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# Universities, Conflict and the Public Sphere: Trajectories of the Public University in Lebanon

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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March 2021

## Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

## Abstract

Rarely examined through the prism of political theory, the public and private dimensions of universities tend to be defined in economic terms of 'who pays' or 'who benefits', overlooking the political meanings of 'public' that relate to state-society relations and conditions of democracy. This research explores the question of what makes the university 'public' through an extended case study of the national university in Lebanon. Highlighting the significance of the university as both a space and an object of political contestation, it argues that the evolving publicness of the Lebanese University is neither intrinsic nor fixed but an inherently contestable terrain. The research concludes that while state funding may be considered a prerequisite for *being* public, it is not in itself a guarantee of the university's publicness beyond that. Moving beyond economic, instrumental and binary understandings of public and private in higher education, this research shows how the ever-evolving publicness of the university relates to conditions of democracy and the making and unmaking of the university as a public sphere.

Adopting an extended case study approach, this research traces the changing historical trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere over the *longue durée*, from the expansion of the university in 1959, through the civil war of 1975 to 1990, to the end of data collection in 2019. As the only public university in Lebanon, a context in which the state has been multiply contested, it may be considered a paradigmatic case, enabling analysis of the meaning of public in a political sense, as well as the shifting historical relations between the state and higher education. Through narrative research methods and newspaper archive work, including 52 interviews and a review of over 400 newspaper articles, the research follows the continuous making and unmaking of the Lebanese University as a public sphere and its evolving publicness through the social and political tumults of the last half century.

This history of the Lebanese University is scarcely documented in the literature, despite its epic role over the last half century through periods of social and political transformation, protracted civil war and neoliberal reconstruction. In 'linking the past to the present in anticipation of the future' (Burawoy 1998, 5), the research not only contributes to extending a theoretical understanding of the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere, it also contributes to excavating aspects of the partially forgotten history of the Lebanese University.

The lack of research on the history of Lebanon's only public university reflects a wider dearth of empirical research on what happens to universities in societies affected by protracted conflict. Branded a 'luxury' in poor and conflict-affected countries, higher education has been largely excluded from the field of education, conflict and peacebuilding. At the same time the emerging literature on universities and the public sphere has predominantly focused on universities located in the Global North, overlooking the longstanding egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory that recognise hegemony, inequality and conflict in public spheres.

Overlooked in theory, disregarded in policymaking, and largely ignored in research and practice, the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere is particularly illuminated in societies affected by war, but is also relevant to all plural and stratified societies. In moving towards a political rationality in higher education, this research identifies four propositions for conceptualising the publicness of universities relating to difference, autonomy, accountability and domain. In the context of a declining publicness of universities across the globe, the arguments for re-centring the public purposes of the university have relevance for the emerging literature on higher education in contexts of conflict but also point to the wider democratic significance and precarity of the university as a public sphere.

## Acknowledgments

There are a number of people without whom this thesis could not have been written. Above all, I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Mario Novelli, who in the first place believed in the project and has supported me throughout this journey, introducing me to critical directions in the fields of education, conflict and development and helping me to find a theoretical language for things I've long grappled with, both in work and beyond it. I will be forever accompanied by the ideas of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Nancy Fraser and many others. My second supervisor, Professor John Pryor, greatly encouraged me in the early stages of the research and the 'publicness of universities' arose from one of our fruitful conversations. After John's retirement, Dr Barbara Crossouard supported me in the process of writing up, providing me with detailed and much appreciated comments on drafts. My examiners, Professor Yusuf Sayed and Professor Tristan McCowan also gave me extremely helpful guidance in clarifying the knowledge contributions of the thesis. I am very grateful to them all.

While carrying out my fieldwork in Lebanon, a number of people were central to the success of the research. In particular I would like to thank Dr Adnan El-Amine at the Lebanese Association of Education Studies for generously sharing his wealth of experience, analysis, advice and contacts, arising from a life's research and commitment to the Lebanese University and public education more generally. His encouragement and support for this project, both intellectual and practical, was invaluable. I am also indebted to Professor Munir Bashshur at the American University of Beirut who has similarly dedicated his long career to researching and writing about the relationship between education and society. I will never forget his memorable line, 'I think I have something that might interest you', which turned out to be boxes filled with newspaper cuttings about the Lebanese University going back over 40 years. My sincere thanks to him for all our conversations and for allowing me to use this wonderful archive.

I was only able to embark on the PhD due to being funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Having spent 15 years working on issues of education justice in different contexts, it was such a privilege to begin this journey into academia with an MSc in Social Research Methods as part of the ESRC studentship. I am also grateful to ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius for a 'Trajectories of Change' fieldwork grant that enabled me, as a mother of young children, to travel between London and Beirut to carry out the fieldwork over multiple trips. I am especially thankful to Dr Christoph Trinn who pointed me to the work of Chantal Mouffe. I am also glad to have participated in the Lebanon Dissertation Institute, led by Dr Nadya Sbaiti and Dr Ziad Abu-Rish, at the Centre for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies at the American University of Beirut. Their commitment to immersing participants in a diversity of critical and postcolonial scholarship on Lebanon was immensely beneficial, including their own work on the histories of education and state formation in Lebanon.

Doing a PhD is at once a solitary journey and a thoroughly collective endeavour. I have had the fortune to meet so many people throughout the course of this research, including those who have played prominent roles in the history of the Lebanese University, as students, faculty, activists, union members, administrators and policymakers. I am so grateful to all of them for sharing their analyses and life experiences with me. Many others have also influenced the research, both directly and indirectly. The international conference organised by Zeina Maasri, Cathy Bergin and Francesca Burke on decentring the 'Radical Sixties' in June 2019, was a wonderful opportunity to think about the history of the Lebanese University in relation to student movements and transnational solidarities across the globe. I have also been inspired by the work of Dr Seteney Shami and the Arab Council for Social Sciences on the politics of knowledge production in the Arab region, including

‘talking back’ to the Eurocentric literature on the public sphere. My earlier formative experiences at Birzeit University in Palestine continue to shape my interest and commitment to higher education in processes of social and political change and I would like to acknowledge, in particular, the intellectual and activist work of my former colleagues Riham Barghouti and Lisa Taraki. Thank you to Dr Yann Lebeau who helped me to think about the university over the *‘longue durée’*. Thanks also to Mohamad Hussein, Nisrine al-Kabbani and Ali Kassem for their support in helping me to translate interview transcripts, books and newspaper articles at different stages of the research, I could not have got through it all without them. Thank you to the wonderful staff of the Jafet Library Archives and Special Collections at the American University of Beirut, and at the University of Sussex Library. And last, but by no means least, a heartfelt thanks to Francesca Burke, Jennifer Grant, Feras al-Kabbani, Patrick Kane, Jenny Hewitt and Sarahjane Phelan for friendship, chat and having me over to stay in the early days, and for walks, pomodoros and lockdown zoom sessions in the last days. We will eventually meet in a pub again.

I also want to acknowledge my mum and dad, John and Ursula Murray, who both worked in local government in Haringey, London, and were involved in wider movements for social housing, women’s employment and public services when I was growing up. I look back and realise that growing up in Haringey in the 1980s and 90s was an indelibly formative experience, instilling in me the politics of race, class and gender and shaping who I am. My mum has also given me a great deal of practical support throughout the PhD, and I would like to thank her for being a brilliant mum, granny and academic supervisor all rolled into one.

Finally, to those I love, Vinny, Lana and Daniel, thank you for coming on the journey, ‘keeping it real’, and making it all worthwhile.

## Note on Transliteration

I follow the Arabic transliteration guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) throughout this thesis, including the simplified use of ' to indicate both the letter *ayn* and the glottal stop *hamza*.

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## Introduction:

# Understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere

*In the Lebanese University during the '60s and the first part of the '70s, there was a public debate, permanently, inside the university... the people were together. It was the same arena, the same agora.*

(Professor, Lebanese University, speaking about the university before the civil war)

Rarely examined through the prism of political theory, the public and private dimensions of higher education tend to be defined in economic terms of 'who pays' or 'who benefits', overlooking the political meanings of 'public' that relate to state-society relations and conditions of democracy. As a consequence, the question of what makes a university public is insufficiently theorised and rather weakly understood (Brown 2015; El-Amine 2018b; Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). Going beyond economic, instrumental and binary understandings of 'public' and 'private' in higher education, this thesis explores the democratic significance of the university as both a *space* and an *object* of political contestation and conflict (Honig 2017; Massey 2005; Mouffe 2013). Through an extended case study of the Lebanese University, the only public university in Lebanon, the research considers the factors and conditions that have contributed to *making* the Lebanese University 'public' and how these conditions of 'publicness' have evolved over time. It argues that while state funding may be considered a prerequisite for *being* public, in that it enables greater equality of access to higher education and locates the university as a publicly accountable institution, state funding is not in itself a guarantee of the publicness of the university beyond that. For the political meaning of public relates to conditions of democracy and the making and unmaking of the university as a public sphere.

Adopting a historical sociological approach, the research follows the history of the Lebanese University over the *longue durée*, from the expansion of the university in 1959, through the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990, to the end of data collection in 2019. Through narrative research methods and newspaper archive work, it traces the changing trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere over sixty years, through periods of social and political transformation, protracted civil war, and neoliberal post-war reconstruction. As the only state funded university in Lebanon, a context in which the state has been multiply contested, it may be considered a paradigmatic case, enabling analysis of the meaning of 'public' in a political sense, as well as the shifting historical relations between the state and higher education.

In moving towards a political theorisation of what makes a university public, this thesis makes use of three interrelated concepts: ‘public’, ‘publicness’ and ‘public sphere’. In linguistic terms, ‘publicness’ refers to the state or quality of *being* ‘public’, just as happiness refers to the state of being happy, or heaviness refers to the quality of being heavy. The suffix ‘-ness’ also implies a spectrum: there are *degrees* of publicness, just as there are degrees of happiness or heaviness. By moving beyond simplistic, binary categorisations, the research argues that the publicness of universities is neither intrinsic nor fixed but an inherently contestable terrain. Drawing on egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory, in a dialogue with the case study data, the research shows the ways in which the evolving publicness of the Lebanese University is closely connected to its changing trajectories as a public sphere.

While the expansion of the Lebanese University by the state in the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to greater equality of access to higher education in Lebanon, its evolving publicness over the next half century was shaped by other factors, movements and processes. These often arose in direct opposition to the state, emphasising the important distinction between the meanings of ‘public’ and ‘the state’ (Dewey 1927; Habermas 1989; Newman and Clarke 2009). Furthermore, the case of the Lebanese University illuminates that the university cannot be insulated from conflict and power relations in wider society (‘Amil 1968; Bourdieu 1988). Rather, the extent of difference within the university and its capacities for agonistic conflict are constitutive of the relationship between the university and the public sphere and a condition of its democratic publicness (Mouffe 2013). In a close dialogue between the case study data and egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory, this research identifies four propositions for understanding the publicness of the Lebanese University relating to difference, autonomy, accountability and domain. In the context of a declining publicness of universities across the globe, the research emphasises both the significance and precarity of the university as a public sphere and has particular relevance for the emerging literature on the role of higher education in societies affected by conflict.

## 1.1 The under-theorisation of what makes a university ‘public’

Economistic, instrumental and binary understandings of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in higher education often revolve around *who pays* for higher education or *who benefits*, leaving the political, democratic meanings of public largely unexamined (Holmwood 2017; Marginson 2018; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). Furthermore, in the emerging literature on higher education and the public sphere, there is a tendency to rely exclusively on classical public sphere theory, overlooking

the longstanding egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of the Habermasian public sphere that relate to its Eurocentric origins and ‘bracketing’ of difference and power relations (Fraser 1990; Habermas 1989; Santos 2012). This thesis takes on both challenges: how to move from an economic to political rationality in higher education by re-framing the university as a public sphere (Brown 2015; Burawoy 2011); and, at the same time, how to ‘talk back’ to the Eurocentric literature on public spheres (Shami 2009, 37).

## 1.2 What happens to the ‘publicness’ of universities in times of conflict?

A starting point of this research is the recognition that universities, including public universities funded by the state, are not intrinsically ‘inclusive’ or ‘democratic’ and are, more often than not, built upon historical and ongoing relations of colonialism and oppression (Fraser 1990; Gerrard 2015; Honig 2017; Santos 2015). By their very nature, universities are heavily implicated in the reproduction of societal relations, including social, political and epistemic inequalities and the production and circulation of hegemonic discourse (Bourdieu 1988; Foucault 1980; Santos 2015; Brennan, King, and Lebeau 2004; Singh 2011). Yet higher education has been largely excluded from the field of education, conflict and peacebuilding, as well as from wider goals for international development (Milton 2017; Lebeau and Sall 2011; McCowan 2019). While it is now widely acknowledged that schools contribute to the causes of conflict as well as to processes of post-conflict recovery, by recognising both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ faces of education (Bush and Saltarelli 2000), there is very little consideration of the role of universities in these same processes of reproduction and transformation (Milton 2017; Millican 2018; Novelli et al. 2017).

At the theoretical level, issues of conflict and difference are similarly absent from classical public sphere theory (Benhabib 1996; Mouffe 2013), a limitation that is further reflected in the emerging literature on universities and the public sphere (Pusser et al 2012; White 2017). Consequently, there is very little empirical *or* theoretical analysis of the experiences of universities in societies affected by conflict, while their democratic significance in the rebuilding of public spheres in the aftermath of conflict is entirely overlooked. While particularly illuminated in societies affected by protracted violent conflict, the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere is relevant in *all* plural and stratified societies and demands greater empirical attention and theorisation.

### 1.3 Tracing the trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere

Having started this research with an interest in the role of higher education in societies affected by conflict, by the time I finished the fieldwork, the major questions bubbling up through the data related to the contested publicness of the Lebanese University. The history of the Lebanese University is particularly under-researched and its democratic significance as an arena of cross-sectarian, cross-class interaction and social transformation during the 1960s and early 1970s has been partially forgotten ('Amil 1968; El-Amine 2018a; Shaheen 2014). The partition of the university along political-sectarian lines during the civil war, and persistent patterns of economic neglect and political interference after the end of the war, have also encompassed intensive contestations over identity, social class and the role of the state in the provision of education (Bashshur 1988, 1997, 2003; El-Amine et al. 1999; El-Amine 2018a). In the post-war intertwining of an increasingly privatised, stratified and sectarianised higher education sector, there is a sense that the Lebanese University was abandoned as a democratic public institution at the very moment it was needed most, while ongoing efforts to reclaim or reimagine its publicness have enduring implications for future generations.

Understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere necessitates a methodological approach that can comprehend both the changing political economy of higher education and the transformation and degeneration of public spheres over time (Habermas 1989; Shami 2009). In the tradition of critical theory, this includes changing constructions of publicness in a material and discursive sense (Newman and Clarke 2009), while also anticipating that alternative realisations are possible (Bhaskar 2016). Since the end of the civil war in 1990, references to public spheres in Lebanon are often peppered with descriptions such as 'fragmented', 'divided' and 'shattered'. While capturing the political-sectarianisation of societal relations, such accounts also risk drifting into essentialist discourses that ignore the myriad struggles over publicness in Lebanese society. For neither sectarianism nor inequality are inherent to public life but are produced and reproduced historically, politically and institutionally (Makdisi 2000; Salloukh et al. 2015). The Lebanese University is one such domain, characterised both by relentless processes of reproduction and momentous periods of transformation.

### 1.4 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere through an extended case study of the Lebanese University. By tracing the changing

trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere over a period of sixty years, the research seeks to capture what conditions make the university 'public' in a plural and stratified society, and to understand the ways in which this 'publicness' evolves over time.

The overall research question is:

- What has contributed to making the Lebanese University 'public' and how have the conditions of its 'publicness' evolved over time?

Three sub-questions further guide the case study in relation to its *longue durée* timeframe, from the expansion of the university in 1959, through the civil war of 1975 to 1990, to the end of data collection in 2019:

- What constituted the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1959 and 1975?
- How did the Lebanese civil war impact on the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1976 and 1990?
- In what ways has the publicness of the Lebanese University evolved since the end of the civil war between 1991 and 2019?

## 1.5 Outline of the thesis

Having set out my overall aims and directions for the thesis in this first introductory chapter, Chapter 2 begins with a theoretical discussion of the relationship between universities and the public sphere. It links the questions arising from public sphere theory to evolving debates in the field of higher education and international development including the recent attention to universities in societies affected by conflict. It also identifies the significance of egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of classical public sphere theory for understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere and its implications for the emerging literature on higher education and post-conflict recovery.

This discussion of the literature serves as a springboard for Chapter 3, which establishes the historical, cultural and political economy context for the case study, exploring the public dimensions of higher education in Lebanon. From the emergence of foreign missionary universities during the colonial encounter in the late Ottoman period, through the eras of state-building, revolution, civil war and post-war reconstruction, this chapter interrogates the characterisation of higher education



in Lebanon as a predominantly 'private' field. Highlighting periods of intense contestation and upheaval, as well as processes of fragmentation, marketisation and stratification, the rich and partially forgotten history of the Lebanese University is situated in relation to the evolving landscape of higher education in Lebanon.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and research questions for this study. Drawing on critiques of classical public sphere theory to address issues of difference and conflict, reproduction and transformation, and the spatiality of public spheres, this chapter delineates the theoretical framework for the research, including its epistemological and ontological underpinnings. Emerging in dialogue with an extended case study of the Lebanese University, the historical sociological approach of this research is justified both theoretically and empirically as a means of capturing the changing trajectories of the university as a public sphere over the *longue durée*. Through narrative research techniques and newspaper archive work this study moves from the 'unique' to the 'general' through the extension of theory (Burawoy 1998, 5).

The next three chapters present the case study data, following the changing trajectories of the public university in Lebanon before, during and after the Lebanese civil war. Structured thematically within an overall chronological frame, these chapters convey a strong narrative arc in the data about the making and unmaking of the Lebanese University as a public sphere and its continuing struggles over publicness. In Chapter 5, narrative interviews with former students and faculty at the Lebanese University during the 1960s and early 1970s connect personal experience to broader processes of sociological change, highlighting themes of building and contesting the state, struggles of participation, and the democratic significance of difference within the university arena. In Chapter 6, the impacts of civil war on the Lebanese University are overwhelmingly expressed in relation to the division of the university, the loss of difference, and the dismantling of university autonomy, alongside an enduring commitment to advancing the public university in the face of extreme adversity. In Chapter 7, the interview and newspaper data points to ongoing struggles over the democratic dimensions of the Lebanese University in the post-civil war era, including questions of unity and diversity, autonomy and accountability, and an overriding sense of economic and political abandonment of the university by the state.

Following this presentation of the case study data over the three time periods, Chapter 8 analyses the changing trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere. Addressing the three research questions that relate to the case study, it examines the evolving conditions of the Lebanese

University as a public sphere, what happened to those conditions during the civil war, and the extent to which the university has recovered as a public sphere in the post-civil war period. It finds that in the 1960s and early 1970s the Lebanese University not only challenged *the* public sphere from multiple counter-hegemonic perspectives, but actively redefined it. In this way it was neither a universal public sphere in the Habermasian sense, nor was it a specific ‘counterpublic’ in Nancy Fraser’s (1990) theorisation. As an arena of agonistic conflict (Mouffe 2005), the Lebanese University encompassed a wide spectrum of interests, identities and standpoints, including those of the state itself. During the civil war of 1975 to 1990, the university no longer provided democratic containment for the agonistic conflict of ideas and ideologies (Honig 2017) but was engulfed by the territorialisation of space and place as different militias sought to control university branches, dismantling conditions of institutional autonomy and accountability.

The end of the civil war in 1990 represented a historic moment of contingency for the future of the Lebanese University as issues of diversity, autonomy, accountability and location were vigorously debated. Yet those who hoped to rebuild the democratic publicness of the Lebanese University soon found themselves at loggerheads with local-global forces pushing in the other direction. In the context of an increasingly privatised, stratified and sectarianised higher education sector, Lebanon’s only public university has been subject to patterns of economic neglect and political interference over much of the past thirty years. Out of this discussion of the data, in dialogue with public sphere theory, four propositions emerge for theorising the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. These four propositions relate to conditions of difference, autonomy, accountability and domain, drawing on concepts of hegemony, counter-hegemony, agonistic conflict and the democratic salience of ‘public things’ (Fraser 1990; Mouffe 2013; Honig 2017).

In conclusion, Chapter 9 addresses the overall research question driving this thesis: What constitutes the ‘publicness’ of the Lebanese University and how have the conditions of its publicness evolved over time? Outlining the findings of the research, as well as reflecting on the research process itself and possible new research directions, this chapter highlights three significant contributions to knowledge. The first is an empirical contribution to understanding the experiences of universities in contexts of conflict, including in Lebanon where the history and socio-political significance of the Lebanese University is particularly under-researched. The second is an empirically based theorisation of the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere, drawing on the case study data in dialogue with political theory to theorise the ‘publicness’ of universities. Finally, the research raises substantial policy and practice implications for the emerging discourse and policy

priorities on higher education, conflict and peacebuilding. The thesis concludes that re-centring the publicness of universities in processes of post-conflict recovery is not only relevant to ongoing struggles for liberty and equality in higher education, but a vital component of rebuilding deliberative democracy in the aftermath of conflict.

In this introduction I have outlined my overall aims, directions and methods for researching the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. In the next chapter, I situate this in a discussion of the relevant theoretical and empirical literatures.

## Chapter 2:

# Understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere

Rarely examined through the prism of political theory, the public and private dimensions of higher education tend to be defined in economic terms of ‘who pays’ or ‘who benefits’, overlooking the political meanings of ‘public’ that relate to state-society relations and conditions of democracy. As a result, the public purposes of universities have been insufficiently theorised and are only becoming illuminated as they are eroded and lost in neoliberal and authoritarian contexts across the globe (Brown 2015; Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). The growing literature on higher education and the public sphere tends to focus on universities located in the Global North, also overlooking the longstanding egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of public sphere (Fraser 1990, 2007; Santos 2012). In the emerging discourse of ‘Higher Education in Emergencies’, the public purposes of universities are almost entirely ignored, despite education being more broadly recognised as a major factor in contributing to the causes of conflict as well as to processes of post-conflict recovery (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Milton 2017). Overlooked in theory, disregarded in policymaking, and largely ignored in research and practice, the very aspects of universities that are most threatened in societies affected by conflict are often the least articulated: their role in the democratic fabric of society, the public sphere.

### 2.1 Towards a political understanding of ‘public’ in higher education

Over the last two decades, in the context of rapidly changing relations between higher education and the state, there has been increasing attention to what constitutes the ‘public’ and ‘private’ dimensions of higher education and whether higher education is fundamentally a public or private good (Holmwood 2017; Marginson 2018; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). This literature addresses the economic and instrumental understandings of ‘public’ and ‘public good/s’, which largely relate to *who pays* for higher education and *who benefits*. The more political meanings of public, relating to democracy and the public sphere, are significantly under-theorised and ‘weakly understood’ (Holmwood 2017, 935). At the same time, it is increasingly recognised that the move from a political to economic rationality in higher education not only has implications for the fundamental purposes of universities but also for the conditions of democracy (Brown 2015; White 2019; Holmwood 2017).

### *2.1.1 Functions of the university*

It is often said that there are three main functions or ‘pillars’ of the modern university: teaching, research and service (Oketch, McCowan and Schendel 2014). However, the emphasis and balance of these functions, coupled with the mass of underlying assumptions that underpin them, continue to be fiercely contested. The principal sources of contestation relate to the role of higher education in the reproduction of societal inequalities relating to race, social class, gender and other patterns of discrimination and injustice, as well as to the hegemonic nature of academic knowledge production and its inherent coloniality. Yet despite reproducing inequality and hegemony in society, universities are also perceived as spaces of critical debate, engines of social mobility and fertile ground for the production of counter-hegemonic ideas and political action. As Ruth Jonathan reflects in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, ‘What is it about [higher education] which keeps alive our optimism in its socially transformative power... yet which also pulls in the opposite direction?’ (cited in Sall, Lebeau and Kassimir 2003, 128).

Recognising that universities are not autonomous from state or society and are, on the contrary, imbued with all the inequalities and assumptions of the age, Tristan McCowan (2019) outlines five modalities of higher education: education, knowledge production, public debate, service provision, and embodiment. While education, knowledge production and service provision broadly relate to the three pillars of teaching, research and service, the modalities of public debate and embodiment capture the more relational and experiential significance of universities as spaces of deliberation (public debate) that also enact democratic principles (embodiment). At the same time there are inherent tensions and contradictions between the different functions of universities (Cloete, Maassen and Bailey 2015). For example, Manuel Castells (2001) highlights that his categorisation of the four main purposes of the university - ideological reproduction, elite formation, professional training, and knowledge production - are not necessarily mutually reinforcing and are often contradictory. The perpetual question ‘What are universities for?’ (Collini 2012) is always situated in a broader ideological paradigm and changing political economy context.

### *2.1.2 Higher education as a public good*

While it is broadly acknowledged that universities produce both individual (private) and collective (public) benefits (McMahon 2009), there is a deepening sense that the neoliberal marketisation and commoditisation of higher education systems over recent decades have ‘lessened the “public goods” provided by higher education’ and blurred the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ (Dill 2014,

143). The transformation of relations between higher education, society and the state over the last forty years has drawn attention to the inadequacy of economic definitions of ‘public’ and ‘private’, as well as leading to renewed efforts to re-conceptualise and advocate for higher education as a public good (Calhoun 2006; Holmwood 2011; Unterhalter et al. 2018)

Simon Marginson (2012, 11) disentangles some of this complexity by distinguishing the meaning of public *goods* (plural) from the more normative concept of *the* public good (singular), which he characterises as more ‘assumption driven and prone to ambiguity’. Referring to Paul Samuelson’s (1954) longstanding definition of ‘non-rivalry’ and ‘non-excludability’ to define public goods (plural), he cites another economist, Joseph Stiglitz (1999), who notes that ‘knowledge is an almost pure public good’ (Marginson 2012, 10). However as Elaine Unterhalter et al. (2018) point out, even the application of this more quantifiable definition of *a* public good overlooks the inherent inequalities in both knowledge production and access to knowledge, casting significant doubt on the non-rivalry and non-excludability of knowledge.

Exploring a more sociological approach to understanding higher education as a public good, Craig Calhoun (2006, 10) identifies ‘four senses of public’, relating to who pays for higher education, who governs, who benefits, and the extent of public purposes in the production and circulation of knowledge. Highlighting that universities are undergoing a ‘deep transformation in both their internal structure and their relationship to the rest of society’, Calhoun argues that critical theorists need to urgently assess this transformation, ‘both in order to grasp adequately the social conditions of their own work’, as well as to comprehend the declining public purposes of higher education and the implications for deepening social inequality and increasingly stratified access to knowledge.

In their recent work on higher education and the public good in Africa, Unterhalter et al. (2018, 1) raise the question ‘who is defining the public good and how?’ Contextualising this discussion in relation to the histories and political economies of higher education systems and institutions in Africa, including past and present relations with colonialism, globalisation and neoliberalism, they argue that higher education as a public good is broadly conceptualised in two distinct ways: ‘instrumental’ and ‘intrinsic’. The *instrumental* value of higher education relates to the economic, social, cultural and political goods and benefits that are conferred at individual, community and global levels, while the *intrinsic* value of higher education is understood in more experiential, relational and spatial terms, relating to ‘the physical, intellectual/cultural or affective *spaces* of higher education that express and enact the public good’ (Ibid, 4). Observing that there is ‘less theorisation’ of these intrinsic dimensions, the authors highlight the potential of public sphere

theory, questioning the relationship between higher education and ‘other elements of the public sphere’ (Ibid, 3). They also point to the significance of higher education *institutions*, as distinct from ‘higher education’, highlighting the positioning of universities as ‘public spaces’ between society and the state and the ways in which this situatedness is continually shaped by changing political and historical contexts (Howell, Unterhalter and Allais 2017, 5).

In contrast, Locatelli (2018) asserts that framing education as a public good is inherently instrumental and, by turns, individualistic and utilitarian as it fundamentally relates to the distribution of individual and collective goods of education by the state. She argues that in the context of diversifying actors, funding and trends of privatisation and marketisation in education, it is increasingly problematic to define education as a public good as ‘the State is no longer identified with the ‘public’ (Ibid, 8). On this basis, Locatelli asserts that a different conceptual framing is needed to re-establish the democratic meanings of public in education. Drawing on ideas of the ‘the commons’ that seek to reclaim and protect ‘common goods’ from the profit-making intentions of the market on the one hand and the oppressive tendencies of the state on the other, Locatelli proposes the ‘common good’ as a framework for educational governance:

The notion of common goods suggests the transformation of public institutions through greater participation of citizens and communities in the introduction of viable policies and practices in order to overcome more utilitarian and individualistic approaches and build more democratic education systems (Ibid, 11).

While this discussion helpfully re-centres the meaning of ‘public’ in a democratic, political sense, there are a number of problematic assumptions embedded in the argument for re-framing education as a common good. Firstly, it assumes the possibility of commonality, collectivity, solidarity and consensus in education, marginalising the inherent inequalities and power relations that shape education systems, linked to the presence of difference, hegemony and conflict in plural and stratified democracies (Benhabib 1996; Mouffe 2013). Secondly, the notion that the connection between public and state is broken in education, therefore necessitating an alternative framing of public, assumes that the meanings of public and state were conflated in the first place, contrary to longstanding theoretical distinctions (Dewey 1927; Arendt 1954; Fraser 1990; Habermas 1989). Finally, Locatelli’s insistence that the ‘common good’ should complement rather than replace the ‘public good’ implicitly acknowledges that her arguments may be deployed in education agendas that seek to minimise the responsibility of the state for funding free access to education. While this is not the motivation of Locatelli’s work, it relates to a broader problematisation of ‘the commons’,

which is intentionally situated outside of state structures, throwing up questions of democratic accountability and difference (For a discussion of the anti-statism implicit in the commons model and counter-arguments for re-framing the state as a social relation see pages 41-47).

It is increasingly recognised that the economic and instrumental definitions of public good/s are less effective when it comes to articulating the relationship between universities and democracy (Holmwood 2017; Locatelli 2018; Marginson 2018; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). In the face of a driving neoliberal rationality in higher education, which subjugates the democratic dimensions of universities to logics of human capital, competition and the labour market, Burawoy (2011, 41) concludes that there are two alternatives: to re-frame the university as a 'critical public sphere' in itself, or to re-centre the public mission of the university as a 'pivotal institution' in restoring deliberative democracy. Both proposals require a deeper theorisation of the university *as* a public sphere (recognising a multiplicity of public spheres) and/or the contribution of the university to *the* public sphere (assuming a singular, universal public sphere). These theoretical divergences are more fully addressed in the second half of this chapter (see sections 2.4 to 2.7), following a discussion of the current literatures on universities, conflict and the public sphere below.

### *2.1.3 Universities and the public sphere*

The space between society and the state is described by Jürgen Habermas as the 'public sphere', the arena or realm where people come together to critically debate matters of public concern (Habermas 1989). As a dedicated space for exchanging ideas and deliberating matters of public concern, the university has been called 'a paradigmatic institution of the public sphere' (Delanty 2005, 530). Yet despite being recognisably 'suggestive' of the public sphere from a Habermasian perspective, universities have been largely overlooked in political theory (Marginson 2012, 12). As Axel Honneth (2015, 29) reflects, 'Not only democratic theory but politics itself seems to have lost interest in the only kind of institution that is suited to constantly regenerate, albeit tentatively...the fragile preconditions of a people's democratic decision-making'. Morgan White (2017, i) concurs that the political role of universities been 'insufficiently addressed' in the literature, further emphasising that 'state and market forces threaten to diminish the legitimacy, authority and fundamental purposes of higher education systems'.

This under-theorisation has also contributed to a 'paucity of hard data on the university's role in the public sphere' (Sall, Lebeau, and Kassimir 2003, 137), raising challenging empirical and theoretical questions about what is, could or should be 'public' about universities (Marginson 2012, 9). To begin



to answer them, Simon Marginson (2012, 18) argues, we first need ‘means of measuring particular aspects of “public” and then of making synthetic judgments about the incidence and degree of “publicness”’. The literature that exists on the relationship between universities and the public sphere has charted the declining publicness of universities in the context of intensifying marketisation and privatisation of higher education (Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012; White 2017). For example, John Holmwood (2017, 935) traces the demise of the public university in Britain and North America and its contribution to ‘dismantling’ of the post-Second World War ‘citizenship complex’, while White (2017) focuses on the commodification of universities in Europe and North America and the implications for both higher education and the conditions of liberal democracy. Looking specifically at the decline of the public university in the United States, Wendy Brown (2015, 18) further argues that the economisation of higher education is contributing to a ‘hollowing out’ of liberal democracy, converting political meanings of liberty and equality into economic rationalities of human capital and market competitiveness.

Much of this literature focuses on the experiences of universities in Europe and North America, despite the disproportionate impacts of the global marketisation of higher education on universities in the Global South (Connell 2019; Naidoo 2011). This raises two distinct challenges for the emerging literature on universities and the public sphere: how to de-centre the Eurocentric nature of the literature on higher education and the public sphere; and how to reconstruct public sphere theory in order to supersede its Eurocentric origins and explanatory limitations in a higher education context in the Global South (Santos 2012).

Furthermore, the literature that exists on universities and the public sphere tends to draw exclusively on the arguments of Habermas, overlooking longstanding egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory that point to issues of inequality, hegemony and conflict in public spheres (Fraser 1990; Santos 2012). This liberal reading of the relationship between universities and the public sphere tends to lead to a rather mythical ideal of university autonomy, unencumbered by the power relations that shape the world ‘outside’ the university, enabling a uniquely insulated environment for untrammelled freedom of debate and deliberation. However, all the evidence suggests that universities do not exist abstractly, looking out on the disarray unfolding around them because they are part of the disarray. For universities are deeply implicated in the reproduction of unequal social relations and hegemonic knowledge and their positioning between society and the state is always historically and politically situated (‘Amil 1968; Bourdieu 1988). As the Arab Marxist theorist Mahdi ‘Amil (1968) points out, only those with a vested interest in the

status quo perpetuate the pretence that universities are insulated from political, cultural and socioeconomic hegemony, tyranny and conflict, while Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) work in *Homo Academicus* shows that the academy is 'not just a realm of dialogue and debate, but also a sphere of power'.

At the same time, criticality is often expressed as existential in the case of universities. As Edward Said (1996, 223) states, the purpose of intellectual pursuit is 'the freedom to be critical: criticism is intellectual life', while Stuart Hall reflects, 'the university is a critical institution, or it is nothing' (Hall cited in Giroux 2013). The values of university autonomy and academic freedom continue to be shaped and contested by a diversity of struggles for democratisation across the globe (Sall, Lebeau, and Kassimir 2003; Ignatieff and Roch 2018). As such, they are ultimately political questions linked to wider struggles for democracy and the making and unmaking of public spheres. For university autonomy does not exist abstractly from political, cultural and economic power, while 'academic freedom is not just a matter of free speech and individual rights. It is a matter of institutions and public purposes' (Calhoun 2009, 561). Furthermore, the egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of the Habermasian ideal are particularly poignant for conceptualising the deeply contested nature of the institutions and public purposes of higher education in the twenty-first century.

## 2.2 Universities between society, the market and the state

The range of threats to universities in the twenty-first century is itself illustrative of the conceptual problems of conflating public and the state, or democracy and free market capitalism, as both the state and the market pose a danger to the university as a public sphere. Furthermore, the neoliberal transformation of higher education often interacts with anti-democratic trends in universities as the logics of increasing human capital and economic growth not only deprioritise the basic liberal conditions of universities but can also appear to negate their very relevance. Elias Mazawi (2011) reflects that in the years immediately prior to the Arab revolutions in 2011, World Bank and EU-funded higher education reforms in Syria and Egypt turned a blind eye to questions of university autonomy and academic freedom, disregarding the heavy politicisation of universities and violent persecution of students and academics over decades. 'Thus', he says, political subordination and economic liberalization feed on each other' (Mazawi 2011, 3). Over the last decade, there have been increasing mobilisations among students and academics against the encroachments of both the state and the market in higher education. From Chile to South Africa, Turkey to Egypt, the UK to Hong Kong, calls for 'fees must fall', 'Rhodes must fall', and demands for an end to the persecution

of students and academics, continue to emphasise the political situatedness of universities between society, the market and the state (Choudry and Vally 2020; Selenica 2018).

### *2.2.1 Changing discourses of higher education, democracy and development*

The mid-twentieth century stands out as an era characterised by rapidly expanding access to higher education across the globe (Altbach 2016). In European and north American contexts, the massification of higher education in the 1960s was linked to the increasing recognition of social rights after the Second World War (Robbins 1963 and Kerr 2001 cited in Holmwood 2017). In countries emerging from European colonial rule, public higher education systems also underwent rapid expansion, linked to developmental and decolonial priorities that put higher education at the heart of state-building agendas. As Mahmood Mamdani (2007, 256) remarks, ‘just as sure as the national anthem, the national flag, and the national currency, a national university too became an obligatory sign of real independence.’ It is easy to look back on this period as something of a ‘golden age’ for public higher education. Yet in most contexts around the world, the democratisation of higher education came out of prolonged periods of social and political conflict and struggle, often in the face of significant resistance to change (Gerrard 2015; Bourdieu 1988). Furthermore, the expansion of access to higher education has not precluded its continuing role in the reproduction of deep inequalities within and between societies, nor has it guarded against the political and economic encroachments on university autonomy and academic freedom (El-Amine 2018b; Mamdani 2016; Said 1996; Selenica 2018).

Motivated by an understanding of human capital that causally links education to economic return at micro and macro levels, the World Bank reached a position in the 1980s that higher education in the Global South was not economically productive, recasting it as a luxury monopolised by political and economic elites (Lebeau and Sall 2011; Teferra 2016). As well as influencing governments and aid agencies to focus exclusively on primary education, structural adjustment programmes across Africa, Latin America and Asia were simultaneously cutting public spending and radically restructuring societal relations with the state (Mamdani 2007; Selenica 2018). It is contended that these policies so dramatically affected higher education that public universities across Africa were sent into ‘irreversible crisis and decline’ (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 133). Just a decade later, the rate-of-return orthodoxy was revised by the World Bank, which effectively made a U-turn on its earlier policy. However, the material and intellectual legacies of decades of cuts and disinvestment were not so easily turned around and the notion of higher education as a ‘luxury’ in poor and conflict-affected countries has persisted (McCowan 2019; Milton 2017).

In the 1990s and 2000s, as higher education in developing countries was re-cast as an engine of the ‘knowledge economy’ (Task Force on Higher Education and Society 2000; Teferra 2016), universities re-gained the attention of governments and international development agencies (Cloete, Bunting and Maassen 2015). Claiming to ‘transform countries that are materially poor into countries that are ‘information-rich’, by ‘leapfrogging’ historical processes of industrial and material production (Naidoo 2011, 40), the knowledge economy imaginary has emerged as a ‘master discourse’ in the neoliberal restructuring of relations between society, the market and the state (Jessop 2006, 159). This projected faith in human capital theory promises rich returns on private investment in higher education, on individual as well as national, regional and global levels. Having been ignored in the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All agendas, higher education is now included in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet the predominant focus is on increasing ‘affordable’ access to an internationalised higher education market, rather than building the capacities of national higher education systems. In 2015 it was estimated that 70% of higher education aid was channelled through study-abroad scholarships, largely benefitting high and middle income countries, while higher education systems in poor and conflict-affected countries remain neglected (UNESCO 2016; McCowan 2019).<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the privatisation of higher education is occurring more rapidly and intensively than at all other levels of education (UNGA 2014). While this is a global phenomenon it is significantly concentrated in the Global South (Kinser et al. 2010). Today, 69.8% of private universities in the world are located in developing countries, while conflict-affected countries have seen particularly sharp increases in the share of private institutions in higher education enrolment (Bothwell 2018; Milton 2017). According to UNESCO’s 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report (cited in Selenica 2018, 57), ‘In Nepal, this share grew by 38 percentage points between 2000 and 2015, while in Burundi and Rwanda, private institutions now account for two in three students. In Congo, one in three students attended a private university or college in 2015, up from close to zero in 2000.’ Free trade agreements on higher education have also enabled universities in Europe, the USA and China to penetrate education markets across the Global South (Dale and Robertson 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Target 4B of the SDGs states ‘By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, *in developed countries and other developing countries*’ (my emphasis to indicate the focus on international higher education opportunities rather than building the capacities of national higher education systems). <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4> (accessed 12 March 2020).

In the Arab region, for example, many new private universities are branches of foreign, mostly American universities (Romani 2009), while regional hubs such as Dubai's Knowledge Village and International Education City are effectively 'free trade zones' for higher education (Connell 2019).

This rapid marketisation of higher education has resulted in the stratification of universities on local and global levels, with growing inequalities between different types of institutions, enormous gaps in research capacity, and starkly differential graduate employment opportunities (Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2010; Mbembe 2016; Naidoo 2011). The Times Higher Education university rankings reveals that all 'top ten universities in the world' are located in Britain or the United States, while out of the 'top four hundred universities in the world' just four are located in Africa and a further four in Latin America (THE 2014). As the privatisation of risk for investing in higher education falls directly to young people and their families, there are increasing concerns about the consequences of 'false promise' when access to higher education fails to deliver in terms of employment opportunities and a way out of poverty (Brown et al. 2010; Buckner 2011). There is also a sense that the relationship between universities, society and the state has moved into uncharted territory. In the context of the neoliberal transformation of higher education what are the implications for university-state relations and conditions of deliberative democracy? Tracing the World Bank-driven commoditisation of Makerere University through the 1990s and early 2000s, Mahmood Mamdani (2007, 262) reflects that not only have African universities been devalued and demoralised through policies of structural adjustment, but their role in the democratic fabric of society is also at stake:

Most importantly, higher education is the location where a society comes to understand both its weaknesses and its potential through research and reflection...It is where we develop the range of choices which makes democracy meaningful in different spheres of life.

The active marginalisation of universities in discourses of international development over the last forty years closely mirrors the declining public dimensions of universities across the globe, undermining and transforming public higher education systems across the Global South. This conversion from a political to economic rationality in higher education is driven by an ideological agenda that subordinates questions of democracy and social justice to the logics of competition, human capital and the market. In the African context, 'the elision of concepts of the public sphere and the public good... reflects the historical project of structural adjustment' (Hoffmann et al. 2020), driven by deliberate policies of disinvestment from public services and institutions, including in the field of higher education. As student movements and teacher unions are increasingly mobilised in struggles for accessible, critical and quality public higher education in diverse contexts across the

globe (Choudry and Vally 2020), Nimi Hoffman et al. (2020, 26) further suggest that 'To retrieve and rework the notion of public, then, is an act of creative intellectual resistance'.

### *2.3.2 The coloniality of universities*

Postcolonial theory has sought to dismantle the enduring monopoly of a 'colonial epistemic monoculture' within the global academy, as well as in dominant notions of development and modernity (Santos 2007, xxxii). From Frantz Fanon's (1961) 'colonised intellectual' to ongoing calls for epistemic disobedience and justice (Mignolo 2009; Santos 2015), postcolonial theory is based on the understanding that the relationship between knowledge and power is not yet decolonised, with ongoing cultural, political and economic ramifications (Said 1994). Just as underdevelopment is produced through ongoing colonial relations within global structures of capitalism (Amin 1972; Rodney 2018), scientific dependency is perpetuated through the colonisation of knowledge production and the unequal division of labour in the global academy (Hountondji 1990). As theory-building remains colonised by academics in the Global North (Alatas 2003; Taraki 2016), along with the colonial tradition of extracting knowledge resources from the Global South and taking them 'back to metropole' for analysis and learning (Abaza 2011; Connell 2007), the imperative for 'provincializing' Eurocentric social and political theory (Chakrabarty 2000) continues to evade universities and entire academic disciplines (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu 2018).

Unsurprisingly, then, the role of the university in postcolonial theory is an ambiguous one. In the first place, the pre-colonial histories of universities have been all but obliterated (Teferra and Altbach 2004), while the co-constitutive histories of modernity and colonialism are deeply embedded in the content, structures and practices of the 'modern university' and the racial and global inequalities that it continues to reproduce (Bhambra 2014; Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu 2018). A key question arising is whether universities can be potential agents of social and cognitive justice or are they inherently colonial and reactionary? This is further complicated by the radically changing landscape of higher education. As Achille Mbembe (2016, 32) asks, 'is today's Beast the same as yesterday's?' While he and others emphasise that movements for decolonising the university must engage with transnational imperatives beyond the nation state, they also speak to the enduring locatedness of universities, linked to complex social forces in higher education and the need to respond to society's needs, demands, capacities and aspirations (Mamdani 2018).

The role of universities in the 'tyranny of globalising discourse' (Foucault 1980, 83) is echoed in Gayatri Spivak's (1993) ambivalence about the 'teaching machine' and Boaventura de Sousa Santos'

(2015, 2-3) depiction of universities as ‘reactionary’ and ‘fortified’. What does it mean, then, to decolonise the university? Or more specifically, as Mbembe (2016) asks, what does it mean to decolonise the university within a neoliberal paradigm and is this even possible? In addition to bringing an end to the hegemony of Eurocentric theory and moving towards an ecology of knowledges (Santos 2015), it also necessitates the decolonisation and democratisation of higher education institutions, systems and structures at local and global levels (Mamdani 2018; Mbembe 2016). There are no fixed answers or visions for decolonising higher education and while some seek to transform the institutional, structural and epistemic foundations of the university as we know it (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu 2018), other post-development approaches are coming together around ‘popular universities’, discarding the coloniality of the ‘modern’ university altogether (Mamdani 2016; McCowan 2019; Santos 2015).

## 2.3 Universities in societies affected by conflict

While universities are often sites of intensive contestation in many societies, the role of higher education in countries affected by protracted violence conflict has been largely ignored in research, policy and practice (Milton 2017; Millican 2018). At the same time, issues of conflict and difference are excluded from classical public sphere theory (Benhabib 1996; Mouffe 2013), a limitation that is further reflected in the emerging literature on universities and the public sphere (Pusser et al 2012; White 2017). Consequently, there is very little empirical *or* theoretical analysis of the experiences or trajectories of universities in societies affected by conflict, while the democratic significance of universities in the rebuilding or reworking of public spheres in the aftermath of conflict is entirely overlooked. Historicising the reasons why universities have been so marginalised from international development priorities over the last forty years, the following discussion also highlights the tensions and contradictions in the emerging discourse on ‘Higher Education in Emergencies’. The theoretical questions of conflict and difference in public spheres, which are relevant not only to societies affected by protracted violent conflict but *all* plural and stratified societies, are addressed in latter half of this chapter (see sections 2.4 to 2.7).

### 2.3.1 *The neglect of universities in contexts of conflict*

By their very nature, universities are heavily implicated in the reproduction of societal relations, including social, political and epistemic inequalities and the production and circulation of hegemonic discourse (Bourdieu 1988; Foucault 1980; Santos 2015; Brennan, King, and Lebeau 2004; Singh 2011). Yet higher education has been largely excluded from the field of ‘Education in Emergencies’,

as well as from wider goals for international development (Milton 2017; Lebeau and Sall 2011; McCowan 2019). While it is now widely acknowledged that schools contribute to the causes of conflict as well as to processes of post-conflict recovery, recognising both the 'good' and 'bad' faces of education (Bush and Saltarelli 2000), there is very little consideration of the role of universities in these same processes of reproduction and transformation in societies affected by conflict (Milton 2017; Millican 2018; Novelli et al. 2017).

The global education development agenda, catalysed by the first Education for All (EFA) conference in Jomtien in 1990, was heavily influenced by the 1980s rejection of higher education as a public good. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which outlined global development priorities until 2015, focused exclusively on primary school education, de-prioritising secondary as well as higher education (McCowan 2019). In conflict-affected countries, where half of the world's out of school children are located (UNESCO 2013), higher education came to be regarded as even less of a priority. Despite the increasing focus on education in contexts of conflict and natural emergencies throughout the 1990s and 2000s, higher education remained marginalised and even maligned as a threat to securing funding for basic education.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness that universities are very often at the centre of social and political tensions in society, and in many cases are directly targeted (Novelli and Selenica 2014). But aside from efforts by human rights organizations to document attacks on higher education over the last few years (for example see the work of Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack), there is very little research on the impacts of conflict on universities, while the experiences of students, academics and staff who have lived and worked through periods of conflict are rarely heard (Milton 2017). The material impacts of this marginalisation are not difficult to trace. Following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, zero funding was allocated to higher education from the \$18.4 billion Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (Milton and Barakat 2016). This blow was compounded by the removal of hundreds of Iraqi academics from their jobs, an agenda described as 'de-Baathication', which contributed to destroying the intellectual capacities of Iraqi universities over the long term (Agresto 2007). In Afghanistan, higher education was similarly neglected in post-war reconstruction strategies, with dire implications for the recovery of basic sectoral and professional capacities in the country until today (Milton 2017). In Rwanda, conversely, the government invested in higher education following the genocide in 1994, causing considerable tension with UN agencies and the World Bank, which accused it of inequitable use of funds (Ibid).



The escalation of so-called ‘new wars’ in the 1990s and 2000s also coincided with the global marketisation of higher education, reinforcing the neglect of higher education in post-war reconstruction strategies. From Bosnia to Nepal, Nicaragua to Liberia, rising post-war demand for higher education has been met by the rapid proliferation of for-profit private universities (Selenica 2018; UNESCO 2016). The prevailing view of higher education in many post-conflict contexts is that ‘the sector is either held to be an expensive luxury that war-torn societies can ill-afford or is increasingly viewed as best left to the private sector’ (Milton and Barakat 2016, 405). Underlying this is a narrow preoccupation with the economic dimensions of universities, with little consideration of their social, cultural or political significance. In the Arab region, for example, much of the literature produced by international organisations has failed to acknowledge, much less address the enduring legacies of conflict and military occupation in higher education, even while constraints on academic freedom, the sectarianisation of higher education, and military attacks on universities, students and academics continue (Galal 2008; Jaramillo and Melonio 2011). Until recently, the only logics of internationally-funded higher education reforms in the Middle East and North Africa have related to financing, quality assurance and the labour market in a political and historical vacuum (Buckner 2011; Mazawi 2005).

### *2.3.2 Universities and post-conflict recovery: what paradigm?*

Having been largely ignored in recent decades, the unprecedented surge in attention to the role of higher education in contexts affected by conflict reflects the growing influence of the knowledge economy imaginary in international higher education policies (Lebeau and Sall 2011; Naidoo 2011; Selenica 2018). More immediately, it has been catalysed by the scale of the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011, interacting with the growing securitisation of international education aid (Novelli 2017). Constrained within a neoliberal higher education paradigm which ignores the socio-political dimensions of universities, the emergent literature on higher education, conflict and peacebuilding highlights significant tensions in thinking about the role of universities in conflict-affected societies within a Western-centric and highly marketised model of higher education. It also draws attention to existing weaknesses in the Education in Emergencies field and the need for critical, postcolonial perspectives (Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Murray 2008; Novelli et al 2014; Brun and Shuayb 2020).

As a field that is largely driven by international development agencies seeking practical guidance for humanitarian interventions, the Education in Emergencies literature is already critiqued for its tendency to produce generic, technicist and Eurocentric analyses that overlook the complex historical, cultural and political economy factors that shape education systems, including the politics

of international education aid itself (Murray 2008; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; Brun and Shuayb 2020). Furthermore, the Education in Emergencies field grew out of a focus on schools, and specifically primary schools, in countries affected by conflict and crisis. As such, while it may be useful to extend or borrow concepts from this wider literature to apply to universities (Feuer, Hornidge, and Schetter 2013), there is a risk of overlooking the very aspects of universities that are most significant or in jeopardy, notably their distinctive role in processes of knowledge production (McCowan 2019) and their relationship to conditions of democracy (Brown 2015; White 2017). There is also a tendency to exceptionalise universities in contexts of conflict and while it is true that deteriorating institutional capacities and the effects of political divisions are often extremely acute, a more global political economy lens suggests that universities in contexts of conflict face similar pressures to elsewhere and potentially with greater impacts as trends of neoliberalism, authoritarianism and social fragmentation intensify and intersect.

The emerging policy agenda for 'Higher Education in Emergencies' has focused almost exclusively on expanding access to higher education and, more specifically, scaling up the provision of university scholarships for Syrian refugees (Dryden-Peterson 2010, El-Ghali, Berjaoui, and McKnight 2017; Fincham 2020). Fuelled by a combination of human capital, security and rights-based arguments, there has been little attention to the complexities of higher education contexts in the major host countries for Syrian refugee students - Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq - three of which are also affected by ongoing conflicts. Research into the experiences of refugee students in higher education flags the difficulties that many young people face in negotiating highly politicised university environments and wider discriminatory contexts with virtually no support (Watenpaugh et al. 2014; Fincham 2020). While demand for scholarships continues to far exceed the number available, many students also drop out, partly due to being funnelled into disciplines that are perceived to match gaps in the labour market rather than student needs or interests, but also due to hopelessness about employment prospects (Fincham 2020). In Lebanon, for example, all refugees, including Palestinians who were born in the country, are denied the right to work in professional jobs (Hanafi, Chaaban, and Seyfert 2012).

While the emerging policy agenda for 'Higher Education in Emergencies' remains largely preoccupied by questions of access to higher education, there are a raft of neglected questions about the role of higher education structures, systems and institutions in both contributing to the causes of conflict and to processes of post-conflict recovery (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). This picture is further complicated by post-conflict trends of privatisation in higher education and the rapidly changing

relations between higher education and the state (Selenica 2018). For example, in advocating for greater attention to the untapped role of universities in post-conflict recovery, Samson Milton (2017, 81) acknowledges that this role ‘cannot be adequately realised within the marketized model’ and that ‘the presence of at least a leading national university with incentives to engage in research and public service is crucial to realising the potential of the sector.’ In the midst of such complexity, a narrow focus on access to higher education within a knowledge economy paradigm is not enough. In order to build a compelling literature on higher education in contexts of conflict, the field needs to go well beyond issues of access, human capital, economic growth and securitisation, to engage with the role of universities in the democratic fabric of society.

## 2.4 Critiquing and extending classical public sphere theory

The emerging literature on universities and the public sphere not only tends to focus on the experiences of universities located in the Global North but also overlooks longstanding critiques of public sphere theory from egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational perspectives. Thus, if we are to address the under-theorisation of what makes a university ‘public’ and learn from the experiences of universities located in ‘non-Western and non-European spaces’ (Shami 2009, 37), then it becomes imperative to recognise the Eurocentric origins and inherent coloniality of public sphere theory, along with the possibilities for its reconstruction. Asking whether the Global South even needs the concept of the public sphere, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012, 43) enquires: ‘can the limitations of Eurocentric origin be superseded by theoretical and political reconstruction?’ Similarly, other critics of Jurgen Habermas do not so much reject the notion of the public sphere as crucially extend it. As Nancy Fraser (1990, 57) says, ‘something *like* Habermas’s idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and democratic practice.’ It is only in the dissection of its weaknesses that the full scope and potential of public sphere theory for the field of higher education comes into focus. The following discussion considers the critiques of classical public sphere theory, interrogating the meanings of ‘public’ and ‘publicness’ through this political lens, and returning to the question of universities, conflict and the public sphere in the final section of this chapter.

### 2.4.1 *Exclusionary public spheres*

While the rise of a ‘bourgeois public sphere’ in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe might have signified the demise of old order despots (Habermas 1989), it also signalled the birth of modern capitalism and a new set of local and global power relations based on economic exploitation and colonial rule (Bhambra 2014). As Nancy Fraser (1990) points out, the bourgeois public sphere was

built upon significant exclusions of gender, race and class. The enduring tension between individual freedom (liberty) and social equality (democracy) is not merely an abstract debate as different political projects have tended to emphasise one over the other and what is neglected invariably comes back to 'haunt' societies at both ends of the spectrum (Hoggett, Mayo, and Miller 2009, 29). Habermas's conception of the public sphere, based on 'the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all matters of public concern' (Benhabib 1996), places it in the liberal democratic tradition, elevating freedom of participation over equality of opportunity and explicitly 'bracketing' questions of difference (Fraser 1990).

While offering a theoretical basis for more deliberative forms of democracy, the avoidance of difference is a key critique of Habermas's conception of the public sphere. Firstly, his proposition that nobody is excluded from entering public discourse requires 'bracketing' societal inequalities, defying the existence of material and discursive barriers that silence large sections of the population. The 'somewhat quaint' assumption that the better argument rather than the loudest will always win out (Edwards 2014, 69) is strongly disputed by feminist theorists who argue that not only are certain voices invariably louder than others, but that the elevation of 'rational argument' also implicitly privileges class-based, masculinist and racialised speech-forms (Young 1996). bell hooks, for example, points out that, 'for women within oppressed groups who have contained so many feelings – despair, rage, anguish – who do not speak, as poet Audre Lorde writes, "for fear our words will not be heard or welcomed", *coming to voice is an act of resistance*' (hooks cited in Hoggett 2000, 149 my emphasis). Indeed, political subjugation works precisely on the basis of denying the expression of experience (Ibid). Judith Butler (2016, 20) acknowledges these multiple and intersecting exclusions as a 'haunting' of public spheres, which are not only steeped in power relations but are highly precarious for many people:

All public assembly is haunted by the police and the prison. And every public square is defined in part by the population that could not possibly arrive there...In other words, the freedom to gather as a people is always haunted by the imprisonment of those who exercised that freedom... And when one arrives in public or common spaces with radical and critical views, there is always an anxious or certain anticipation that imprisonment may well follow.

A second major critique of Habermas's conception of the public sphere is that its driving rationale is consensus-making. From this perspective, the existence of difference is not only something to be 'bracketed' but also to be overcome, even suppressed in pursuit of consensus politics. Opposing this view, Chantal Mouffe (1993), Nancy Fraser (1990), Bonnie Honig (1993) and others offer an

‘agonistic’ conception of democracy, insisting ‘politics in a modern democracy must accept division and conflict as unavoidable, and the reconciliation of rival claims and conflicting interests can only be partial and provisional’ (Mouffe 1993, 113). By the early 1990s, the rising politics of difference confronted both the theory and practice of liberal democracy with some fundamental questions. Identity politics and a ‘new Left’ had already upended the assumption that politics is solely concerned with issues of economic distribution (Fraser 1995; Hall 1993). At the same time, far from marking ‘the end of history’ (Fukuyama 1989), the end of the Cold War witnessed major eruptions of conflict across the globe that were often fought out ‘in the name of various forms of “difference” – ethnic, national, linguistic, religious and cultural’ (Benhabib 1996, 3).

#### *2.4.2 Difference and conflict in public spheres*

So how should democratic politics deal with difference? This is the question that motivates an ‘agonistic’ approach to democracy (Benhabib 1996). Chantal Mouffe (1993) argues that difference and conflict are ineradicable in public spheres because democracy *is* conflict. This springs from a Gramscian observation that every hegemonic order or political project is subject to confrontation by counter-hegemonic forces (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). By acknowledging the existence of perpetual conflict in plural societies, the distinction between ‘agonism’ (struggle between adversaries) and ‘antagonism’ (struggle between enemies) is highly significant (Mouffe 2000). Not because agonism strives for consensus in the Habermasian sense, but because liberal democracy depends upon the legitimacy of dissent. Without agonistic conflict, Mouffe (2013, 7) warns, ‘there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identification’, whereby opponents are no longer adversaries but enemies to be destroyed. In this democratic ‘paradox’, the suppression of difference ultimately risks a breakdown of democratic politics, as experienced in contexts of civil war (Mouffe 2000). While consensus-making invariably plays a part in politics, it is contestation that provides the lifeblood of democracy. As Michael Edwards (2014, 81) reflects:

One cannot long for a vibrant public sphere and avoid the political conflicts that drive people into or out of it. The best consent, let’s remember, emerges from dissent, not from the rosy glow of polite conversation that fuels liberal fantasies about social transformation.

If we accept ‘living with difference’ (Hall 2007), then we can begin to think of it as intrinsic to democratic politics rather than a threat to the cohesion of society. This is a very different starting point to discourses of assimilation, which include imposing unitary and hegemonic forms of identity

linked to imagined ideas of 'the nation' (Anderson 2006). While a shared national citizenship is potentially unifying, conflating publics with the nation raises problems of inclusion and exclusion, conditional citizenship and racialised conceptions of 'the people'. Linking the origins of the nation state to the colonial state, Mahmood Mamdani (2020) calls for decoupling the state and the nation, reimagining political communities beyond colonially constructed notions of 'majorities' and 'minorities' in relation to religion or ethnicity, thereby facilitating new forms of political identity and alliances. Conceptualising public spheres as intrinsically and necessarily diverse enables societies to aspire to living with difference (Hall 1993; 2007). By embracing diversity and admitting the inevitable collision of ideas and value systems as a result (Hoggett, Mayo, and Miller 2009, 28), plural societies are released from relying on unitary forms of identity and historical narrative to underwrite the possibility of a democratic publicness.

While numerous theorists emphasise plurality and contestation within public spheres, there are also divergences between them, reflecting a range of critical and post-structuralist approaches. Chantal Mouffe (2013), for example, distinguishes her own understanding of agonistic politics from the work of Hannah Arendt (1969) and Bonnie Honig (1993), on the basis that 'agonism' is not possible without 'antagonism', a 'democratic paradox' linked to Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy conceptualisation of the political (Mouffe 2005). Insisting upon the inherently conflictual nature of plurality, Mouffe (2013, 11) argues that 'neither Arendt nor Habermas is able to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the ineradicability of antagonism'. Going beyond the notion of contestation, Mouffe's 'agonistic pluralism' arguably has more in common with Nancy Fraser's (1990) 'counterpublics'. For despite their broadly contrasting post-structuralist (Mouffe) and critical (Fraser) approaches, both situate their arguments in relation to a Gramscian understanding of hegemony and counter-hegemony. As well as establishing the impossibility of 'bracketing' differences of gender, race and class in order to deliberate as equals in society, Fraser demonstrates that hegemony is infinitely contested by a multiplicity of counter-hegemonic interests. Drawing on revisionist historiographies of Europe and North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, she shows how the era of the so-called 'bourgeois public sphere' was in fact characterised by multiple other 'counterpublics', including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, women's publics and working class publics (Fraser 1990, 61). In short, Fraser argues, there is not one public sphere but many of them.

As the often-cited alternative to Habermas's singular public sphere, Fraser's (1990) concept of 'counterpublics' coalesces around different interest groups and identities, as illustrated in her own

examples. While she does not ‘rule out’ the possibility of a ‘more comprehensive arena in which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity’ (Ibid, 69), such an ideal is contingent upon realising an egalitarian, non-stratified and culturally diverse society, rather than simply ‘bracketing’ difference. Fawwaz Traboulsi (2005, 529) similarly argues that the intrinsic value of the public sphere as a critical theory is in its ‘processural’ understanding of democratisation, which he describes as ‘motivating, not simply instrumental’. As such, the recognition of difference, conflict, hegemony and counter-hegemony in public spheres does not preclude the relevance of thinking about the *where* – what domain, arena, terrain or sphere - do the conflicts *between* these multiple counterpublics play out? Geoff Eley (cited in Fraser 1990, 68) describes this as ‘the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place’, while Paul Hoggett et al. (2009, 15) further reflect:

More than any other part of life this terrain acts as an incubator for politics, it is the site from which many social movements spring, where local activists and politicians develop, where struggles for social justice grow and decline and where inter-communal conflicts are generated. It is therefore, above all, a public sphere, a space where public purposes and values are continuously contested.

## 2.5 Spatial and temporal formations of publics

It is something of an irony that despite frequently drawing on spatialised terminology such as ‘domain’, ‘arena’ and ‘terrain’, political theories of the public sphere rarely interact with theories of space, leading to a ‘lost geography of the public sphere’ (Low and Smith 2006). Yet spatialising the public sphere not only goes some way towards addressing its Eurocentric and state-centric orientations, it also helps to draw our attention to the inherently temporal and fragile nature of public spheres (Massey 2005; Shami 2009). For publics are not fixed in any particular time or place but are subject to ongoing processes of degeneration as well as transformation (Habermas 1989).

### 2.5.1 *Provincialising the public sphere*

Historically situated in eighteenth century Europe, Jürgen Habermas’s conceptualisation of the bourgeois public sphere is evidently Eurocentric, triggering questions of how useful or extendable it is to other contexts. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012, 43) enquires, ‘does the Global South need this concept? Its theoretical and cultural presuppositions are entirely European.’ Other postcolonial theorists point out that primordialism adheres around the notion that democracy is an anathema outside of the Western liberal democratic order, essentialising historical and political

constructions of authoritarianism, sectarianism and conflict rather than investigating the conditions that produce them (Makdisi 2000; Said 1978; Traboulsi 2005). The Middle East, for example, is a region that has long been 'characterized by its Orientalizers, past and present, as not only lacking in civility but also in public-ness and public-ity' (Shami 2009, 14).

Tackling Eurocentrism in the social sciences entails 'provincializing' so-called universal ideas, which have been forged within the European experience and crudely extended to the rest of the world (Chakrabarty 2000). It also involves 'reconstructing' those ideas in order to redress the silencing and suppression of non-European histories and knowledges (Santos 2015). While some theorists argue for a 'redployment' of Eurocentric theory through a postcolonial lens (Go 2013, 42), Santos suggests that 'counterhegemonic understandings and uses of Eurocentric concepts....can be generated from the Global South' (Santos 2015: ix). The question for the public sphere, then, is the extent to which its Eurocentric origins and bourgeois social conditions can be 'superseded by theoretical and political reconstruction' (Santos 2012, 45).

### *2.5.2 Spatialising the public sphere*

Emphasising the relational nature of space and place, Doreen Massey conceptualises space as the complex interaction of social relations, while place is the meeting up of histories and 'stories-so-far', inherently diverse and always contested. Taking a multi-scalar perspective, she demonstrates that the 'local' and the 'global' are mutually constitutive; one does not exist in isolation to the other (Massey 2005). Similarly rejecting the idea of a powerful 'global' and subordinated 'local', Arturo Escobar points to the ways in which events, processes and institutions are simultaneously shaped by 'global' trends *and* subject to the agency of 'local' populations (Escobar 2001; 2004). A spatial perspective also sheds light on the actual '*places and spaces of publicness*', which are otherwise neglected in public sphere theory (Low and Smith 2006, 7, my emphasis). Seteney Shami (2009, 31) further suggests that 'thinking of public spheres as "*spaces of contestation*"' helps to elucidate the 'processural and emergent quality of public spheres' (my emphasis). At the same time, paying greater attention to the relational production of space (Lefebvre 1991) highlights the many inclusions, exclusions and inequalities that characterise public spheres. As Massey (1998, 127) notes, while space is inherently relational and contestable, 'both individuals and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territorialize, to claim spaces, to include some and exclude others from particular areas.'



### 2.5.3 *Transnationalising the public sphere*

Until relatively recently, public sphere theory presupposed the territorial boundaries of the nation state (Fraser 2007). Two major considerations have upended this state-centric framing of public spheres, on the one hand relating to the transnational nature of societal concerns, and on the other hand resulting from the diminishing responsibilities of states. From climate change and migration to trade wars and protest movements, there is no denying that many issues reach well beyond the boundaries of the nation state and its capacity to resolve them. As Nancy Fraser (2007, 14) remarks, the 'Westphalian blind spot of public sphere theory is hard to miss'. Yet while societal issues are increasingly trans-territorial, Fraser also reminds us that it is not enough to simply point to transnational flows of information, communication and opinion formation. For without the twin elements of 'normative legitimacy' (equal rights to participate in a political community) and 'political efficacy' (ability to hold governing authorities to account), the concept of the public sphere 'loses its critical force and its political point' (Ibid, 8). 'Transnationalising' the public sphere is therefore not straightforward and Fraser calls for further work to salvage the critical and emancipatory promise of the public sphere within a post-Westphalian world (Fraser 2014).

## 2.6 'Public things' between society and the state

The emphasis placed by Habermas on the space *between* civil society and the state has contributed to an enduring ambiguity around the role of state-funded public institutions in the public sphere. Crucially, the public domain is not the same as the public sector, just as the meaning of public cannot be conflated with the state. Likewise the common slippage between the public sphere and civil society in discourses of democratisation, particularly in post-Communist contexts of Eastern Europe and China, is also erroneous (Calhoun 1993). Paul Hoggett et al. (2009, 15) suggest that we think of the public sphere as 'the point where participatory and representative democracy meet', including *all* of the institutions, organisations, associations and movements that 'populate the territory between the two private spheres of our intimate relations and family life on the one hand, and what we think of as the 'private sector' (companies, firms etc) on the other' (Ibid 24). While the authors concede that the distinction between public and private has been rightly complicated by feminist movements and theory, their definition of the public sphere works on the basis that everything that falls within it should be open to public scrutiny. To this end, transparency and accountability are essential characteristics of the public sphere, rendering it a space of infinite contestation: 'the part of society in which collective values and purposes can be expressed, argued about and developed' (Ibid 24).

### *2.6.1 The state as a social relation*

There is a tendency, even in scholarly literature, to refer to 'the state' in monolithic, undefined terms (Frerks and Stel 2013). This has been further accentuated by the 'unhelpful' state-civil society dichotomy (Traboulsi 2005), which obscures the interaction of what Nancy Fraser (1990) describes as 'strong publics' and 'weak publics' on a continuum of proximity to decision-making power. In the field of international development, public institutions have been actively marginalised by the Western civil society model, which has elided with a neoliberal agenda for rolling back the social obligations of the state and become increasingly synonymous with processes of depoliticization and 'NGOisation' linked to donor agendas (Howell and Pearce 2002; Jad 2004; Milbourne and Murray 2017). Challenging this limiting framing of societal change, Seteney Shami (2009, 15) suggests that reconceptualizing the public sphere in the Middle East and North Africa holds 'integrative promise', joining up an array of different approaches to social and political transformation and enabling new perspectives on the region. As well as helping to unpack contested notions of 'the nation' and 'the state', the conceptual importance of the public sphere 'lies largely in that it goes beyond appeals to the formal institutions of the Western civil society model, to address entire realms of societal and cultural life that has relevance to the social and political order' (Hoexter cited in Shami 2009, 15-16). From universities to public squares, an expansive range of social, cultural and political organisations, movements and spaces rendered invisible by the civil society model come back into view.

While it is important to situate public institutions within the public sphere, they are not inherently 'good', inclusive or democratic. In Europe and North America, for example, a great deal of public infrastructure, including public universities and other institutional legacies of industrialisation and the welfare state, are built on the spoils of slavery, theft and colonisation (Bhambra and Holmwood 2018; Holmwood 2018). In contexts of conflict, public institutions may be used to oppress, divide and even erase communities (Honig 2017), or they may be ravaged or paralysed by decades of systemic neglect and corruption. Perhaps unsurprisingly, from a range of political and geographic perspectives, public institutions continue to be equated with an 'authoritarian-statist' approach in opposition to more 'participatory-democratic' forms of association in civil society (Fraser 1990). Yet history has shown that the state can look both ways; it can be both an instrument of oppression and control *and* a guarantor of social rights and civic freedoms. Overcoming the tendency towards monolithic or essentialist perspectives, Bob Jessop's (2007) strategic-relational approach theorises the state as a social relation, while Chantal Mouffe (2018, 46) also frames the state 'as a crystallization of the relations of forces and as a terrain of struggle.'

Fawwaz Traboulsi (2005) further emphasises that institutions of the state are not synonymous with the regime in power at a particular historical moment. As he poignantly notes, we have only to look to Iraq to see the devastating consequences of breaking up the state in the name of 'regime change', an externally-led process which saw the widespread destruction of Iraqi public institutions including government ministries, the army and even universities (Ibid). In Lebanon, which has long been described as a 'weak state', the sectarianisation and privatisation of public institutions in the post-civil war period has further contributed to the decline of a 'trans-sectarian democratic citizenship' (Salloukh et al. 2015, 4). A question that is perhaps becoming increasingly significant in contexts of deteriorating publicness, is to what extent do public institutions play a role in holding society together?

### *2.6.2 The neoliberal repurposing of the state*

While the role of the state in neoliberal economies is often mistaken for a withdrawal, it is better understood as the repurposing of the state to create deregulated free markets, whilst simultaneously abandoning the state's commitment to social welfare and public provision. Alongside evidence of soaring inequalities in society (Piketty 2017), there is growing concern about the effects of this neoliberal transformation on democratic relations. Wendy Brown (2015, 18) argues that 'Democracy can be undone, hollowed out from within, not only overthrown or stymied by antidemocrats', while Bonnie Honig (2017) suggests that democracy unravels if there is nothing public left to contest, deliberate or hold to account. Referring to Habermas's basic premise that democracy is necessarily deliberative rather than simply majoritarian, Zygmunt Bauman (1999, 5) argues that the democratic core of the public sphere is rapidly receding in the neoliberal context of globalisation, rendering citizens weakened if not impotent in bringing about change through their political institutions:

Assuming for a moment that the extraordinary happened and private/public space was filled with citizens wishing to debate their values and discuss the laws which are there to guide them - where is the agency powerful enough to carry through their resolutions? The most powerful powers float or flow, and the most decisive decisions are taken in a space remote from the agora or even from the politically institutionalized public space... power will stay at a safe distance from politics.

### 2.6.3 'Public things' and democracy

Within this global context of diminishing public space, Bonnie Honig (2017) makes the case for 'public things' as a vital element of democracy. From hospitals and libraries to schools, parks and water treatment works, Honig's theory of 'public things' is not about the utility or efficiency of public infrastructure, but about how public things 'press us into relations with others' (Ibid, 6). Without public things, she argues, democratic life becomes unsustainable because democracy depends upon the 'adhesive' and 'integrative' powers of public things that both bind and *un*bind us as citizens. Honig draws on the theoretical ideas of two mid-century thinkers: Hannah Arendt's notion of 'action in concert' relating to collective mobilisation around issues of common concern, and D. W. Winnicott's object-relations theory, which Honig extends to conceptualising public things as 'holding environments' for society's conflicts. This combination of contestation and containment is also echoed in Hoggett's argument that public institutions both enable 'the continuous *contestation* of public purposes and a means of *containing* the moral ambivalence of citizens' (Hoggett 2005, 168 my emphases).

Furthermore, Honig is clear that public things are not intrinsically good, democratic or unifying. On the contrary, as already discussed, public infrastructure may be built on histories of exploitation and oppression while also continuing to oppress or segregate societies in the present. Reflecting specifically on the racialised histories of public things in the United States, such as public swimming pools before desegregation (white) or public housing today (black), she makes a twofold argument: Not only have public things been part of a regime of white supremacy in the United States, in which equal access to public things is denied on the basis of race, but even when public things *are* democratised, 'the response of the powerful is often to abandon them'. From swimming pools to schools and housing, white flight, Honig says, 'is not just from the urban to the suburban; *it is from the public to the private thing*' (Honig 2017, 24-25, my emphasis). Honig's theory of public things therefore goes well beyond the limitations of contact theory (Allport 1954), which fixates on individual attitudes over structural conditions of reproduction and transformation. In contrast Honig (2017, 36) argues that public things, including schools and universities, are inherently political and contestable:

[Public things] furnish a world in which we encounter others, share the experience of being part of something that is larger than ourselves, and work with others, acting in concert, to share it, democratize access to it, to better it, to desegregate it, to maintain it... Public things are things around which we

constellate, and by which we are divided and interpellated into agonistic democratic citizenship. They are not innocent or pure. They are political.

## 2.7 The temporality and fragility of public spheres

Publics are not fixed in a particular time or place but are inherently fragile. Jürgen Habermas (1989) identifies the qualifying conditions of the public sphere, tracing the patterns of its degeneration as well as transformation. From an agonistic perspective, Nancy Fraser (1990), Chantal Mouffe (1993), Bonnie Honig (1993) and others argue that public spheres are not static but continuously fought over, containing the seeds of their own decline as well as transformation through the interaction of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests. Whether due to conflict, anti-democratic regimes or the 'hollowing out' of democracy from within (Brown 2015, 18), the temporality of public spheres is not particular to societies in 'parts of the world outside the institutionalized liberal-democratic order', but is an integral, inescapable characteristic (Shami 2009, 38). As Seteney Shami (Ibid, 38) reflects, once the inherent fragility of public spheres in the democratic functioning of society is understood, perhaps we might be more aware that 'public civility needs to be continually and vigilantly constructed, buttressed and protected'.

In post-civil war contexts, there is often a profound loss or fragmentation of a sense of public yet in the cacophony of concerns for security, stability and economic recovery, attention to the public sphere is virtually absent from academic and policy debates on post-war reconstruction. Due to issues of capacity and resources, post-war governments are very often dependent on international agencies with a track record of privatising rather than supporting public institutions and infrastructure. Naomi Klein (2008) employs the term 'shock doctrine' to denote the deliberate strategy of introducing neoliberal economic restructuring in the aftermath of conflict, disaster and crisis. In the field of education, Antoni Verger et al. (2016) similarly identify conflict and crisis as a key pathway in the privatisation of education systems, a phenomenon which they describe as 'privatization by way of catastrophe'.

As fractured, crisis-stricken societies lose their material and symbolic 'places and spaces of publicness' to the neoliberal restructuring of post-conflict economies (Low and Smith 2006, 7), what are the ways in which public spheres can be salvaged and rebuilt from the wreckage of public life? Janet Newman and John Clarke (2009) liken the idea of 'public' to a social imaginary which is constantly being made and remade. Each shift in society leaves a 'a new sedimentary layer in the meaning of the public' (Warner 2002, 28), so that even where public spheres are fundamentally

changed, fragmented or destroyed, memories of previous or alternate meanings of public are often retained. This perspective underlines the fact that making and unmaking of public spheres is not linear and while it may not always be clear whether a democratic publicness can survive (Newman and Clarke 2009, 15), there also remains scope for publics to be both reclaimed and reimagined (Honig 2017; Mitchell and Fazi 2017).

### 2.7.1 *'Public space' in societies affected by conflict*

The idea of 'bringing people together' is central to processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts. However, the nature of this coming together is often disconnected from democratic theory. For example, contact theory (Allport 1954) is based on the notion that intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Yet it is also critiqued for focusing solely on changing individual attitudes rather than addressing bigger structural problems of inequality and discrimination, issues that have very often contributed to the causes of conflict in the first place. It is a criticism that is repeatedly levelled at peacebuilding strategies that emphasise social contact over social justice, prioritising 'negative peace' (the absence of conflict) over 'positive peace' (the integration of human society) (Galtung 1969). Despite increasing recognition that underlying causes of conflict need to be addressed alongside intergroup contact, including tackling the 'structural violence' of social structures and institutions (Ibid), there is very little attention to what James Tully calls the 'practical arts of democratic integration' (Tully cited in Salloukh et al. 2015, 180).

In Belfast, for example, 'new waterfront developments, shopping precincts and tech-led industries' may be shared by those who can afford to use them, yet sit 'uncomfortably close to communities still affected by poverty, division and violence' (Murtagh 2018, 438). In post-civil war Beirut, spaces such as shopping malls, bars, offices and universities are similarly shared but separately traversed by young people, leading to what Nasser Yassin (2012, 216) describes as 'co-existence without empathy'. Such examples highlight that Tully's 'practical arts of democratic integration' must take account of issues of access and inequality, as well as paying attention to the need for realising a collective stake in things beyond economic or consumerist need. It is therefore necessary to link spatialised theories of togetherness to questions of democracy and justice. In particular, the concepts of 'public space', 'shared space' and 'the commons' might all be said to *bring people together*, and yet have very different standpoints and implications (Honig 2017).

'Public space' assumes collective accessibility and is subject to both political control and public accountability, linked to democratic institutions of the state (Low and Smith 2006). In contrast, the

urban design concept of ‘shared space’ seeks independence from state bureaucracy, embracing the potential of its users to self-organise and self-regulate and does not preclude privatisation (Monderman cited in Honig 2017). Conversely, the concept of ‘the commons’ actively opposes the privatisation and unequal domination of cultural and natural resources (De Angelis 2003), calling attention to ‘the losses exacted by long histories of dispossession, appropriation, and accumulation’, including by the state (Honig 2017, 89). Yet as Bonnie Honig (2017, 90) points out, the anti-statism implicit in both the shared space and commons models, whether emanating from libertarianism or political resistance to policies of enclosure and oppression, risks abandoning public things and public institutions rather than fighting to democratise and reclaim them (Mitchell and Fazi 2017). ‘If democratic theorists neglect public things’, Honig says, ‘we end up theorizing the demos... without the things that give [it] purpose and whose adhesive and integrative powers are necessary to the perpetual reformation of democratic collectivity’ (Ibid, 90).

### *2.7.2 Theorising the university as a public sphere in societies affected by conflict*

The relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere is neglected in multiple literatures relevant to this study. Universities are largely absent from political theories of the public sphere, despite being ‘recognisable’ and even ‘paradigmatic’ examples of a classical conception of the public sphere (Marginson 2012; Delanty 2005; Honneth 2015). While there is now attention to the rapidly declining publicness of universities (Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012; White 2017), this literature tends to focus on the neoliberal transformation of universities in the Global North, as well as overlooking the substantial egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of classical public sphere theory (Fraser 1990; Fraser 2007; Mouffe 2005; Santos 2012). At the same time, universities have long been ignored in the field of education and international development on the basis that they are economically unproductive and a ‘luxury’ in poor and conflict-affected societies (Lebeau and Sall 2011; Milton 2017). While universities are gradually coming back into focus, the newly emerging discourse on ‘Higher Education in Emergencies’ is constrained within a knowledge economy paradigm that focuses almost exclusively on questions of access and human capital, marginalising the democratic significance of universities in processes of post-conflict recovery.

This discussion highlights the lack of theoretical consensus on what *makes* a university ‘public’ and, in more empirical terms, the absence of any contextually rooted frameworks or approaches to measuring the ‘incidence and degree of “publicness”’ in higher education (Marginson 2012, 18). In the context of a declining publicness of universities across the globe, these gaps and absences in the literature throw up some urgent questions: What is the significance of the university in the

democratic fabric of society? What are the implications of an exclusively economic rationality in higher education for wider conditions of democracy? Is the public university, as a 'public thing', particularly significant as a space and/or object of democratic contestation (Honig 2017)? In societies affected by conflict (including, by degrees, all plural and stratified societies) does the public university play a particular role in facilitating agonistic encounters with difference?

In this chapter I have discussed both the contributions and limitations of different literatures to understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. In the next chapter I consider the changing public dimensions of higher education in Lebanon.



## Chapter 3:

### The public dimensions of higher education in Lebanon

There is a certain incongruity in highlighting the public dimensions of a higher education context that is heavily dominated by private providers. There are no less than 49 higher education institutions in Lebanon today, 37 of which are universities, and all but one of them are private (CERD 2019).<sup>2</sup> Yet on closer inspection, Lebanon's higher education sector is steeped in historical and ongoing struggles across multiple generations, over questions relating to identity, social class, and the role of the state in the provision of education ('Amil 1968; Bashshur 2003; El-Amine 2018a; Shaheen 2014; Tibawi 1972; Zbib 2014). Furthermore, defying the characterisation of a predominantly private higher education sector, Lebanon's only public university, the Lebanese University, enrolled two-thirds of all students until the early 2000s, a figure which subsequently declined to 37% of the total student population in the context of neoliberal trends in Lebanese higher education and changing conditions within the Lebanese University itself.

The picture of higher education in Lebanon is therefore not fixed but ever-changing, closely linked to shifting relations between society and the state. A historical political economy perspective throws these dynamics into sharp relief, highlighting the prominent role of universities in the constructions and transformations of public spheres in Lebanon, from the emergence of higher education in the late Ottoman period, through the momentous eras of state-building, revolution and civil war, right up until the present day. References to the public sphere in Lebanon are often peppered with descriptions such as 'fragmented', 'divided' and 'shattered', while others reasonably enquire, 'what "public" is being addressed'? (Baumann 2016, 116). Civic and public institutions are often perceived to have a particular political-sectarian association, throwing doubt over the meaning of their 'publicness'. Yet without historicising the trajectories of Lebanon's public spheres, there is a risk of drifting into essentialist discourses of sectarianism that ignore the myriad struggles over publicness, as well as the deliberate, material effects of laws and policymaking. For sectarianism is not inherent to Lebanese public life but is produced and reproduced historically, politically and institutionally (Makdisi 2000; Salloukh et al. 2015). The field of higher education is one such domain, characterised both by relentless processes of reproduction and momentous periods of transformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Out of a total of 49 higher education institutions in Lebanon, 37 are universities (defined by having more than 3 academic faculties), while the rest are higher education colleges and institutes. All are private with the exception of the Lebanese University.

### 3.1 Colonial encounters in higher education

It is often cited that the first ‘modern’ universities in the Middle East were founded in Lebanon, a reference to the American University of Beirut (AUB) and Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), which were both established by foreign missionaries in the late-nineteenth century. While these historic institutions have played a significant role in the development of the modern state of Lebanon, this narrative not only marginalises the pre-colonial histories of universities in the region (Teferra and Altbach 2004), it also distorts the intensity of struggles over nationhood, identity and class relations in the arena of higher education over more than a century (Anderson 2011; Bashshur 1997). For the colonial encounter in education was both central to the production and practice of sectarianism in the birth of modern Lebanon and the ongoing reproduction of social and political inequalities and divisions in education that continue to flow from the colonial legacies of the past (Makdisi 2000; Sbaiti 2009; Weiss 2010).

#### *3.1.1 Constructing modernity and sectarianism through education*

Far from a primordial feature of Lebanese society, sectarianism is a historical and institutional construct that dates back to the late Ottoman empire and the seismic power struggles between the Ottoman state, European powers and local populations (Makdisi 2000). The establishment of Lebanon’s first universities by American Protestant and French Jesuit missionaries, in 1866 and 1875 respectively, was an expression of this interaction and a highpoint in the spread of missionary education since the 1830s (Hauser, Lindner and Möller 2016). Founded in the wake of the Druze-Maronite massacres of 1860 and the subsequent introduction of communal power-sharing arrangements in Mount Lebanon,<sup>3</sup> the births of the Syrian Protestant College (later renamed the American University of Beirut) and Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth were also generated by competition. It was a competition between Ottoman and European powers, French and British colonial interests, and Protestant and Catholic missionaries who acted, to varying degrees of intentionality, as interlocutors for foreign states (Anderson 2011). It specifically played out around claims to modernity and ‘being modern’, locating higher education as a site of intense rivalry from the start (Sbaiti 2009; Watenpaugh 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> The Druze-Maronite massacres of 1860 led to the reorganisation of Mount Lebanon as a semi-autonomous region ruled by a Christian *mutasarrif* and a council of representatives for different religious groups. Known as the *mutasarrifiya*, it was a solution imposed by the Ottoman state under European pressure as a means of ending sectarian strife through the institutionalisation of communal representation.

These two missionary universities came to dominate higher education in Lebanon for the best part of the next hundred years, with significant implications for the cultural and political economy of Lebanese society (Bashshur 1964; 1997). Orientalist discourses of an enlightened, tolerant (Christian) West confronting a backward, violent (Muslim) East (Said 1978), are prominent in the speeches and writings of missionaries at the American University of Beirut into the early twentieth century (Anderson 2011). At the same time, the burgeoning intellectual production of university students and graduates also spilled into the cultural forces behind the *Nahda*, the Arab cultural ‘renaissance’ or ‘awakening’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Traboulsi 2007). Alongside the proliferation of newspapers, printing presses and the Arab novel came the call for new forms of education that would prioritise Arab language, Arab identity and the education of women (ibid). While foreign missionary universities shaped the evolving cultural, political and socioeconomic relations in society, the emergence of anti-imperialist movements for Arabizing higher education can also be traced to this period and foreign universities in Lebanon and elsewhere became sites of Arab nationalist politics (Anderson 2011).

By the early twentieth century, the education context was comprised of a diverse array of foreign missionary and secular private schools, local secular and religious private schools, and a significant number of public schools that were a direct legacy of the *tanzimāt*, the extensive reforms introduced in the latter decades of the Ottoman empire (Sbaiti 2009; Abisaab and Abisaab 2014; Fortna 2002).<sup>4</sup> While this varied assortment of schools represented a range of foreign, religious, Arab and local interests, the French and American missionary schools enrolled the largest majority of pupils. Following the destruction of the Ottoman empire at the end of the First World War, France’s heavy presence in education actively facilitated its political claim to Lebanon in the partitioning of a new ‘Middle East’ by European colonial powers (Tibawi 1972).

### 3.1.2 The de-development of public education under the French Mandate

The role of the French colonial Mandate in what became known as ‘Le Grand Liban’, or Greater Lebanon, between 1920 and 1943, was ostensibly to facilitate the emergence of an independent Lebanese state. Yet the French determination to bring Lebanon under its own sphere of influence was particularly apparent in the field of education as French was made an official language alongside

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to foreign private schools, there were also traditional Islamic *kuttabs* and a range of schools set up by local Islamic and Christian institutions, such as the *Maqāsīd* schools, as well as secular nationalist schools, pushing back against foreign missionary influence. For example, a key figure in the *Nahda* era was Butrus al-Bustani, who founded the first Arab secular school, *al-madrasa al-waṭanyya* (the National School) in Beirut in 1863.

Arabic and the teaching of French became compulsory in schools (Sbaiti 2009; Tibawi 1972). The Mandate authorities were also perceived to privilege French private schools, which had a dedicated budget controlled by the French High Commissioner. By the end of the Mandate in 1943, there were 1534 private schools and just 177 public primary schools (Tibawi 1972). This disparity had two major consequences for Lebanese education and society as a whole. The first related to the future of a public education system in Lebanon; the second concerned the deepening convergence of sect, language and social class through educational institutions.

According to the terms of the Mandate, France was responsible for the development of public education and it duly set up the Service de l'Instruction Publique (Department of Public Education). Despite the name, there was negligible development of public education, which not only stalled but went into steep decline. This had a disproportionate impact on Muslims who were significantly over-represented in the minority public school system (Labaki 1988) and according to Abdel Latif Tibawi (1972, 134-135), Muslims explicitly 'accused France of retarding the education of their children for political reasons'. By 1924 the state budget for education had already been cut by half and in 1933 the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission queried another 'very considerable cut' to education expenditure in south Lebanon, despite the unmet demand for school places (Ibid, 135). The response of the French Representative at the time was that 'public education only supplements the private', an argument that would continue to define the role of the state in the field of education long after the end of the Mandate (Bashshur 1997).

The tension surrounding the role of the state in the provision of education is further reflected in the Lebanese Constitution of 1926, which enshrines the right of religious communities to privately provide education. Echoing the legal framework for education established during the Mandate, Article 10 of the Lebanese constitution specifically states that 'religious communities shall have the right to maintain their own schools, provided that they conform to the general prescription relating to public instruction as laid down by the State'. While state obligations for education have since expanded, the constitution retains the original ambiguity over the role of the state in the provision of education for Lebanese citizens. As Munir Bashshur (1988, 44) remarks, 'Thus was the stage set for a long and serious polarisation in education'.

Within this divided educational context, the American University of Beirut (AUB) and Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) crystalised access to higher education around conditions of language, sect and social class (Zbib 2014). These two universities monopolised pathways into government, the

professions and the private sector. These connections were perceived to be heavily skewed in favour of French-speaking, upper class Maronite graduates from Université Saint-Joseph in the public sector; and English-speaking, upper class Sunni, Druze and Protestant graduates from the American University of Beirut in the private sector (Bashshur 1964). By the end of the French Mandate, Lebanon's education system was not only a complicated mix of educational traditions and sources of education financing, but also inextricably intertwined with social, cultural and political hierarchies in society that produced divergent subjective identities and massive structural inequalities.

The literature on Lebanese education in the Ottoman and French mandate periods reveals the richness of education as a lens on nationhood, shifting identities and resistances to state-imposed agendas and narratives (Fortna 2002; Fleischmann 2002; Hauser, Lindner and Möller 2016; Sbaiti 2009). Yet the tendency to focus on private education institutions and the experiences of predominantly upper class students obscures the fact that large sections of the population remained excluded from education altogether (Labaki 1988; Zbib 2014). What was becoming increasingly significant by the end of the French Mandate was not the religiosity of the two missionary universities but the fact that they were Western foreign institutions catering almost exclusively to an upper class, male student elite (Bashshur 1997; Tibawi 1972).

### 3.2 The birth of the national university and the expansion of public education

The Constitution and National Pact of 1943 marked the founding of the independent Lebanese Republic. As Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007, 109) highlights, the national constitution retained a 'fundamental dichotomy', simultaneously defining the population as equal citizens (*'muwatinin'*) and unequal communitarian subjects (*'ahlin'*). Yet despite continuing constitutional ambiguity over the public provision of education, the new Lebanese state initially appeared to seize the challenge of developing a more coherent national education system. The number of pupils in public schools doubled in the first three years after independence (Matthews and Akrawi 1949) and in 1953 a decree was passed to provide for the expansion of public secondary education as well as formally establishing Lebanon's first national university, the Lebanese University.

#### 3.2.1 *The ambiguous role of the state in education*

The establishment of the Lebanese University, which remains the only public university in Lebanon, marked a watershed in the country's educational landscape. Initially opened in 1951 as a teacher training college, its principal role was to produce secondary school teachers in order to feed the

expansion of public secondary education. An education report in 1955 describes the Lebanese University as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of an expanding national education system (Khuri and Nasr 1955) while an earlier survey anticipates that, ‘with the end of the French mandate, which encouraged foreign schools (especially the French)...the next few years may witness a spurt in public education and a comparative lull in the numerical expansion of private and foreign schools’ (Matthews and Akrawi 1949, 422). The stage seemed set for a new educational orientation, one which would assert independence from foreign rule and in which the as yet fragile sense of national unity might be fostered. As a Minister of Education in the new republic expressed:

Until the first quarter of this century the schools in Lebanon were all private [sic], whether native or foreign. They followed different syllabuses with a different cultural spirit and different educational methods. We should have no quarrel with a different culture or a different educational method, but we cannot tolerate conflict of aims in education. For we are a nation that must make the maximum effort to mould and unify all its elements (cited in Tibawi 1972, 137).

While it is possible to detect a new direction in education in the early years after Lebanon’s independence, it turned out to be a much more difficult journey than might have been anticipated. Just as higher education was a focus of conflict and competition in previous eras, so it continued to be a site of intense struggle over the character of the Lebanese state. Despite the official fanfare surrounding the opening of a national university, the hand of the state had been forced by a major mobilisation of students from Université Saint-Joseph and public high schools in January 1951, demanding government support for higher education, which resulted in violent clashes with police. Farajallah Mikhayel Haneen, a student leader at Université Saint-Joseph and member of the Lebanese Communist Party, was among those beaten and imprisoned, later dying from his injuries (Shaheen 2014). The Lebanese University opened as a teacher training college that same year and the long struggle for its development was set in motion. Student strikes would again force the government to ratify the Lebanese University by decree in 1953, followed by ongoing student and faculty strikes, protests and popular mobilisations to establish its role and presence as a national university (El-Amine 2018a; Ghusayni 1974; Shaheen 2014).

In the decades following independence, the expansion of public education in Lebanon was both supported and constrained by a state that was fraught with ambiguity over its vision for education. The role of public education was explicitly cast in terms of ‘complementarity’; its purpose was to fill the gaps left by private education but not to compete with it (Bashshur 1997). Perhaps surprisingly, in a country celebrated for having the highest literacy and enrolment rates in the Arab region

(Matthews and Akrawi 1949), Lebanon did not have a complete public secondary school, comprising all grades, until 1959 (Bashshur 1997). As a result, the majority of the Lebanese population did not have access to secondary or higher education until the 1960s (Labaki 1988; Zbib 2014). While the inequalities in education cut across all communities, certain groups were considerably worse off than others. Illiteracy rates were particularly high in the Shi'a community, while regions to the north, south and east of the country were also heavily disadvantaged (Labaki 1988). Despite the rhetoric of unimpeded economic development within the embrace of a *laissez faire* economy, Lebanon's illiteracy rate of 30 per cent remained unchanged until the 1970s (Gaspard 2003).

### 3.2.2 The statist 'moment' in education

The so-called 'Merchant Republic' reached a crisis point in 1958 when a civil war erupted in reaction to President Camille Chamoun's unconstitutional attempt to renew his presidency, fuelled by mounting resentment over the political and social inequalities that characterised the new Lebanese state (Schayegh 2013). This precipitated the start of a brief yet decisive 'statist' era under President Fouad Chehab (1958-1964) and his successor President Charles Helou (1964-1970), who sought to redress the worst inequalities and imbalances in Lebanese society through investing in public services and infrastructure (Abu-Rish 2014). Echoing the wider regional context of Arab statist politics in this period, Lebanon's increased public spending over the next twelve years led to a striking interregnum in the longer history of Lebanon's *laissez faire* economy (Traboulsi 2007).

From 1959 to 1970, there was a spike in building public schools and the number of children in public education increased by almost half a million, from 276,704 to 732,681 pupils (Bashshur 1988, 50). The new schools were primarily built in poor regions to the north, south and east of the country and the majority of children who attended these public schools were Muslim (Labaki 1988; Zbib 2014). In a hallmark decree in 1959, President Chehab expanded the Lebanese University to include four new faculties of Science, Law, Humanities and Social Sciences.<sup>5</sup> Enrolment in the Lebanese University rocketed from just 298 students in 1958 to over 15,000 students just fifteen years later (see Appendix 1, Figure 1). The establishment of the Beirut Arab University (BAU) in 1960, directly linked to Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Arab nationalist agenda for higher education, further shook the status quo, triggering a law on higher education that year to regulate the foundation of new

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<sup>5</sup> The Institute of Social Sciences was established as an integral part of the inquiry commissioned by President Fouad Chehab, and led by the French research agency IRFED, *Institut de Recherche et de Formation en Vue de Développement Intégral et Harmonisé*, to inform development planning and strategies for reducing poverty and inequality across Lebanon.

private universities (Tibawi 1972). The higher education law of 1960 would remain the principal framework for regulating private higher education in Lebanon until the mid-1990s.

While the government never became the primary provider of education, the expansion of public education in the 1960s contributed to powering the socio-economic transformations that took place in this period, including changing class structures and mass rural migration to the cities (Traboulsi 2007). In particular, the development of public education directly contributed to a growing state bureaucracy, creating new channels of social mobility for young people. Teaching became a key pathway into a growing middle class and there was a threefold increase in the number of teachers between 1958 to 1971 (Zbib 2014). To become a secondary school teacher, a candidate with sufficient school grades could also win a scholarship to the Lebanese University to cover their living costs in Beirut, not only providing a route into the teaching profession but a university degree.

The state-driven growth of public education turned out to be as fleeting as it was momentous. Adnan El-Amine (2018a) reflects that with the significant exception of President Chehab's expansion of the Lebanese University in 1959, every single development of the public university came on the back of intense periods of conflict between students, professors and the state. Abdel Latif Tibawi (1972, 139) also notes the unchanging ratio between public and private schools in this period, musing that 'for a variety of reasons...the state remained unable or unwilling to depart from custom and assume more than a symbolic share of the burden of secondary education'. Yet facts on the ground were beginning to overtake the reluctance of politicians. Swelling student numbers throughout the 1960s interacted with wider forces of social and political change, leading to a surge in student activism at all four of Lebanon's universities. As Betty Anderson (2011, 50) observes, in contrast to the suppression of Arab nationalist politics at the American University of Beirut in the 1950s, 'by the time student activism exploded again in 1968, the concept of the campus as a civic space was not so easily quelled'.

### 3.3 Revolutionary politics and the prominence of Lebanon's universities

The era of 1968 is often viewed through a Euro-American lens, focusing on student movements in Paris, London and American college campuses, ignoring the radical movements, ruptures and revolutions that were taking place all over the globe (Maasri, Bergin, and Burke Forthcoming). Animated by anti-imperialist and class politics, the so-called global 'periphery' was at the very centre of the radical sixties, a period which stretched from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s across the ascendant political landscape of the Third World (Prashad 2008). Lebanon was no exception as



Beirut emerged as a political and cultural hub in the Arab region following the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. The rise of the Palestinian revolutionary movement and exile of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970 interacted with the live reverberations of May 1968 in France and a re-channelling of anti-colonial, Arab revolutionary ideas (El-Khazen 2000; Traboulsi 2007).

There is a tendency to view the role of the university in the era of 1968 as little more than a backdrop for student protests. Yet the contemporary work of Mahdi 'Amil (1968), described by Vijay Prashad (2014) as 'the Arab Gramsci', explicitly situates the Lebanese University in relation to themes of social and cultural reproduction and transformation in wider society. Writing twenty years before Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) *Homo Academicus*, which theorises the French academy along similar lines, 'Amil (1968) argues that it is not possible to abstract the institution of the university from the socioeconomic and political structures of society. While Bourdieu depicts the French academy in 1968 as inherently reproductive and to a large extent reactionary, 'Amil identifies a more contradictory set of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic factors that shaped the Lebanese higher education context throughout this period.

### *3.3.1 The eruption of a national student movement*

The late sixties and early seventies in Lebanon were fraught with political, economic and social unrest. Unprecedented levels of urbanisation and an expanding poverty belt around Beirut connected agricultural labour movements with an emerging militant working class (Traboulsi 2007). Spurred by the boom in student numbers as a direct result of the expansion of the Lebanese University, the emerging national student movement was propelled to the forefront of intensifying conflicts with the state. As depicted by historian Fawwaz Traboulsi, himself a student activist at the time, the student movement in Lebanon was 'much more than a protest movement, it was a radical questioning of Lebanese and Arab societies' (Traboulsi 2007, 170). Large-scale mobilisations of all political persuasions saw the rise and expansion of new and existing political parties and an explosion of political and literary publications. Traboulsi (2007, 177) describes it as a 'second *Nahḍa*', in reference to the cultural renaissance of the late Ottoman period, while El-Khazen (2000, 73) calls it 'Lebanon's entry into the age of ideology and mass politics'.

The international profile of the student movement in Lebanon has tended to be associated with the Arab nationalist and Palestinian liberation politics of the student body at the American University of Beirut (AUB) (B. S. Anderson 2008; 2011a; Rabah 2009). Given that 82% of students at AUB at this

time were not Lebanese but from other Arab countries further accentuated its regional significance (Ghusayni 1974, 5). In 1970, the American magazine, *Newsweek*, dubbed the American University of Beirut 'Guerrilla U', in reference to student support for Palestinian political parties, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which was founded by AUB graduate, George Habash (Anderson 2011, 151). Yet the American University of Beirut was by no means the biggest, nor the most radical hub for Lebanon's student politics in this period.

In a survey of student politics at three of Lebanon's universities, the Lebanese University, Saint-Joseph University and the American University of Beirut, between 1970 and 1971, Halim Barakat (1977) considers the role of religion, family and social class in correlation with political and national identities among students. He finds that 50 per cent of students at the Lebanese University (LU) supported revolution rather than reform, compared to 29 percent at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and 22 percent at Saint-Joseph University (SJU). Among those students who identified as left-wing, 28 per cent at LU would 'recommend the use of violence, if necessary' compared to 12 percent at AUB and 11 percent at SJU (Barakat 1977, 122). Social class is also more significant in shaping political identities at the Lebanese University, as Barakat (Ibid, 107) remarks, 'The lower the social class students at LU identify with, the less they identify with the rightist ideology and the more they identify with the leftist ideology. At SJU and AUB the trend is not significant.'

### *3.3.2 Revolutionary politics at the Lebanese University*

While student activism at the Lebanese University followed wider political trends, it was also focused on the development of the national university itself. Student and professor demands coalesced around working conditions, a university campus, adequate facilities such as libraries and laboratories, international recognition of decrees and new academic faculties (El-Amine 2018a; Ghusayni 1974; Shaheen 2014). Ra'uf Ghusayni's (1974) doctoral research provides a richly detailed timeline of strikes and protests at the Lebanese University over more than two decades, from its establishment in 1951 until 1974. It shows how students and professors at the Lebanese University waged regular protests, strikes and mass demonstrations on the streets of Beirut to demand the development of the public university over a sustained period of almost twenty-five years. Month after month, year after year, students and professors took on the Lebanese state, both politically in dialogue with government, and often physically in brutal clashes with police (El-Amine 2018a; Shaheen 2014).

Neither Ghusayni (1974) nor Barakat (1977) explicitly connect the Lebanese University student movement with broader political movements in society. Barakat (1977, 119) states that ‘students at LU have been almost solely occupied with reforming the university and promoting their interests’, while Ghusayni (1974, 188) suggests that ‘Lebanese University students, occupied with setting their university on its feet, have until recently shown mild interest in national and political issues’. It is possible to see why the aims and demands of students and professors at the Lebanese University might be characterised as essentially educational rather than political in nature. Yet other analyses place student and professor activism at the Lebanese University at the core of a much bigger struggle for social and political transformation (‘Amil 1968; Bardawil 2016; El-Khazen 2000; Traboulsi 2007). The story of the Lebanese University from this perspective is about challenging class relations, sectarianism and the vestiges of colonial control in higher education and wider Lebanese society.

While all four of Lebanon’s universities were a significant stage for national and regional politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the rise of the Lebanese University came to represent a particular challenge to the existing social and political order of the Lebanese state. Yet despite the uniquely transformative role of the public university in this period, it is only faintly discernible in the literature. With the exception of contemporary work by Mahdi ‘Amil (1968), Ra’uf Ghusayni (1974) and Halim Barakat (1977) among others, along with references to the significance of the Lebanese University in the wider social and political context of this period (for example see Bardawil 2016; Bashshur 1997; El Khazen 2000; Traboulsi 2007), it is only recently that more focused research on the history of the Lebanese University has emerged. This includes Emil Shaheen’s (2014) narrative of the early history of the Lebanese University, focusing on student and professor struggles with the state, and Adnan El-Amine’s (2018a) account of the history of the Lebanese University as part of his edited volume on the trajectories of public universities across the Arab region.

### 3.4 Impacts of civil war on higher education

While the political context in Lebanon was intensely fraught in the years leading up to the outbreak of civil war in April 1975, few could have imagined that the country would descend into fifteen years of violent conflict, only drawing to a close in 1990. Commonly referred to as the Lebanese civil war, this period is more accurately understood as a series of interrelated conflicts between different internal and external groups, including the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Israel and Syria among others. It is estimated that up to 150,000 people were killed during the war. A further 990,000 people left the country, accounting for some 40 per cent of the population (Tabar 2009, 7). A great deal of infrastructure and housing was destroyed or damaged, particularly in and around

Beirut and southern Lebanon, while the average income fell from US\$280 at the end of 1983 to just US\$27 in 1987 (Labaki 1992). Less measurable but no less devastating was the abrupt loss of common spaces of interaction, both physical and social, as the population was wrenched apart along political-sectarian lines (Salloukh et al. 2015). Despite the enormity of all of these impacts on Lebanon's higher education sector, both materially and socio-politically, there is very little research into what happened to universities during this period.

#### *3.4.1 Lebanon's universities during the civil war*

The human and material cost of war for all of Lebanon's universities was immense. Students and professors were killed, kidnapped and disappeared by militias on all sides, thousands of students became engaged in the fighting, and universities haemorrhaged faculty as tens of thousands of Lebanese emigrated abroad. Due to their proximity to areas of intensive fighting in the city, Université Saint-Joseph and the Beirut Arab University sustained high levels of physical damage, the latter losing a significant proportion of its mostly Arab (non-Lebanese) student population (Bashshur 1997). At the American University of Beirut, where university president, Malcolm Kerr, was assassinated in 1988, large numbers of faculty and students also left the country. Where once Lebanon had been a hub for educating students from the wider Arab region and beyond, the number of Arab and foreign students plummeted during the war and universities became increasingly isolated from the international academic community (Ibid).

Both the Lebanese University and the American University of Beirut (AUB) were obliged to open new campuses in east Beirut, as students and professors could no longer safely cross the city to reach their classes. But where AUB's second campus was only a temporary emergency measure, the partitioning of the Lebanese University led to the long-term splintering of a national institution, linked to deep fissures in society over the meaning of the Lebanese nation (Bashshur 2004; El-Amine 2018a). Writing in the latter years of the war, Munir Bashshur (1988) describes Lebanon's education sector as a 'mirror' and a 'prism' of the fracturing of society during the civil war, specifically tracing the fragmentation of Lebanon's only national university. Jacques Kabbanji (2012, 131) similarly mourns the loss of the Lebanese University as a 'melting pot of the most dynamic part of youth', reflecting that while the university was able to continue functioning throughout the war, it came at a terrible cost:

[The Lebanese University] had to pay with its unity, its cohesive role in the social fabric of Lebanon and the quality of its education, an exorbitant price for a difficult survival.

At the same time, universities not only continued to function through the civil war, but also developed and expanded. Université Saint-Joseph notably renewed its mandate during the civil war, asserting its independence from France and ‘re-founding’ the institution with a new university charter in 1975 (Bashshur 1997). At the Lebanese University, considerable developments also took place throughout the 1980s, including the establishment of multiple university branches around the country and the founding of a public medical school (Ibid). Reflecting the movement of up to 40 per cent of people out of the country, the focus also shifted to opportunities for study abroad. While many graduates of the Lebanese University pursued doctoral studies in France, Rafik Harriri’s education foundation offered tens of thousands of international scholarships to study at universities in Europe, Canada and the United States (Baumann 2016). Meanwhile the opening of 8 new private higher education institutions during the civil war years marked the start of a bigger neoliberal transformation of the higher education sector that was yet to come (Nahas 2009).

The Ta’if Agreement of 1989, which negotiated an end to the civil war, is distinctly unusual for peace agreements in that it not only addresses education, but specifically highlights the role of Lebanon’s only public university in processes of post-war recovery. Particularly emphasising the Lebanese University’s ‘technical colleges’, referring to Medicine, Agriculture and Engineering among others, the peace agreement both addressed the role of the university in the material reconstruction of Lebanon, as well as highlighting the importance of the university’s reform on a socio-political level:

The conditions of the Lebanese University shall be reformed and aid shall be provided to the university, especially to its technical colleges (Taif Agreement 1989).

However, while there was an intensive mobilisation around issues of reform and investment in the public university throughout the 1990s, it was stymied on two fronts: the political-sectarian reordering of public institutions after the end of the civil war blocked the efforts towards institutional reform, while a new set of neoliberal policies in the higher education sector entrenched the neglect of the country’s only public university.

### 3.5 The post-war transformation of higher education in Lebanon

The transformation of Lebanon’s higher education landscape during the 1990s and 2000s is the result of intensive deregulation and privatisation of the sector, alongside the post-Ta’if redistribution of public institutions, including the public Lebanese University, along political-sectarian lines. The

proliferation of new private universities in the post-war period has interacted with processes of social stratification and political sectarianisation, while continuing external interference and clientelist practices have reinforced political-sectarian divisions in the public Lebanese University. Yet the literature on higher education in Lebanon, as in the wider Arab region, rarely touches on these issues, focusing instead on questions of financing, quality assurance and the labour market within a neoliberal paradigm (Buckner 2011; Mazawi 2011; Waterbury 2020). The role of universities in contributing to the drivers of conflict in Lebanese society as well as to processes of post-conflict recovery is rendered marginalised in this discourse, yet a closer look reveals widespread concerns about university democracy, autonomy and the role of universities in dividing or bringing together future generations. Neglected in much of the literature and in policymaking, these public dimensions of higher education remain starkly significant.

### *3.5.1 Neoliberal policies in higher education and patterns of sectarianisation*

The fracturing of Lebanese higher education along religious and political-sectarian lines tends to be attributed to the legacies of civil war rather than post-civil war higher education policies, obscuring the ways in which neoliberal processes in higher education have interacted with the fragmentation of the sector. Drawing on David Harvey (2007) to distinguish Lebanon's long history of *laissez faire* economics from the introduction of neoliberalism in the post-war era, Hannes Baumann (2016) emphasises that the state was not absent in Lebanon's neoliberal reconstruction but actively involved in pushing through the deregulation and privatisation of different sectors, including higher education. While the public sector was subject to a political-sectarian reordering under the terms of the Ta'if Agreement, processes of privatisation also intertwined with the sectarianisation of institutions and services. Despite masquerading as a return to pre-civil war liberalism, the blurring of public, private and sectarian interests through political corruption, clientelism and rent-seeking (Leenders 2012) is a combination described by Baumann as 'liberal talk, illiberal walk' (Baumann 2016, 4).

In 2019, there are 49 higher education institutions, including 37 universities, and all but one of them are private (CERD 2019). Unlike the deregulation and privatisation of higher education systems across the wider Arab region (Buckner 2011), the neoliberal transformation of Lebanese higher education in the post-civil war era was not led by international agencies such as the World Bank or IMF, but by Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Baumann 2016). While the emergence of new private institutions began during the civil war (Nahas 2009), the mushrooming of for-profit universities took off in the 1990s and 2000s (Bashshur 2003; El-Ghali 2010). Between 2005 and 2015, government

spending on education declined from 2.4% to 2.1% of GDP, less than half the average in the world (World Bank 2017, 9). At around 0.5% of GDP, public spending on higher education is approximately half the average of other lower middle-income countries (Nahas 2009).

Today 70% of children in Lebanon attend private schools, the majority of which are linked to religious organisations, raising questions about the role of the education system in growing sectarian divisions (Baytiyeh 2017). Public schools are characterised by acute socioeconomic inequalities and high dropout rates, which are also linked to sectarianism and conflict, but concealed by the post-war focus on curriculum reform and textbooks (Bahou 2015; Shuayb 2016). In the higher education sector, there have been more variable shifts in the distribution of students over the last thirty years. In the first decade after the end of the civil war, the proportion of students attending the public Lebanese University decisively increased, from 45% in 1991 to 60% in 1999, reaching almost two-thirds of all students in Lebanon. Throughout the 2000s, this trend went into reverse and the proportion of students at the Lebanese University declined, hitting just 36% in 2013 and plateauing at around 37% since then (see Appendix 1, Figure 5). The remaining 63% of students are spread thinly across a highly stratified private sector, with some higher education institutions enrolling just a few hundred students (CERD 2019). At the American University of Beirut, which enrolls approximately 4% of the total student population, the annual fees are equivalent to more than two years' average salary (The Lebanese Politics Podcast 2019). According to AUB, it produces 63% of 'all citable knowledge for Lebanon' (American University of Beirut 2019, 19), highlighting not only the prestige of AUB but also the low research capacity of many universities in the country.

The majority of private universities were founded after the end of the civil war in 1990 and many are affiliated with a religious sect or linked to a political figure. For example, the Islamic University of Lebanon is affiliated with the Supreme Islamic Shi'i Council, while Phoenicia University was established by the wife of Amal Movement leader and Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri, and Maaref University is linked with Hizbollah. Other universities are associated with prominent Sunni politicians, including Rafik Hariri University founded by former prime minister Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese International University founded by former education minister Abdel Rahim Mourad, and Al-Manar University founded by former prime minister Rashid Karami. The universities of Sagesse, Kaslik, Antonine and Notre Dame-Louaize are all linked with the Maronite church, while Balamand University is connected to the Orthodox community. Some of the 48 private universities, institutes and colleges are profit-making, others are non-profit, and many make claims to being inclusive and non-partisan. While this proliferation is a post-civil war trend, the oldest universities in Lebanon

were established by Christian missionaries, raising questions about autonomy and freedom, inclusion and diversity, elitism and social justice, private and public good, the quality of teaching and research, and the distinction between religious-cultural and political-sectarian aims.

### *3.5.2 The neglected public dimensions of universities in conflict and peacebuilding*

Despite a broad recognition that Lebanon's education sector has become increasingly fragmented along sectarian and socioeconomic lines (Baytiyeh 2017; Bahou 2015; Buckner 2011), Munir Bashshur is among the few who focuses on higher education, exploring 'the story of how this fragmentation happened, or how integration was prevented from happening, and how education served these ends' (Bashshur 1988, 42). He traces the origins of this fracturing back to the colonial encounter and the 1926 constitution which actively prioritised the private provision of education for different religious sects from the outset. By the 1970s, the growing movements for a unified national education system were gaining momentum, but these 'promising signs...came too late' (Ibid, 55). By following the splintering of the public Lebanese University through the civil war years, Bashshur outlines the loss of a national institution catering for all young people across boundaries of class and sect. Writing during the latter years of the war he concludes:

In Lebanon education has been basically subservient to other forces, which have led Lebanese society to where it is now: fractured and fragmented or, as some are beginning to say, disintegrated beyond hope of repair. Education did not stand in the way of these forces – it could not. It gave them expression, articulated them, promoted them and planted them deep in the consciousness of its recipients (Ibid, 42).

Given the fragmented nature of higher education, in both the private and public sectors, there is very little research about its role in both contributing to the drivers of conflict in society and the potential for peacebuilding. While it is well documented that the continuing separation of young people from different sects reproduces socio-political divisions in society (Larkin 2012; Yassin 2012), the obvious significance of universities is rarely explored. There are two principal features of this evasion in the literature. The first relates to the overwhelming focus on school level education rather than universities. Reflecting international discourses and priorities in the growing field of education, conflict and peacebuilding during the 1990s and 2000s, the literature on education as a strategy for social cohesion in Lebanon has primarily focused on the revision of curricula and textbooks in schools, with little attention to the socio-political significance of universities or soaring education inequalities (Shuayb 2016). The second reason relates to the growing dominance of neoliberal discourses in higher education during the same period. Despite the fact that universities in Lebanon



and the wider Arab region have long contended with issues of conflict, military occupation, political interference and authoritarian government, the focus of the international higher education literature appears solely concerned with issues of financing, quality assurance and the labour market (Mazawi 2011). While the Arab revolutions of 2011 briefly punctuated this discourse, drawing urgent attention to questions of university autonomy, academic freedom and the persecution of students and academics, the 'trilemma' of quantity, quality and cost in Arab higher education remains the primary preoccupation of policymakers (Waterbury 2020).

Conversely, however, the future of the public Lebanese University became a topic of intensive public debate in the 1990s, precisely because of its relationship to issues of democracy, post-conflict recovery and national reconciliation. A series of articles published in the Lebanese University journal, *'awrāq jāmi'yya*, initiated by the union of Lebanese University professors, rail against the post-war neglect of the public university by the government and evoke its potential to contribute to processes of national reconciliation and social reintegration (Attrisi 2013). A milestone report published in 1999 by a group of Lebanese University professors, *Issues of the Lebanese University and its Reform (Qaḍāyā al-Jām'a al-Lubnāniyya wa Iṣlāḥihā)* further surveys the material, academic and political situation of different university branches around the country, proposing key principles and recommendations for sweeping institutional reform (El-Amine et al. 1999). The 1999 report was as ground-breaking as it was incendiary in its indictment of ongoing external interference in the Lebanese University and caused such a furore that the university administration threatened the publisher, the Lebanese Association of Educational Studies, with legal action (Shuayb 2019). While the wider academic and policy literature on education in post-war Lebanon continued to ignore the role of universities, the 1999 report recommends:

ensuring equal opportunities without distinction between students' identities and affiliations and providing opportunities for mixing between students of different backgrounds and orientations. This allows the university to contribute to comprehensive democratic development and to improve social mobility opportunities, which are prerequisites for social integration.

The report also positions the Lebanese University as:

one of the major institutions that has the responsibility to entrench human values that distance Lebanese society from war, violence, tyranny, sectarian, regional and tribal strife... deepening and spreading the values of equality, human rights, public interest, democracy, freedom, justice, inclusivity and peace (El-Amine et al. 1999, 141-143).

Yet more than a decade of public debate about the future of the Lebanese University is not reflected in the academic literature nor, ultimately, in government policy. Munir Bashshur (2003) discusses

the proliferation of private universities in the post-civil war period alongside the continued branching and politicisation of appointments in the public university, pointing to the 'deepening cleavage' in education and rising influence of political-sectarian groups. Capturing the intensifying conflicts within the Lebanese University over issues of governance, autonomy, control and identity, he quotes a Minister of Education in 2001, seemingly exasperated by the logic of sectarian shares entrenched by the Ta'if Agreement that sought to bring an end to war:

The religious identity of key persons in top administration has been set in the Taif agreement – positions such as that of governor of Central Bank, President of State University, President of Reconstruction and Development Board...such matters are not in my hands... deans of faculties are to be half and half between Christians and Moslems...Let us hope we can select these from among those qualified in both groups (Bashshur 2003, 176).

In a wider discussion of the production of sectarianism in post-war Lebanon through institutional, clientelist and discursive practices, Bassel Salloukh et al (2015) examine a number of different institutional case studies, from the Lebanese Army to the General Union of Workers. As well as documenting the struggles waged by opponents of the sectarian system and the Syrian-Lebanese security apparatus through the 1990s and early 2000s, they demonstrate how public and civic institutions were transformed during this period, leading to the progressive loss of a 'democratic, trans-sectarian citizenship' (Ibid, 4). While the Lebanese University (LU) is not examined in any depth, the authors make the observation that:

Instead of serving as a vehicle for the molding of a polyphonic multi-sectarian nation, higher public education is deployed by the sectarian/political elite to divide society along sectarian lines ...the LU's different branches and schools [are] yet another segment in their complex clientelistic ensemble. Faculty and administrative appointments are often based on sectarian loyalties rather than on merit. Campuses have emerged as sites for sectarian confrontations and divisions rather than as national melting pots for a new postwar generation (Ibid, 49-50).

There is little historical examination of how and why these processes occurred in the Lebanese University, the struggles and contestations that surrounded them, and the past and future significance of the university in the democratic fabric of society. Lamenting the 'scarcity of historical academic studies on the Lebanese University', Adnan El-Amine (2018a, 150) is among the first to narrate its longer history as part of a recent study of public universities across the Arab region. Exploring the politicisation and sectarianisation of the Lebanese University through the civil war and post-civil war periods, El-Amine also sheds light on the social and political movements that built and sustained the university as a democratic public institution. Pointing to a wider amnesia about the

history of the Lebanese University, and the implications of this forgetting for society, El-Amine reflects that key elements that made the Lebanese University public, seared in the memories of those involved in fighting for its publicness, have ‘gone with the wind’ (El-Amine 2018a, 189).

### *3.5.3 Access to higher education for refugees*

One in four people in Lebanon is now a refugee, the highest population density of refugees in the world. Since the eruption of war in neighbouring Syria in 2011, there are roughly 1.5 million refugees in the country, while just under half a million Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). In contrast to previous refugee crises, international funding to absorb Syrian refugee children into Lebanon’s neglected public school system is now a significant component of the humanitarian aid strategy (Buckner and Nofal 2019). However, Palestinian refugees are formally denied access to public schooling, while high numbers of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon remain out of school and only 6 per cent of Syrian and Palestinian refugees attend university (Fincham 2020). The exclusion of refugees from education, healthcare and other basic rights, including the right to work, has persisted for over seventy years (Shuayb 2014; Hanafi, Chaaban, and Seyfert 2012), yet the ‘education in emergencies’ agenda has a tendency to exceptionalise education for refugees, framing it as a humanitarian intervention rather than rooting it in a deeper systemic analysis of education inequalities (Brun and Shuayb 2020). At the Lebanese University Palestinian students are classified as ‘foreigners’ but have also been exempt from paying foreign student fees since 2005, in contrast to their wider exclusion from the public education system (Chaaban et al. 2015, 70).

Having been ignored for much of the post-civil war era, there is rising international attention to the role of Lebanon’s universities in expanding access to higher education for refugees (El-Ghali, Berjaoui, and McKnight 2017; Watenpaugh et al. 2014). Catalysed by the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011, this largely internationally-driven agenda is focused on scaling up the provision of university scholarships in the region, including in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq (El-Ghali, Berjaoui, and McKnight 2017; El-Ghali, Ali, and Ghalayini 2017; Fincham 2020). Various framed by human capability, human capital and security approaches, it tends to overlook the institutional challenges facing universities in the region, including the fact that three out of the four major host countries for Syrian refugee students (Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq) are directly affected by conflict. Issues of sectarianism and intrusions on university autonomy are not yet part of the emerging ‘higher education in emergencies’ agenda, which is overwhelmingly focused on questions of access. Research into the experiences of refugee students further emphasises the difficulties associated

with studying in highly politicised university environments, with little attention to wider socioeconomic and political constraints (Watenpaugh et al. 2014; Fincham 2020).

### *3.5.4 The public dimensions of higher education in Lebanon*

Thirty years after the end of the civil war, some 35 per cent of Lebanese live in poverty, with a projected increase to 45 per cent (World Bank 2021). Immediate factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic aside, the growing crisis in Lebanese capitalism is linked to ‘skyrocketing public debt, a looming currency crisis, failing public services’ (Baumann 2019). The question ‘*wayn al-dawla?*’ (where is the state?), evokes a widespread perception that the state has abandoned responsibility for the collective welfare of its citizens, while much of the academic literature on post-civil war Lebanon fails to define or locate its various purposes and institutions (Mouawad and Baumann 2017).<sup>6</sup> In 2018, international donors pledged US\$11 billion in loans and grants to Lebanon on the condition of reducing the public deficit and other reforms, leading to what then Prime Minister Sa’ad Hariri described as the ‘the most austere budget in the history of Lebanon’ (Arab News 2019). Among the deep cuts to already flagging public services, this included a proposal to reduce the Lebanese University budget by US\$27 million dollars, resulting in months of strikes at the public university and across the public sector in the spring and summer of 2019 (Al-Fanar 2019). Some weeks later, in October 2019, popular protests erupted across Lebanon, unleashing what many described as a revolution in response to thirty years of endemic corruption by a self-serving sectarian political class, intensifying economic crisis, and the failing public provision of utilities, education, healthcare and social welfare.

The history of higher education in Lebanon is marked by a longstanding ambivalence of the state in the provision of education and its particularly lacklustre support for the country’s only public university. Since the colonial encounter during the late Ottoman period and French Mandate, communal rights in education have been elevated over the development of a cohesive national education system, leading to a systemic fracturing of education that is legally enshrined by Article 10 of the national constitution. The private provision of education has remained dominant at all levels of education, intersecting with massive structural inequalities in society and divergent constructions of belonging and unbelonging to a Lebanese ‘nation’. While Lebanon’s fragmented education sector is born of colonial legacy, and compounded by civil war, it is also the product of decades of wilful

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<sup>6</sup> This question is posed in the opening chapter of Hannes Baumann’s account of ‘Lebanon’s neoliberal reconstruction’ (2016, 1) and a subsequent article, ‘Wayn al-Dawla: Locating the Lebanese State in Social Theory’ (Mouawad and Baumann 2017).

economic neglect. Lebanon's *laissez-faire* economy before the civil war and neoliberal economy after the war are both implicated in Lebanon's chronically weak public education system, disadvantaging the poorest in society and inhibiting processes of democratic integration. The neglected public dimensions of higher education, along with the permeation of both public and private universities by political-sectarian interests, has bled into the absence of shared spaces for young people and their continued separation along political-sectarian and socio-economic lines.

In their analysis of the politics of sectarianism in post-civil war Lebanon, Bassel Salloukh et al. (2015, 175) conclude that dislodging the hegemony of the sectarian system not only entails far-reaching systemic and structural reforms, it also fundamentally requires 'creating public space' (Ibid, 180). Drawing on what James Tully (2007) calls the 'practical arts of democratic integration', they specifically highlight the role of universities and other education institutions as a means of nurturing 'inter-sectarian forms of democratic recognition, integration and citizenship' (Ibid, 180). While universities are by no means the only possible sphere for cross-sectarian, cross-national and cross-class interaction, they are by their very nature a space for gathering or dividing future generations, and of producing and reproducing discourse, culture and knowledge.

Despite the prominent role of the Lebanese University in the major social and political transformations in Lebanon over the last half-century, there is very little literature on its history (El-Amine 2018a). This lack of research on the Lebanese University and its public dimensions has not only resulted in a widespread amnesia about its history, but also contributes to stifling alternative narratives of 'publicness' in higher education. As the Lebanese University is itself part of shifting political hegemonies, a closer examination of its trajectories over the past sixty years reveals it to be a highly significant crucible for exploring the university as a public sphere and why it matters.

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the higher education context in Lebanon, including its historical, political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. Responding to the empirical and theoretical gaps and questions arising from this discussion of the literature on higher education and conflict at local, regional and global levels, the next chapter outlines a research methodology for exploring the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere.

## Chapter 4:

# A methodology for exploring the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is little consensus on what makes a university public (Holmwood 2017; Marginson 2018; White 2017). While the declining publicness of universities over recent decades is a strikingly global phenomenon, research still tends to overlook the variable historical, political, economic and social dimensions of this trajectory in different contexts, including in societies affected by conflict (Mamdani 2007; Sall, Lebeau, and Kassimir 2003). Despite recent attention to scaling up the provision of scholarships to refugees in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011, there is still little research or policy interest in the role of higher education systems or institutions in processes of post-conflict recovery (Milton 2017; Millican 2018). Nor is there a discernible socio-political framing of higher education in contexts of conflict beyond the knowledge economy paradigm and growing agendas for securitisation through education (Naidoo 2011; Novelli 2017). This research therefore requires a methodology for re-framing the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. In this chapter I outline my theoretical approach to undertaking this research, reflecting on the epistemological, ethical and practical reasons behind the decisions taken; the strengths and limitations of the research methods adopted; and the process of developing a framework for analysing the data and expanding on its theoretical implications.

### 4.1 Theoretical framework

It is often said that doctoral theses shapeshift along the way and the reason of course is the data. Having started this research with an interest in the role of higher education in societies affected by conflict, by the time I finished fieldwork in early 2019 the big questions already bubbling up through the data primarily related to meanings of ‘publicness’: What makes a university public? Is a university still public if it has been divided by war? Why does external political interference diminish the publicness of a university? How can the public dimensions of a university be recovered in the aftermath of protracted conflict? In an ongoing dialogue with such questions arising from the data, the lack of consensus in the academic literature about what constitutes the publicness of universities propelled me to political theories of the public sphere. Unlike economic definitions of ‘public goods’ or more nebulous conceptions of ‘*the public good*’ (Marginson 2018), public sphere theory offers a framework for thinking about what makes a university ‘public’ and how to measure its

‘publicness’ in the context of ever-changing relations between higher education, the market and the state.

#### *4.1.1 Re-framing the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere*

Rarely examined through the prism of political theory, the public dimensions of higher education tend to be defined in economic terms or are only vaguely referenced (White 2017). At the same time, political theories of the public sphere rarely consider the significance of universities (Holmwood 2017). With a diminishing democratic perspective on higher education, the role of universities in societies affected by conflict has been ignored for much of the last four decades, despite education being more broadly recognised as a significant factor in both reinforcing and potentially redressing the causes of conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2010). Although universities are not considered to the same extent as schools in processes of post-conflict recovery (Milton 2017), there has been increasing attention to their wider developmental significance as places of knowledge production, expertise and higher level training (McCowan 2019). Outside of the international development arena, which remains largely constrained within a neoliberal ‘knowledge economy’ framing of higher education (Selenica 2018), there is also a gradual reassertion of the democratic dimensions of universities.

Recent work on the public dimensions of universities has primarily engaged with a liberal conception of the public sphere, emphasising the role of the university in contributing to public debate and opinion formation. For example, Morgan White’s (2017) *Towards a Political Theory of the University* contends that solely defining the university in relation to economic and instrumental purposes is eroding its democratic capabilities in Habermasian terms, while Simon Marginson (2018), John Holmwood (2017), Brian Pusser (2012) and others variously adopt or interrogate the liberal emphasis of classical public sphere theory within the context of neoliberal, European-American higher education systems. While Habermas’s original theorisation provides a useful starting point for thinking about the publicness of universities, it also overlooks the egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques of public sphere theory that challenge its liberal, Westphalian and Eurocentric orientations. In this thesis I take up the critiques of classical public sphere theory, arguing that they bring many of the major challenges facing universities in the twenty-first century, including in societies affected by conflict, into sharper conceptual focus.

Drawing together the political critiques of classical public sphere theory, supported by spatial and postcolonial perspectives, key theorists for this study include Nancy Fraser (Fraser 1990; 2007;

2014), Chantal Mouffe (2005a), Bonnie Honig (2017), Doreen Massey (2005) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012) among others. In Fraser's (1990) seminal critique of Habermas's (1989) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, her theorisation of counter-publics deconstructs the hegemonic, masculinist and Eurocentric precepts embedded in the notion of a universal public sphere, while she later expands on the legitimacy and efficacy of public spheres within a post-Westphalian frame (Fraser 2007). Recognising the inherently conflictual interplay of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces in plural democracies, Mouffe (2005) further argues that agonistic conflict is the 'ineradicable' basis of democracy, while Honig (2017) also situates her theorisation of 'public things' within an agonistic framework, arguing that public institutions and infrastructure are a vital material and discursive focus in the realisation of democracy.

In order to address a more spatial theorisation of publicness, which is often lost in political theory, Doreen Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of space as the product of 'local' and 'global' interrelations is highly relevant for universities, given their local situatedness within an increasingly marketised global terrain. This local-global lens is further considered from postcolonial perspectives on the unequal structures of higher education across the Global North and Global South and the continuing coloniality of knowledge production (Hanafi 2011; Mamdani 2007; Santos 2015). By asking 'Is today's Beast the same as yesterday's?' Achille Mbembe (2016, 32) draws attention to the global inequalities in higher education arising from neoliberal policies of marketisation, privatisation and competition alongside state-centric and institutionally-focused directions for decolonising the university. Susan Robertson (2012, 33) also identifies the need for 'new epistemic paradigms' that go beyond opposing 'inside/endogenous' and 'outside/exogenous' forces.

Recognising this local-global interaction and the imperative to decolonise social and political theory by provincializing its universalist assumptions (Chakrabarty 2000), this research takes up two active arguments for deconstructing and reconstructing the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. The first relates to the challenge of reconstructing Eurocentric public sphere theory through knowledges, experiences and perspectives from the Global South (Shami 2009; Santos 2012). The second relates to the ineradicability of conflict and difference in all plural democracies (Mouffe 2013; Fraser 1990). This theoretical weave of egalitarian and postcolonial perspectives on public spheres both frames my research approach and contributes to my development of a conceptual framework for analysing the research data. By exploring the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere, the empirical findings of this study



directly contribute to the extension of public sphere theory and its relevance to understanding the challenges facing universities in societies affected by conflict.

#### *4.1.2 A critical research frame: epistemological and ontological outlooks*

In adopting public sphere theory as a theoretical framework for this study, I am situating the research within a critical research frame. Critical theory is particularly associated with multiple generations of German Marxist philosophers, including Jürgen Habermas, known as the ‘Frankfurt School’. However, a critical theory can be more broadly understood as a form of social inquiry that does not reduce ‘reality’ to what exists, but rather assumes that there are ‘alternatives capable of overcoming...what exists’ (Santos 1999, 122). Or to paraphrase Karl Marx’s own well known phrase, critical research seeks to change the world as well as to interpret and understand it. This underlying transformative intention has ignited fierce opinions among both advocates and detractors (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011). While some reject the ‘critical’ nature of the critical research paradigm altogether, seeing it as the ultimate transgression of dispassionate scientific objectivity, others question the extent to which it is possible to construct universal critical theory across the diversity of space and time, despite myriad things to be critical about in contexts of social and political oppression (Santos 1999).

At the core of these divergences is an enduring epistemic standoff on the role of social structure and human agency in constituting social realities. Yet over the past thirty years, there have been numerous ‘turns’ in the humanities and social sciences that have brought the elements of structure and agency closer together, including spatial, narrative and postcolonial perspectives adopted in this research (see sections 3.1.1 and 3.3.1). Going ‘beyond conventional analyses of the duality, dualism, or dialectic of structure and agency’, I regard them as co-constitutive and always in process (Jessop 2005, 40), neither reducing social reality to individual subjectivity irrespective of social structures, nor ignoring people’s agency to resist and change those structures (Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson 2019).

## **4.2 The Extended Case Method**

Understanding the relationship between higher education and the public sphere in a society affected by conflict requires a research method that can capture the changing trajectories of universities in relation to shifting political, socioeconomic and cultural environments. This suggests a case study approach, but an extended one, encompassing both historical and contemporary factors and the

interaction of local and global dimensions. Michael Burawoy's (1998) Extended Case Method is discussed in this section, together with my rationale for selecting the Lebanese University as a case study and the methodological challenges of generalising and theorising from the specificities of a single case.

#### *4.2.1 A reflexive model of science*

The Extended Case Method is underpinned by a reflexive model of science, rejecting positivist assumptions that research must be objective, replicable and representative in order to be 'scientific'. Writing at the end of the 1990s, Michael Burawoy's contribution was part of a much wider challenge to positivist views of social science, subverting the notion that it is possible to extract 'truth' from a social situation in order to produce universalizable claims. Instead of striving to exorcise the presence and subjectivities of the researcher to avoid 'contaminating the data', the reflexive model is based on recognising the intersubjectivity between researcher and participant, the inherent situatedness of knowledge, and the interconnectedness of specific social processes with wider social forces. While feminist, postcolonial, spatial and other constructivist theoretical traditions have achieved major strides in unpicking the power relations of research encounters and deconstructing the politics of knowledge production, there is wide variation in their epistemological and ontological outlooks. In the Extended Case Method, the essential scaffolding of reflexive science is the dialogue between theory and data, neither subscribing to a deterministic approach to interpreting social reality, nor relying solely on a subjectivist outlook.

Taking a layered approach to interpreting social situations, reminiscent of the critical realist argument that documenting observable empirical data is not enough to understand social reality, there are four dimensions in the reflexive scientific model: intervention, process, structuration and reconstruction. The first relates to the nature of the research intervention itself. Rather than trying to insulate the researcher from the subject of study, the researcher is inside the research frame from the outset, entailing 'not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge' (Burawoy 1998, 5). The second dimension is 'process', relating to the interpretation of a complex mass of 'situational knowledge' through identifying distinct social processes, while the third, 'structuration', is about connecting these social processes to larger social forces that 'for the most part lie outside the realm of investigation' (Ibid, 15). The last dimension of Burawoy's reflexive model of science is the reconstruction of theory, which replaces positivist notions of 'representativeness' and 'reliability' as the basis for connecting the uniqueness of a particular case to broader processes and structures in the wider world.

While Burawoy applies the Extended Case Method to ethnography, he does not preclude its relevance for other types of research. Indeed he specifically poses the question, 'What does it mean to extend reflexive science to historical research?' (Ibid, 27). This wider applicability of the Extended Case Method is significant for this research, which does not pursue an ethnographic methodology, drawing instead on narrative and historical approaches, as will be discussed below (see section 3.3). From a historical perspective, Burawoy argues, the historian can either stand at the edge of history, deriving universalist assumptions from decontextualized data, or alternatively situate themselves and their research temporally, spatially and structurally, extending ever-outwards in the reconstruction of theory. Whether taking an ethnographic or historical approach, the Extended Case Method applies reflexive science 'in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the "micro" to the "macro", and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory' (Ibid, 5).

#### *4.2.2 Selecting a case study*

What then of the case itself? The selection of a case is suffused with methodological considerations, including the relationship between the researcher and the case study context, the practical and ethical circumstances for data collection, and the epistemological basis for drawing generalisable conclusions from the specificities of a single case. Once I had decided upon the public university in Lebanon as a case study for exploring the relationship between higher education, conflict and the public sphere, the methodological questions attached to this decision have continued to arise in conversation with research participants and will presumably continue to do so: Why Lebanon? Why the Lebanese University? Why you?

#### *Why you?*

To begin with the last question, I am a white British woman, based at a British university. I have spent much of my career working in what is broadly defined as 'international development', a field laden with baggage relating to concepts of modernity and the enduring coloniality of north-south relations. My interest in higher education came from studying and later working at Birzeit University in Palestine in the late-1990s and 2000s, a deeply formative experience for me in thinking about the role of universities in processes of social and political change. Motivated, even exasperated by the narrow ways in which international development agencies have cast the role of higher education

over the years, I have continued to engage with higher education debates and perspectives from the Global South through my involvement in international research partnerships and education support programmes. In Lebanon, this included working in partnership with a number of civil society organisations on issues of education, conflict and social justice, as well as teaching English in Palestinian refugee camps. Having spent over a decade living or working in the Middle East, I can speak and read Arabic, though not fluently, while my positionality as a Western researcher in Lebanon is at once a mixture of attachment and solidarity yet at the same time remaining, unmistakably, an outsider. Problematising the Western gaze and rejecting the objectification of research participants through an intersubjective approach (Mohanty 1988; Said 1978; Santos 1999) is therefore central to my research strategy and is further discussed in relation to the ethics of this research (see section 3.6.3).

### *Why Lebanon?*

The decision to situate this research in Lebanon came about for a number of reasons. Lebanon is a post-conflict context in that thirty years have passed since the end of the civil war, which enveloped the country between 1975 and 1990. However, the country remains fraught with internal and external tensions and exposure to multiple conflicts, including ongoing conflicts in neighbouring Syria and Israel-Palestine, as well as wider geopolitical fault lines in the region. One in four of the population is now a Syrian or Palestinian refugee and questions of citizenship and societal fragmentation persist, including among young people born after the civil war (Larkin 2012; Yassin 2012). Yet despite attention to the role of schools in post-civil war Lebanon, including initiatives around school textbooks and citizenship education (Akar 2007; Frayha 2003; Shuayb 2015), there has been very little focus on the role of universities. The sector also tends to be exceptionalised within the Arab region as being predominantly private and therefore more autonomous from the state (Buckner 2011), often overlooking the intensive contestations over identity, social class and the role of the state in the provision of higher education (Bashshur 2003). Defying the characterisation of a private higher education system, the Lebanese University accounted for two-thirds of the total student population in 2000 and 37 per cent in 2019. It remains not only the largest university in the country, but also one of the biggest public institutions, comparable only to the Lebanese Army in terms of numbers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In 2019 there were over 80,000 students at the Lebanese University and some 8000 faculty and staff (Lebanese University website n.d.).

### *Why the Lebanese University?*

With little published literature about the Lebanese University, my decision to focus on it as a case study was initially instinctive. As the only public university in Lebanon, what was its role in a society where young people are so systemically divided? My prior knowledge of the higher education sector in Lebanon did not extend much beyond the renowned reputation of the American University of Beirut (AUB), which today serves approximately 4% of the total student population (CERD 2019), and the predominance of private universities. When I described my interest in the Lebanese University to others, the response tended to be one of surprise. Initially anxious about such exchanges, I began to realise that these reactions were themselves an insight, reflecting the intensive stratification of higher education and wider fragmentation and demoralisation of public institutions since the end of the civil war (Salloukh et al. 2015). Furthermore, as I became aware, there is a clear generational aspect to the loss of public memory about the history of the Lebanese University and its formidable role in the social and political tumults of the last half century.

#### *4.2.3 On generalisability: a critical, extreme or paradigmatic case?*

Is the Lebanese University representative of all universities in societies affected by conflict? Can it reveal something about the challenges facing universities in such contexts? The answer to the first question is of course no. The answer to the second is emphatically yes. A longstanding criticism of the case study approach relates to issues of representativeness and generalisability. How can a single context, in all its micro detail, say anything about the wider world? The Extended Case Method points to the role of theory ‘in order to extract the general from the unique, and to move from the “micro” to the “macro”’ (Burawoy 1998, 5), while Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) mounts a detailed defence of the in-depth case study by addressing the ‘common misunderstandings’ that relate to theory, reliability and validity in the case study approach. However, as Flyvbjerg points out, it is often difficult to assess whether the case in question is ‘critical’, ‘extreme’ or ‘paradigmatic’ until the researcher is fully immersed in the data. As the only public university in Lebanon, a context in which the state has been multiply contested, the Lebanese University can be considered a paradigmatic case, enabling analysis of the meaning of ‘public’ in a political sense, as well as the shifting historical relations between the state and higher education. Furthermore, the trajectories of the Lebanese University coincide with the ‘rise and fall’ of public universities elsewhere, linked to the declining publicness of universities within a neoliberal paradigm (Holmwood 2017).

### 4.3. The *longue durée*: tracing trajectories of the Lebanese University

While the Extended Case Method extends the timeframe of a case study by ‘linking the present to the past in anticipation of the future’ (Burawoy 1998, 5), the inherently temporal nature of public spheres necessitates a longer historical reach. By setting out to capture the incremental and contradictory processes that have shaped the relationship between the Lebanese University and the public sphere over time, I have drawn on ideas of the *longue durée* (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009), narrative research (Andrews 2007; Plummer 2001) and principles of historical sociology (Abrams 1982; Delanty and Isin 2003; Thomson 2014). This historically inflected approach is prompted for two reasons. The first is the theoretical observation that public spheres are subject to processes of transformation and degeneration (Habermas 1989) and as such are temporal and fleeting (Shami 2009). The second relates to the strong narrative arc that arises from the data itself. Conjuring an epic history communicated through and beyond individual experiences, research participants repeatedly sought to tell the ‘whole story’ of the Lebanese University from the 1950s to the present, albeit with many different narratives contained within it. It soon became clear that if this research was to shed any light on the trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere, it would need to capture this long narrative arc in the data and follow it through, historically and sociologically.

#### 4.3.1 The *longue durée*

As a term coined by Fernand Braudel (1958) for a school of history that sets out to understand the incrementality of historical change over tens, hundreds, even thousands of years, the modest applicability of the ‘*longue durée*’ to the case of the Lebanese University is relative to the fact that case study research is very often bounded by the present. Looking back over a number of years, let alone decades, is unusual for case study research and is an approach more associated with historical inquiry. Yet if I was to cut a shorter slice out of the history or current context of the Lebanese University, which I also considered, the fuller narrative and trajectory of the university as a public sphere would be lost, resulting in a very different kind of study. Braudel’s rejection of ‘event history’ throws the spotlight on the everyday and the ways in which social and political change happens in a gradual, non-linear way. While events such as the eruption of war or revolution might throw key social dynamics and conflicts to the surface, they rarely burst out of nowhere. A *longue durée* approach is therefore attentive to continuity as well as conjuncture, resulting in an almost geological way of thinking about time. This is relevant to tracing discursive as well as structural shifts in the making and unmaking of public spheres over time, highlighting the sediments of past conceptions of publicness alongside new configurations (Newman and Clarke 2009).

Understanding long-term as well as short-term processes of change, from the early development of the Lebanese University in the 1950s to the present day, is intrinsic to identifying the factors and conditions that might have constituted or deconstituted the publicness of the university over time. Historical sociologists have long argued for a less distinct disciplinary divide between history and sociology, on the basis that social relations and structures evolve over time, thus necessitating modes of inquiry that can reveal the processes of change (Abrams 1982). Yet the modes of research analysis have not always been so fluid. While the importance of narrative is recognised in historical inquiry, it was only in the 1990s and 2000s that the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences informed a 'new' historical sociology, seeking to understand 'the interconnectedness of human agency and social structure and the temporality of historical events in processual ways' (Gotham and Staples 1996, 481). C. Wright Mills' (2000) *Sociological Imagination*, first published in 1959, is often referenced as an early recognition that sociological analysis is constructed 'at the intersection of...structure, history and biography' (Hobson, Lawson, and Rosenberg 2010, 2). In much the same way, Braudel also argues that 'if one wants to understand the world, one has to determine the hierarchy of forces, currents, and individual movements, and then put them together to form an overall constellation' (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009, 182).

#### *4.3.2 The narrative turn in historical sociology*

As well as linking questions of agency and structure, the 'narrative turn' has highlighted the voices, opinions and experiences of ordinary people in society, particularly those who are otherwise rarely heard due to factors of gender, race, class and other forms of marginalisation (Wengraf, Chamberlayne, and Bornat 2002). The role of narrative research in capturing counter-hegemonic stories and perspectives, including those that are actively silenced or marginalised in dominant historical narratives, is embedded in the rationale of narrative research (Plummer 2001). Narrative research techniques also help to illuminate the multiplicity of historical narratives, which is particularly important in contexts affected by civil war and is further discussed in the following section (Andrews 2007; Haugbolle 2011).

In both History and Sociology, narrative research methods seek to capture the stories that people tell each other and about themselves as a means of uncovering social patterns and how they link to bigger events and processes of social and political change. For example, Rachel Thomson (2014, 148) identifies 'a moment of heightened historical sensitivity' in Sociology, which she links to a 'revival of C Wright Mills' 1959 manifesto for a sociological imagination that animates the space between

biography and history'. For narrative research is about 'the relationship between the stories people tell about their lives, and the political frameworks which form the contexts for those stories' (Andrews 2007, 2). Moving between structure, history and biography is therefore something of a well-trodden path, despite the persistence of positivist misgivings about the usefulness of narrative research, and the lingering turf wars over objectivist and subjectivist approaches in the social sciences (Fraser 1995; Santos 1999).

A narrative research approach complements more conventional techniques of historical inquiry, such as archive work, by enabling me to make connections between different individual experiences and to understand those experiences in relation to wider processes of social and political change. Particularly valuable for this research, it is also a way of exploring the shifting values, meanings and contentions attached to the 'publicness' of the Lebanese University over time. While the biographical emphasis of narrative research has the potential to 'provide a link between the very specific and particular and the more abstract and the general' (Plummer 2001, 159), this is not to suggest that theory comes out of a story fully-formed. Instead narrative research 'provides a whiff of theory: it provokes, suggests, anticipates – but it does not formulate' (Ibid, 162). In so far as linking the micro to the macro by 'dwelling in theory' is a shared basis for analysis (Burawoy 1998, 5), a narrative research approach is fully compatible with my relational understanding of structure and agency and the incrementality of historical change within a reflexive model of science.

#### *4.3.3 Facts or stories? On memory, nostalgia and bias*

Adopting a narrative historical approach to this extended case study of the Lebanese University, highlights issues of memory, nostalgia and bias. These are thrown into even sharper relief in the context of a prolonged civil war and the ideological differences that continue to shape Lebanese historiography (Haugbolle 2011). From a reflexive science perspective (Burawoy 1998), no perspective can represent a singular 'truth', while the basic integrity of historical and sociological research, particularly in a conflict-affected environment, hinges on capturing a diversity of perspectives. In distinguishing the *Annales* school of history from the pursuit of a linear, event-based narrative, Fernand Braudel (2009, 182) is unequivocal that 'For me, history is the sum of all possible histories...The only mistake, in my view, would be to choose one of these histories to the exclusion of all the others'. Sune Haugbolle (2011, 10), who has written extensively about the politics of memory in post-civil war Lebanon, underlines the particular importance of acknowledging the multiplicity of historical narratives in the Lebanon context:



Memory work should of course be treated critically, as it often serves ideological purposes. Having said that, memory culture is not just a collection of dubious sources. History is not just numbers, dates and facts, but equally the telling of stories, and the blending of events into salient narratives. In Lebanon, there are many different narratives, many different histories of the war. Any attempt to write a history of the war or to forge a national history must start by acknowledging the multiplicity of historical narratives.

In the same way that historical narratives are not reducible to a single truth, the value of nostalgia is in what it reveals about the meanings attached to a particular era rather than purporting to be a factual or transparent record of the past. This is because ‘stories are never told in a vacuum’ (Andrews 2007, 3). As Maurice Halbwachs points out, what people remember often tells us more about the present than it does about the past (Halbwachs cited in Haugbolle 2011, 10). For the purposes of this research, memory and nostalgia are not only significant in terms of relaying individual and collective perceptions and experiences over time but are also indicative of changing social imaginaries about the meaning of ‘public’. Janet Newman and John Clarke (2009) specifically frame the idea of ‘public’ as a social imaginary which is constantly made and remade, while Michael Warner (2002, 28) says that each shift in society leaves a ‘a new sedimentary layer in the meaning of the public’, adding to previous meanings of ‘publicness’ that are retained through memory.

#### *4.3.4 Periodisation of the research*

The periodisation of this study came out contextualising the public dimensions of higher education in Lebanon (see Chapter 3), as well as reflecting on the data itself in dialogue with public sphere theory. Through this iterative process of contextualisation and reflection, the selected timeframe for this study is sixty years, from the expansion of the Lebanese University in 1959 to the end of data collection in early 2019. This sixty year timeframe is sub-divided into three main periods, which I broadly frame as the *making* of the Lebanese University as a public sphere between 1959 and 1975; the *unmaking* of the Lebanese University as a public sphere between 1976 and 1990; and a *contested publicness* between 1991 and 2019. The rationale for each of these periods is briefly outlined below, along with the caveat that such demarcations do not preclude the many continuities and discontinuities of ‘making’ and ‘unmaking’ the university as a public sphere across the three time periods.

The Lebanese University was established in 1951 as a teacher training college but it was not until 1959 that it was expanded by the government to incorporate other academic faculties, setting in motion its stratospheric rise, intellectually, culturally and politically throughout the 1960s and early

1970s. This trajectory was cut dramatically short by the eruption of civil war in 1975 and the division of the Lebanese University in 1976, after which point the university became divided along political-sectarian lines. Following the end of the civil war in 1990, clashing visions for the future of the Lebanese University have both challenged and fallen foul of the sectarianisation and fragmentation of higher education, in the context of intensive deregulation and privatisation of the wider sector. While the first two periods, 1959-1975 and 1976-1990 are of similar length, the post-civil war period from 1991 to 2019 could arguably be subdivided further, for example by differentiating the post-2005 era after the departure of the Syrian army from Lebanon, or the post-2011 rise of anti-sectarian and anti-corruption activism. However, for reasons that will become clear from the data, I have kept it as a single period because the struggles over publicness at the Lebanese University that distinguish the last thirty years are ongoing.

Soon after I finished data collection in early 2019, the political situation in the Lebanese University and wider society rapidly intensified. In May and June of that year a two-month strike against debilitating cuts to public spending engulfed the university and the wider public sector, prompting some to compare it to levels of professor and student unrest not seen at the Lebanese University since before the civil war (The Lebanese Politics Podcast 2019). Just a few months later, in October 2019, the same austerity budget triggered mass popular protests across Lebanon. Tens of thousands of Lebanese poured on to the streets to demand an end to crippling public debt and economic decay, rampant political corruption and failing public services. While highly relevant to this research and within the sixty-year timeframe of 1959-2019, I have not included a detailed analysis of these events in the study. This is partly because they occurred after the end of data collection and I wanted to avoid tacking on a rushed and weakly researched analysis. It is also because these events are still unfolding at the time of writing. At the same time, such is the significance of 2019 in the post-civil war history of Lebanon, it seems vital to acknowledge these events in the contextual chapter (see Chapter 3) and in the discussion of the data in the post-civil war period (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Just as there are continuities and discontinuities in the making and unmaking of publicness across these three major time periods, the research participants also criss-crossed the generations. As will be further explained in relation to my selection of interviewees (see section 4.5.3), a particularly captivating aspect of the data, as well as a significant factor in the history of the Lebanese University itself, is that many of the professors were also students at the university, with careers stretching over the pre-war, civil war and post-war periods. When I interviewed these professors, some of

whom are retired now, they did not stick to a chronological account but constantly jumped backwards and forwards between past and present and future. Sometimes leaps of thirty or even forty years would occur within a single sentence. Thus, while I have imposed a broadly chronologically presentation of the data in order to capture the overall trajectories of the Lebanese University and its public dimensions, the actual telling of this narrative by those involved is strikingly unbound by temporal limitations.

## 4.4 Research aim and questions

The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere through an extended case study of the Lebanese University. By tracing the changing trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere over a period of sixty years, the research seeks to capture what conditions make the university ‘public’ in a plural and stratified society, and to understand the ways in which this ‘publicness’ evolves over time.

### 4.4.1 Research questions

The overall research question of this study is:

- What has contributed to making the Lebanese University ‘public’ and how have the conditions of its ‘publicness’ evolved over time?

The following three sub-questions will guide the case study and contribute to answering the overall question:

- What constituted the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1959 and 1975?
- How did the Lebanese civil war impact on the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1976 and 1990?
- In what ways has the publicness of the Lebanese University evolved since the end of the civil war between 1991 and 2019?

## 4.5 Research methods

In order to answer these research questions, I pursue three principal methods of inquiry. These include conducting narrative interviews with current and former university students, professors and

administrators about their individual experiences at the Lebanese University; conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with former ministers of education and other academics with informed but non-biographical perspectives on the Lebanese University; and exploring national newspaper archives covering the period 1959 to 2019. In total, I conducted 45 interviews and indexed over 400 articles from the newspapers *Al-Nahar*, *Al-Safir*, *the Daily Star* and *Al-Hayat*. In addition, I drew upon supporting source material such as university statistics, legal decrees pertaining to the Lebanese University and existing literature on the Lebanese University. These research methods and the justifications behind them are outlined below.

#### *4.5.1 Timeframe of the fieldwork*

Over the course of sixteen months, between October 2017 and February 2019, I made eight trips to Lebanon, totalling twenty-four weeks of fieldwork. The reason for this episodic approach is that I have two school-age children and it was not possible for the family to move to Beirut due to work commitments and the costs involved. This had advantages and disadvantages for the research. It enabled me to stand back from the data at regular intervals, iteratively developing my thinking in relation to theory and the wider literature, as well as assessing gaps or imbalances in the data as I went along which fed into planning forthcoming trips. I was already relatively familiar with the context due to having worked in Lebanon previously, while my narrative and historical approaches meant that staying in the country long-term was not essential for data collection. A key disadvantage of not being located in Beirut was that new research contacts would often emerge at short notice as many of the people I interviewed put me in touch with friends or colleagues. While I endeavoured to keep up with this rapid snowballing of research contacts, it was not always possible. Facing the long expanse of sixty years, I also had to constantly prioritise between expanding the breadth or depth of the data across the three different time periods. However, this tension proved to be less problematic than I originally feared. By analysing the data thematically, from a clear theoretical point of departure, the chronological breakdown of events was ultimately less significant than the empirical and theoretical findings arising from the study as a whole.

#### *4.5.2 Existing literature and archives on the Lebanese University*

For an institution that has had such a major role in the social and political transformations of Lebanon over the past half century, there is very little literature on the history of the Lebanese University. Most of it is in Arabic and published in Lebanon, so it was only after I had begun my fieldwork that I had access to these publications through academic bookshops and libraries in Beirut,

or through the personal collections of research contacts. Among the most significant publications are Mahdi 'Amil's (1968) essay on the role of the Lebanese University in the production of national culture; Ra'uf Ghusayni's (1974) doctoral thesis on student activism at Lebanon's four universities between 1951 and 1974; Georges Tohme's (1996) memoir of the Lebanese University during the civil war; a seminal report on the issues facing the Lebanese University in the post-war period and recommendations for its reform (El-Amine et al. 1996); Emil Shaheen's (2014) historical account of the Lebanese University as the product of student and professor struggles with the state; and Adnan El-Amine's (2018a) research on the history of the Lebanese University, which is part of a wider study of ten public universities across the Arab region (El-Amine 2018b).

If the literature on the Lebanese University is scarce, the accessibility of university archives is even scarcer. In his recent historical account of the Lebanese University, Adnan El-Amine (2018a), who is a former student and professor of Education at the Lebanese University and member of the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES), confirms the apparent absence of a central Lebanese University archive. As he reflects, it is possible that documents were lost during the civil war, or alternatively were never kept, or perhaps they are dispersed across the institution and as yet remain inaccessible:

The issue is that there is no written history of the Lebanese University. And the University itself has no archive, or central Library. Perhaps there are files that were destroyed during the 1975-1990 war in Lebanon, but we have never heard that the whole university archive was destroyed, and we did not find a specific study chronicling the university and the developments that took place within it. Things happened in a way where the authorities that ran the university, in one way or another, from era to era, denounced the previous era or ignored it as if it were a wrong that needed to be surpassed...Later, the long war fractured the sense of continuity, leading to the fragmentation of [institutional] identity and its diminution towards the branches (El-Amine 2018a, 150).

Other archives include the Ministry of Education's Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD), which publishes basic education statistics on an annual basis, including the number of students and faculty at the Lebanese University disaggregated by region, gender and citizenship, going back to the early 1960s (cited in chapters 3 and 5). As far as I could ascertain, only two years of statistics were missing during the civil war years. The Lebanese University's Faculty of Law has produced an online database of state legislation, which includes downloadable texts of all legal decisions, including those relating to the Lebanese University (cited in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). The Jafet Library Archives at the American University of Beirut has collections of papers and documents that relate to the history of education in Lebanon, including the private papers of Zahia Kaddoura, a

professor and dean at the Lebanese University between the 1950s and 1980s (cited in Chapter 5). Finally, the Lebanese University journal, *Awraq Jāmi'yya (University Papers)*, which was established by the League of Lebanese University Full-Time Professors in 1992, includes a number of opinion pieces about the challenges facing the Lebanese University following the end of the civil war (cited in Chapter 7).

#### 4.5.3 Selection of interviewees

I conducted a total of 52 interviews with 45 individual respondents,<sup>8</sup> including 36 current and former Lebanese University students, professors, administrators and a former Lebanese University president; 2 former ministers of education; and 7 other academics and professionals working in the field of education in Lebanon (see anonymised list of research participants in the Bibliography). This number was not based on the idea that more interviews is somehow more representative, but rather that in order to answer my research questions, it was necessary to gain a range of perspectives (Ackerly and True 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Each interview was 1-2 hours in length, comprising narrative interview techniques discussed below (see section 4.5.4). The interviews were conducted in either Arabic or English, according to the preference of the interviewee. While I can speak and understand Arabic, I am not fluent, so I relied on translation support to later transcribe the interviews that took place in Arabic into a written English translation. On five occasions, a translator was also present in the interview.

Having begun the research with no connections to anyone in the Lebanese University, I relied upon existing literature and online sources to identify potential research participants, along with the subsequent snowballing of further contacts (Noy 2008). There is much literature concerning the difficulties of 'access' and 'gatekeepers' in social science research and how these relate to researcher-participant relations (Harrington 2003). In highly politicised contexts it may be even more difficult to gain trust, especially where the researcher has an 'outsider' positionality (Mathers and Novelli 2007). While I was braced for such issues at the Lebanese University and Ministry of Education and Higher Education, problems of access and gatekeeping turned out to be less of an issue than expected. This was likely due to my historical approach, which is perhaps less intrusive by nature. In the absence of university archives and the fact that many of my interviewees were no longer studying or working at the Lebanese University due to having graduated or retired, it also

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<sup>8</sup> Out of the 45 respondents, 5 were interviewed two or three times on the basis that they took a particular interest in the research and were willing to narrate their experiences in greater detail.

minimised the need to conduct the research on university premises. Some respondents seemed particularly pleased that I was interested in the history of the Lebanese University which is under-researched and partially forgotten. A number of the respondents were actively supportive, offering me valuable advice and guidance for the fieldwork. I am extremely grateful for their intellectual generosity and for sharing their own personal histories with me.

The Lebanese University is dispersed across the country in an ongoing process known as 'branching', which is itself a legacy of the civil war as well as relating to policies of decentralisation. I made a decision to focus this research on the first, second and third 'branches' of the Lebanese University, including Hadath campus located to the south of Beirut, Pierre Gemayel-Fanar campus to the east of Beirut and Kobbah campus in Tripoli in northern Lebanon. As well as incorporating diverse perspectives inside and outside of Beirut, these sites were primarily selected for their historical significance as the first three branches of the Lebanese University established before and during the civil war. While I could have selected further branches in the southern and eastern regions of Lebanon, including Saidon and Zahle, I chose not to, primarily for reasons of access and feasibility within the timeframe. Responding to the preferences of research participants, most of the interviews were conducted in cafes, offices and homes of participants in and around Beirut and Tripoli, as well as university campuses and the central administration building of the Lebanese University in Beirut.

My aim was not to build a 'representative' sample but to capture the diverse and competing perspectives of students, professors and administrators at the Lebanese University over time (Ackerly and True 2008). There is a broad balance of respondents across the three different time periods and many of the professors interviewed traverse more than one time period, reflecting the fact that they were also students at the Lebanese University. The majority of current and former students and professors identified as coming from poorer or lower middle class backgrounds, an unprompted self-identification which often emerged in response to the question, 'why did you choose to go to the Lebanese University?' Out of the 45 respondents, 18 were female (40 per cent). In terms of the breakdown across the generations, women are slightly more represented than men in the post-civil war period, which is also reflective of changes within the university. I interviewed 5 Palestinian respondents (11 per cent), which is an over-representation as only 5.1 per cent of the student body in 2015-2016 were classified as non-Lebanese (CERD 2016).<sup>9</sup> I did not interview any

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<sup>9</sup> In 2015-2016, out of a total 72,518 students at the Lebanese University, 68,778 were classified as 'Lebanese' and 3,740 students were classified as 'foreign' (CERD 2016). The 'foreign' students are not disaggregated by nationality but it can be assumed that the large majority are Palestinian or Syrian students.

Syrian students who accounted for 2 per cent of the student body in 2015-2016 (El-Ghali, Berjaoui, and McKnight 2017).

By selecting research participants from the first, second and third branches of the Lebanese University in Beirut and Tripoli, I assume that there is a broadly representative balance of Muslim and Christian respondents though they are not categorised or analysed on this basis. This is based on the view that sectarianism is historically and institutionally constructed (Makdisi 2000), including through academic research, and that reinforcing the sectarian categorisation of people through research is a regressive factor in the perpetuation of sectarian discourses. Furthermore, as many of the research participants were involved in movements to dismantle the sectarian order in Lebanon's fragmented education system, including within the Lebanese University, defining their political positionalities within a sectarian paradigm seems additionally problematic. This is not about camouflaging difference within the university, nor is it about imposing a secular understanding of the public sphere (Butler et al. 2011). On the contrary, through my contextualisation and discussion of the data in the following chapters, the research concludes that the presence or absence of difference – relating to sect, class, nationality, gender and region – is a defining characteristic of the evolving publicness of the Lebanese University. At the same time, the institutionalisation of sectarianism continues to be a highly significant factor in the history and political economy of higher education in Lebanon. It interacts with issues of language and social class to produce massive inequalities in education as well as reinforcing social and political divisions in society. The colonial legacies of sectarianisation in Lebanon's education sector and the ongoing reproduction of the political-sectarian order through higher education, inform the framing, findings and conclusions of this study.

I was aware that the snowballing of research participants could potentially skew the data towards respondents from a similar generational or political background and I had to work harder to identify research contacts from different perspectives (Noy 2008). I was also mindful of my positionality as a Western researcher and that direct questions about personal political affiliation might be warily perceived given the criminalisation of certain Lebanese parties by Western countries, including by the UK government.<sup>10</sup> However, quite a number of respondents spoke about their politics unprompted, or I was already aware of it due to their public prominence. The range of past and present affiliations among respondents that I am aware of include Al-Ahrar, Amal Movement, Ba'ath

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Hizbollah, a major political party in the Lebanese parliament, was banned by the UK government as a 'terrorist organisation' in 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizballah-to-be-banned-alongside-other-terrorist-organisations>.



Party, Future Movement, Harakat al-Wa'iy, Hizbollah, Kataeb (Phalange), Lebanese Forces, Lebanese Communist Party, Socialist Lebanon, Madinaty, Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party. Some of these parties are no longer in existence, some are relatively new, and the range is by no means representative. Indeed, covering the full and complex spectrum of Lebanese politics over the course of sixty years would have been unfeasible. I believe that this does not detract from the overall research aim, which is not focused on the shifting political identities and subjectivities of students and faculty in the Lebanese University, but on the changing nature of the university environment as a public sphere.

#### *4.5.4 Narrative research techniques*

While current and former students, professors and administrators of the Lebanese University narrate their personal stories of being part of the Lebanese University in relation to the trajectories of their own lives, others such as ministers of education or academics and professionals working in the field of education, might have an informed but more distant perspective from outside of the university. In keeping with narrative research techniques across all of the interviews, there is a strong emphasis on conversation rather extraction of information, deliberately enabling the interviewee to take the conversation in directions that I might not have planned or considered. I also came to realise that the less I directed the interview, the more tended to come out of it. Simply framing the conversation in broad terms was often enough to trigger rich accounts of people's experiences over different periods of time.

This open-ended approach is about enabling people to tell their own stories within a minimally structured interview (Andrews 2007; Plummer 2001). At the same time, 'stories are never told in a vacuum, and nor do we as researchers simply tabulate the information which we gather' (Andrews 2007, 3). By highlighting the subjectivities of both researchers and research participants, proponents of the active interview view the production of interview data as a creative and co-constitutive process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Feminist work on the power relations inherent in research encounters also draws attention to the intersubjective nature of interviews and the co-production of knowledge, framing this within a wider epistemic objective of constructing more equal relationships between researchers and research participants (Ackerly and True 2008). Reflecting on the politics of the research encounter is a key tenet of my methodology and is further discussed in relation to the ethics of this research below (see section 3.6).

In addition to interviewing 36 respondents connected with the Lebanese University, I also benefited from talking to 4 other academics, including a former president of the American University of Beirut and professors with a research interest in the field of education in Lebanon. I interviewed 2 former ministers of education and 3 employees at international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of education, including an EU programme attached to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

#### *4.5.5 Newspaper archives*

In contrast to the lack of university archives, the national newspaper archives in Lebanon are an abundant source of data on the history of the Lebanese University. So abundant, in fact, that sifting through sixty years of multiple archives by microfiche would have been very difficult to achieve in the time I had. However, I had a 'lucky break' which I had not anticipated. When I first went to meet Professor Munir Bashshur at the American University of Beirut to talk about my proposed research, he told me that he had something that 'might be of interest', opening up a cupboard of newspaper clippings about the Lebanese University, going back to the branching of the university 1977 and continuing right up to the present day. This archive will henceforth be referred to as the 'Munir Bashshur Newspaper Archive'. Containing close to a thousand newspaper articles, the sheer scale of newspaper coverage is itself indicative of the social and political significance of the Lebanese University across different time periods.

Using an application on my iPhone, I scanned and indexed the articles from the archive which seemed most relevant to my research, listing the date, title, publication and a brief summary for each article in an Excel file. In this way I created an index of around 400 articles. By listing them in chronological order, from 1976 to 2019, I could visually 'see' the accumulation of issues and debates surrounding the Lebanese University across the civil war and post-war periods (see Appendix 3 for list of cited newspaper articles). During the course of writing up, I was able to go back to the original scans and, with the help of additional translation support, extract more detailed citations from key articles.<sup>11</sup>

Covering the years before 1977, I was also aided by Ra'uf Ghusayni's 1974 doctoral thesis on student activism at Lebanon's four universities, which provides a richly detailed record of newspaper

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<sup>11</sup> Over the course of fourteen months of fieldwork, I had translation support from three native Arabic speakers who worked with me in translating extracts from key articles that I had identified. This helped me to work more quickly, as well as ensuring that translations are accurate.

coverage of the Lebanese University between 1951 and 1974. I was able to both cite his thesis directly and locate the original articles if needed, in addition to identifying further articles through trawling the newspaper archives by microfiche at the library of the American University of Beirut. I focused my search for additional articles on the years 1968 to 1976, an intense period in the history of the Lebanese University, as well as covering remaining gaps in the newspaper data.

Newspapers as a historical source are deeply embedded in contemporary power relations, including the nature of the relationship between the press and the political establishment and changing political hegemonies (Franzosi 1987). In this sense, the newspaper data is no more ‘factual’ than the interview data as both types of data reflect and reproduce diverging narratives and discourses. Lebanon’s two main national newspapers, *Al-Nahar* and *Al-Safir*, are regarded as having broadly opposing political perspectives, along with additional coverage in the Beirut-based regional newspapers, *Al-Hayat* and *The Daily Star*. Established in 1933, *Al-Nahar* was associated with the Lebanese political establishment, representing ‘an influential forum of liberal, pro-Western opposition to Nasserism’ in the years before the civil war (Traboulsi 2012, 142). Taking up the slogan ‘the voice of the voiceless’, *Al-Safir* was associated with a left-wing, pan-Arabist stance when it was established in 1974. In the post-civil war years, *Al-Nahar* and *Al-Safir* became seen as right-of-centre and left-of-centre respectively, with differing perspectives on the role of Syria in Lebanon. Regarded as a platform for Arab writers and intellectuals, *Al-Hayat* provides a more regional, liberal outlook, and like *Al-Nahar* was known to oppose the Nasserist influence in Lebanon during the 1950s and 1960s. Its ‘sister’ English language newspaper, *The Daily Star*, also covers Lebanon and the wider Middle East from a similar perspective. Due to financial difficulties, *Al-Safir* closed in 2016 and *Al-Hayat* in 2020, while *The Daily Star* maintains an online presence. In the latter years of this study, I include the reporting of *Al-Fanar*, an online, non-profit news organisation founded in 2013 with a focus on higher education in the Arab region.

## 4.6 Ethics of the research

In this section I discuss the ethics of this research, with particular attention to questions of consent and confidentiality, alongside issues of risk, positionality and the politics of the research encounter.

### 4.6.1 Consent and confidentiality

The proposal for this research was subject to an independent ethical review process at the University of Sussex, which established informed consent, confidentiality and the right of

participants to withdraw from the research as an initial basis for proceeding with the study. Prior to meeting with research participants, I emailed them with a summary outline of the research aims and methods, requesting their consent to be interviewed and clarifying that they could withdraw from the research at any time (see Appendix 4 for the 'Research Information Sheet' and 'Consent Form'). I repeated this information orally at the beginning of each interview, also asking respondents if they consented to an audio recording of the interview. If participants seemed at all wary of the interview being recorded I opted to take handwritten notes instead. In order to protect confidentiality, I uploaded digital recordings on to my computer, which is password protected, deleting the original recordings from the recording device and anonymising file names.

I took the decision to anonymise the interview data for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was aware that current students and professors might be more wary of being identified than graduates or retired professors, whether due to issues of job security, relations with colleagues or political activism. Secondly, the wide range of research participants includes both well-known and lesser-known individuals and I did not want their contributions to be stratified in relation to their perceived expertise or reputation. On the flipside, a major disadvantage of anonymising the data is that many of the people I interviewed have made historic contributions to the development of the Lebanese University and naming them might have contributed to honouring their legacies in this significant yet under-researched part of Lebanese history. I hope that these legacies still shine through the data.

#### *4.6.2 Ethics as process*

While the formal university ethics process is a helpful starting point, it is also generic and insufficient for engaging with the ethical and moral questions that continue to arise throughout the research process (Shaw 2008). These include considerations of dignity, safety and welfare of research participants, as well as the safety and welfare of the researcher. Conducting research in a society affected by conflict heightens all of these as well as adding new ones. There is a growing body of literature on the ethics of peace and conflict research, questioning its potential impacts on respondents both during the research process and after the researcher has left (Brewer 2016; Goodhand 2000; Kovats-Bernat 2002). Much of these deliberations can be broadly described as consequentialist ethics, in that their 'rightness or wrongness...is judged by their consequences rather than their intent' (Edwards and Mauthner 2012, 19). However, intent is equally important, particularly in contexts of conflict or severe social hardship, even if the research does not have directly negative consequences. As David Turton (1996, 96) asserts, 'I cannot see any justification

for conducting research into situations of extreme human suffering if one does not have the alleviation of suffering as an explicit objective of one's research'.

Engaged and critical research approaches tend to take a normative stance on issues of social justice, which has also been critiqued for slipping into 'constituting the very rationale of research' (Hammersley 1999, 18). Whether or not ethical intentions are embedded in the research aims, avoiding wholly extractive research relates to questions of reciprocity and forging authentic relations with research participants (Duncombe and Jessop 2012, 106). While the plans for sharing the outcomes of this research have had to be postponed due to unforeseen circumstances of a global pandemic and unfolding crises in Lebanon over recent months, I remain committed to engaging key research participants and wider audiences in an ongoing dialogue around the research findings, through online discussions, joint publications and further avenues for research on the public dimensions of higher education. As such this research incorporates a consequentialist understanding of ethics in relation to the fundamental tenets of consent, confidentiality, safety and wellbeing of research participants, while its critical, egalitarian and postcolonial perspectives also throw the politics of the research encounter centre stage.

#### *4.6.3 Reflecting on the research encounter*

The Middle East has long been 'characterized by its Orientalizers, past and present, as not only lacking in civility but also in public-ness and public-ity' (Shami 2009, 14). In recent years, Mona Abaza (2011) has likened Western researchers to 'Academic Tourists Sight-Seeing the Arab Spring', continuing to position themselves as 'knowing subjects' while research participants are cast as the 'objects' of their analyses and theories. Lisa Taraki (2016, 189) further reflects on the unequal position of Arab academics as "'native informants" for the army of international researchers, journalists, and scholars who regularly make the rounds of Arab universities and research centers in search of information and analysis of Arab politics and society.' While problems of inequality, objectification and perpetuation of essentialist discourses continue to confound research relations in the Middle East across a range of disciplines, the field of education, conflict and peacebuilding has been particularly unresponsive to longstanding postcolonial critiques of the Western gaze and the coloniality of knowledge (Said 1978; Santos 2016). As a field that is largely driven by international humanitarian and development actors, the tendency to ahistorical analyses evades the inherently political nature of education and international education interventions, as well as implicitly exceptionalising societies and institutions affected by conflict (Murray 2008; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008).

Rigorous reflexivity entails turning the gaze back, both towards me as a Western researcher and also towards the wider role of international actors and local-global relations in my field of study. My rejection of objectification entails an epistemological and ethical approach where 'to know is to recognize the other as subject of knowledge, to progress by bringing the other up from the status of object to that of subject' (Santos 1999, 129). Chandra Mohanty extends her seminal critique of feminist scholarship 'under Western eyes' by calling for a more transnational perspective that goes beyond geographical binaries (Mohanty 1988; 2003). Akin to Boaventura de Sousa Santos's argument for 'there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice' (Santos 2016, viii), Mohanty's focus is on 'the possibilities, indeed on the necessities, of cross-national feminist solidarity' (Mohanty 2003, 509). In the field of higher education, which is riven with local-global pressures in the twenty-first century, a transnational perspective which recognises both common challenges and widening inequalities across the Global North and South is similarly apposite (Choudry and Vally 2020; Mbembe 2016).

## 4.7 Developing a conceptual framework

In his reflexive model of science, Michael Burawoy (1998, 5) regards 'dwelling in' theory as the basis for situating ourselves in the world we study and 'embracing not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge'. This chapter has outlined the methodological foundations for conducting this research, drawing together theories of the public sphere within a critical and reflexive research approach that recognises both material and discursive dimensions of social reality. This informs the methods and ethics of collecting the data and also provides the basis for analysing and interpreting the data, incorporating critical, spatial and postcolonial perspectives for understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere.

### 4.7.1 *Dwelling in theory*

As stated at the outset of this chapter, there is little consensus on what constitutes the public dimensions of universities and even less attention to why the relationship between universities and the public sphere matters in societies affected by conflict. My analysis of the research data therefore needs to be framed within a conceptual framework that enables a deeper understanding of the challenges facing universities in contexts of conflict and post-conflict recovery through the critical lens of public sphere theory. Bringing together existing theories of the public sphere in close dialogue with the themes emerging from the research data, a number of key theoretical propositions arise from this study. These propositions are used to develop a conceptual framework

for analysing and interpreting the data (see Chapter 8) and are also discussed in relation to extending public sphere theory and its relevance for the emerging literature on higher education in societies affected by conflict (see Chapter 9).

#### 4.7.2 *Dwelling in the data*

A narrative research approach is about enabling research participants to tell their stories. Often the way a story is told, from where it starts to where it ends and the interconnections that are made by the teller throughout, can say as much as the details that are contained within the story. Rather than breaking down people's stories into truncated pieces and using the coded fragments to make an academic point, Ken Plummer (2001, 152) talks about 'brooding and reflecting on mounds of data for long periods of time until it "makes sense" and "feels right", and key ideas flow from it.' While the use of data analysis software may be useful for organising and indexing data, it also risks disconnecting and decontextualising its meanings. From a critical realist perspective, coding the data at the surface empirical level is also unlikely to throw much light on the social processes that lie beneath.

Taking up Plummer's more intuitive approach, I grouped interview transcripts and newspaper articles according to key themes arising through the data in dialogue with public sphere theory, shuffling and re-shuffling them until they settled under the four overarching meta themes of 'difference', 'autonomy', 'accountability' and 'domain', which are discussed as conceptual propositions in conclusion to the thesis (see Chapters 8 and 9). This might be described as 'brooding' and 'reflecting' on the data (Ibid), by identifying common themes emerging across the different types of data and engaging with theory to 'triangulate' their biographical, historical and structural meanings (Hobson, Lawson, and Rosenberg 2010, 2). Michael Burawoy's (1998) four dimensions of a reflexive model of science – intervention, process, structuration and reconstruction – also guided this integration and analysis of the data, from empirically piecing together diverse narratives and accounts of the Lebanese University over the *longue durée*, to connecting individual experiences with wider social and political forces and finally reconstructing public sphere theory and its relevance for understanding what constitutes the 'publicness' of universities.

The purpose of this study is not to produce a history of the Lebanese University and it should not be read as one. It is a collection of accounts and reflections based on individual experiences and contemporary newspaper coverage, both of which reflect changing power relations and discourses within and beyond the university. Over the course of sixty years, from 1959 to 2019, my aim is not

to sift fact from perception but to draw all of it together through the theoretical prism of the public sphere with the purpose of understanding the evolving 'publicness' of the Lebanese University over time.

In this chapter I have outlined a methodology for researching the changing trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere, drawing on historical and sociological approaches. The next three chapters present the case study data.



## Chapter 5:

### The Lebanese University and the making of a public sphere (1959-1975)

Reaching beyond the state-led expansion of public education throughout the 1960s, the demand for the democratisation of higher education became a rallying cry of a generation of high school and university students. It signified a broader vision for social, cultural and political change as young people from all over Lebanon, who had never before had access to higher education, were joining the Lebanese University in their thousands. By challenging the link between education and social privilege based on exclusions of class, sect, gender, language and region, the entry into higher education was also connected to widening participation in public life. The recollections of former students and professors at the Lebanese University in this era, along with contemporary newspaper coverage, suggest that the struggle for participation in higher education was linked to a much bigger struggle taking place throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Contesting the barriers relating to class and identity through education, it was a struggle that involved challenging the structures of the Lebanese state and, by extension, who and what constituted the Lebanese public.

#### 5.1 Struggles of participation

In 1959, President Fouad Chehab expanded the Lebanese University beyond its initial role as a teacher training college, to include the faculties of Law, Humanities, Science and Social Sciences (Decree 2883, 1959).<sup>12</sup> As part of a tranche of social reforms designed to advance national development and address social and regional inequalities across the country, the expansion of the Lebanese University ushered in a new era in higher education and laid the foundations for a transformation of social and political relations. The young men and women who joined the Lebanese University as students in the 1960s and early 1970s are now in their sixties and seventies. Looking back across half a century of Lebanese history from the perspective of their lived experience, a common theme arising in the interviews with these former students is the momentous shift in access to higher education and their own role in making it happen. The significance of being part of the Lebanese University in this era is expressed by respondents in broad sociological, even revolutionary terms. As one former student activist from the north of Lebanon explains:

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<sup>12</sup> Decree No. 2883 was issued on 16 December 1959, stipulating that, 'The Lebanese University is an institution that performs the functions of public higher education in its various branches and degrees, and is a centre for high scientific and literary research.'

In the Lebanese society, if it wasn't for the Lebanese University, people would not have gained an education. It made a revolution in higher education (Interview 28, LU student, 1960s-1970s).<sup>13</sup>

Particularly emphasising the role of the Lebanese University in shifting rural-urban dynamics, another former student activist from the south of Lebanon highlights the impact that the expansion of public higher education had for Shi'a communities in the south and east of Lebanon:

The Lebanese University played a huge role in spreading university education. It spread to the villages, especially in the South, the Beqaa' and al-Hermel. We were able to sense that improvement. And these graduates came from poor backgrounds. We were witnessing, basically, the transformation of these villages from no university education to a university education. The Lebanese University spread through these areas and villages, spread widely, bringing not only educational but sociological change (Interview 29, LU student, 1960s).

While poverty and illiteracy levels were particularly high in Shi'a communities, the intersection of class and rural periphery cut across all regions and all sects. As a former student activist and leading intellectual from south Lebanon explains:

It's a fact that the Maronite elite was already large in the 1960s because of the role of the Jesuits [Université Saint-Joseph] and others, but this doesn't mean that the Maronites of 'Akkar or the Maronites of northern Bekaa' were really part of that. So the Lebanese University opened very large sectors of Lebanese society as a whole to higher education, and it changes the social composition of the elites in the country. It changes on a very large scale (Interview 19, LU student, 1960s).

Another respondent from Batroun in the north of Lebanon recalls:

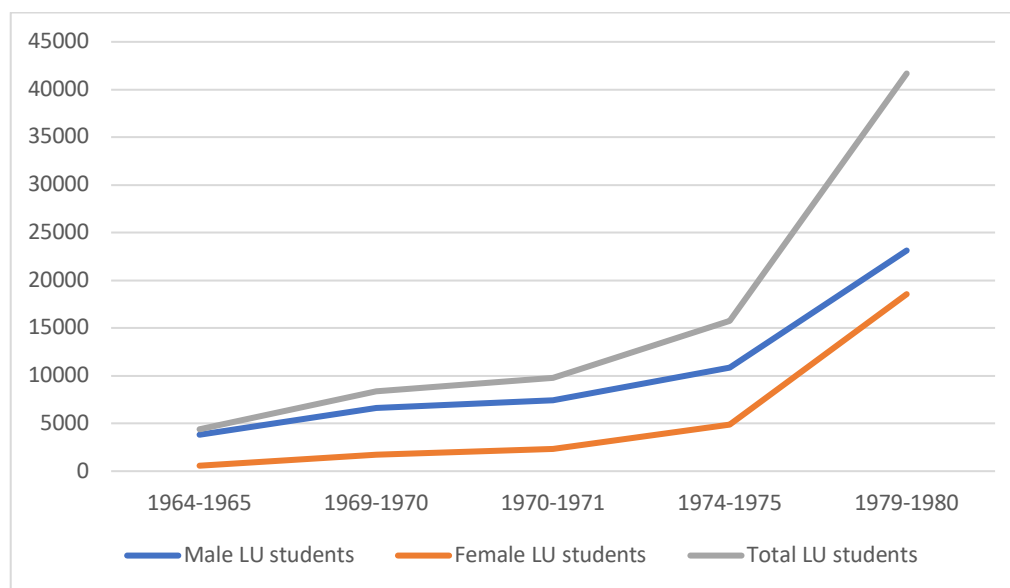
We came from the middle class, we came from the village. If it wasn't for the Lebanese University we wouldn't be able to go to university, my father couldn't cover the expenses of AUB or USJ. I went to Beirut, and I come from a Maronite background, a Christian background which is conservative (Interview 28, LU student, 1960s-1970s).

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<sup>13</sup> For brevity in the text, anonymised interviewees are first identified by interview number and a short description (e.g. LU student, 1960s or LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2000s) as relates to their quote, thereafter by interview number only to link to previous citations. The university branch in which the interviewee was/is located is included after the division of the university in 1976. This does not capture the fact that some interviewees were both students and professors at the Lebanese University across different time periods. Longer descriptive information about each interviewee, including gender, background at the Lebanese University in different time periods, date and place of interview, and language in which the interview was conducted, is included in the Bibliography.

Following President Chehab's expansion of the Lebanese University in 1959, the number of students swelled almost instantly, from just 298 students in 1957-58 to 2316 students in 1961 (Ghusayni 1974, 136). Enrolments increased year on year throughout the 1960s and by the mid-1970s, there were over 15,000 students in the Lebanese University and a third of them were women. By the end of the decade, linked to the circumstances of the early civil war years, this number almost tripled, reaching 41,684 students in 1979, just under half of whom (18,554) were women (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Rising enrolment at the Lebanese University 1964-1980**



Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD).

While breaking down boundaries of sect, class and gender in higher education were key indicators for this new student population, these social markers did not exist in isolation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the inequalities in access to education not only cut across all communities in Lebanon but also lay between them. As a historical consequence of the neglect of public education during the French mandate period, coupled with over a century of foreign Christian missionary schooling going back to the Ottoman era, there were very large education gaps between the different religious communities. Furthermore, these inequalities persisted throughout the first decades of the Lebanese Republic in an economic and policy environment that continued to bolster the private provision of education over public. As the majority of children in public schools were Muslim, it followed that Muslim communities were at the biggest disadvantage, exacerbated by factors of poverty and rural location (Gaspard 2003; Labaki 1988).

Hardening the intersectional inequalities of sect, class, gender and region in education was also the role of language. As one respondent from a rural area in south Lebanon explains, the Lebanese University was the only option available to him, not simply because of the prohibitive fees of private universities, but also because of the language of teaching:

This is what was available for me. I'm French educated, and this is a reason because if you want to go to the American University you must be English educated... At the Saint Joseph University there were also problems of money and language, even though it was a French speaking university. The public schools were French oriented but it doesn't mean that French was very good in the public schools, and it was not good enough to prepare somebody to go to the Jesuit university (Interview 19).

The exclusivity of Lebanon's private schools and universities had determined entry into the professions of law, medicine, politics and the entire state bureaucracy for the best part of a hundred years. As late as 1969, 'the absolute majority of the upper [government] bureaucracy are graduates of the Saint Joseph University and particularly its law school' (Ghusayni 1974, 191-92). Until 1953, Law was only taught in French at the Université Saint Joseph (USJ). While an Arabic law degree was introduced at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts in 1953, its graduates were not permitted to practice Law by the Lebanese Bar Association. The political furore over whether law should be taught in French or Arabic was only resolved when the government intervened to 'annex' USJ's Faculty of Law to the Lebanese University by Presidential Decree. Henceforth Law was taught in both languages, situating the Lebanese University at the heart of a historic shift in the cultural fabric of Lebanese society (Decree No. 18655, 12 February 1958). The implications went far beyond access to higher education; the entry into the professions was viewed as part of the struggle to participate in cultural and political life. As one respondent elaborates:

It is a whole epic story about how the Lebanese University was formed. In the beginning [it was about] how to break the monopoly of the two dominant universities, USJ and AUB, and especially USJ concerning the teaching of law... That had a lot to do with the monopoly that the USJ had on producing cadres for the administration and the liberal professions (Interview 11, professor of history, other university).<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, students actively mobilised for the establishment of Medicine and Engineering faculties at the Lebanese University, while also challenging the continuing marginalisation of public university graduates within the legal profession. During a strike in 1971, for

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<sup>14</sup> Those interviewees who are not current or former students, professors or administrators at the Lebanese University are identified by their current or former role as relates to their knowledge about the Lebanese University (e.g. professor of education, other university, or former minister of education, 2000s).

example, student leaders publicly accused the Lebanese Bar Association of seeking to ‘monopolize the law profession at the expense of other sectors in the society... to prevent them from practicing law’ (*The Daily Star*, 24 March 1971).<sup>15</sup> A former student recalls his personal as well as political motivations for being part of the growing movement for a public school of medicine and faculty of engineering in this period:

When I finished my high school, I wanted to start my studies in Medicine but unfortunately my parents didn't have money to send me to a private medical school...When we were students, from 1967 to 71, we organised manifestations [demonstrations] and strikes to create two faculties, Medicine and Engineering. And I was one of the promoters of these actions (Interview 39, LU student, 1960s-1970s).

The data suggests that expanding access to higher education was not only about social mobility, but also about participation in public life and having a political voice. This was particularly evident in relation to the Shi'a communities in Lebanon, which were historically the poorest and most marginalised in terms of state structures and political representation. As one respondent explains:

If you have a look on the discussion about the Shi'a rights during the 1940s and 1950s, you see that always the answer to the Shi'a demands was ‘you don't have people prepared enough to take on high responsibilities in the state administration, and that's why you are not represented enough in this administration, that's the reason (Interview 19).

Another section of the population largely excluded from public life, was women. Even women from upper class families faced barriers to accessing higher education and, by extension, were scarcely represented in politics or other professions. At the American University of Beirut (AUB), for example, which became coeducational in 1921, women's presence on campus was still a topic of discussion for the student newspaper in the 1950s (Anderson 2010, 90), while the first female academic dean at AUB was not appointed until 1998 (AUB at 150). At the Lebanese University, Zahia Kaddoura, a prominent advocate of Arab nationalism and women's rights, joined the university as a professor in 1951 and became Lebanon's first female dean in 1971 in the Faculty of Literature and Humanities. While it is significant that the public university was more than twenty-five years ahead of the oldest universities in Lebanon when it came to appointing women in senior academic positions, this is not to suggest that it happened without a struggle. In an interview with Zahia Kaddoura in 1990, she describes the determined efforts of the Lebanese University administration to block her

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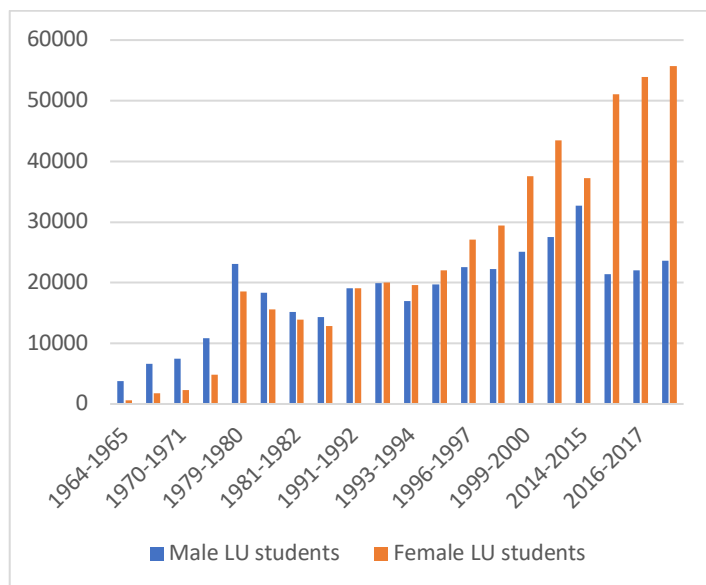
<sup>15</sup> Newspaper articles are cited by publication and date. A longer citation, including the title of the article, is included in Appendix 3.

appointment. However, even in battle with the university administration, she situates her exclusion in relation to her views on Arab nationalism rather than the fact she was female. Prime Minister Saeb Salam eventually stepped in to allow her to be nominated as faculty dean in 1970 (Majala al-Manābir 1990).

While Zahia Kaddoura came from an upper-class background, the growing number of female students at the Lebanese University throughout the 1960s and 1970s was transformative on a much larger scale. The number of female students enrolling in the Lebanese University rose from just 573 in 1964 to 18,554 by 1979 (see Figure 2). As one woman from a Palestinian family who joined the Faculty of Law and Political Science as a student in 1960 recalls:

I kept on for 4 years studying at the university. During that time I got married. I was a bride when I did my 3rd year exams and in my 4th year I had a child... They didn't have higher studies at that time and so I kept on with my family. Until 1969, it was summer of 1969...and I read in the newspapers that they had taken the decision to open higher studies up to PhD level in the Faculty of Law and Political Science. I was so happy indeed... My husband, he was very broad-minded, he told me *mabrūk, mabrūk*, congratulations. Many, many friends of mine told me how did he accept? I never listened to them, and it went (Interview 23, LU student, 1960s).

**Figure 2: Rising female enrolment at the Lebanese University 1964-2018**



Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD)

A number of male and female respondents highlight the mixing of men and women in the Lebanese University environment. In doing so they distinguish the Lebanese University space from other social environments, signalling a more liberal atmosphere in the university in general (Interviews 10, 12 and 28). However, the expansion of women's access to higher education did not automatically lead to a change in gender relations in wider society. As one female respondent from Zahle in east Lebanon, who was a student at the Lebanese University in the late 1960s, dryly recalls:

We were sitting in the cafeteria and one of them [a male student activist] said to me, 'women are free as men' and I told him, 'how are we free?' (Interview 14, LU student, 1960s).

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the presence of difference, both in terms of identity and social class, characterised the wide range of students coming to the Lebanese University from all over Lebanon. With the rise of public education and specifically the expansion of the Lebanese University, the layers of socioeconomic, cultural and political exclusions in society began to come apart. For example, a former student activist in this period specifically reflects on the role of the Lebanese University in transforming the social circumstances of Lebanon's Shi'a population:

In the '60s, the Shi'a were at the bottom of the educational and social ladder and the percentage of illiteracy was high. We did not have higher education opportunities until the Lebanese University... This changed over twenty years and after twenty years we now have a new production... This generation produced a new educated class among the Shi'a and the Lebanese University played a role in its emergence (Interview 40, LU student, 1960s-1970s).

Particularly striking in the interviews with students of this generation is the extent to which they repeatedly connect their own experience with broader processes of social change. These former students are predominantly from social backgrounds and parts of the country that had not previously had access to higher education as a result of multiple social and political exclusions. As they came of age in the 1960s and early 1970s, they found themselves part of a shifting tide in Lebanese society. While consciousness of the enormity of social change underway comes partly with historical hindsight, the contemporary discourse of democratising higher education was also part of a growing movement for social and political change throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. At the forefront of this movement was an escalating conflict with the state over the future development of the Lebanese University. It was a conflict that called into question both the vision for the public university and the character of the Lebanese state itself. As one former student from south Lebanon reflects:

The conflict that happened between students and faculty and the state, in order to really advance and improve the university, it made a real change in Lebanese society and in the state organisation (Interview 12, LU student, 1960s).

Another from Beirut explains:

When we're talking about the public university in Lebanon, it should be taken as a part of the struggle over public space (Interview 10, LU student, 1960s).

## 5.2 Building and contesting the state

The rise of student and faculty activism for the development of the Lebanese University represents one of the most significant social movements in Lebanese history. National newspaper coverage highlights the constancy and frequency of student and faculty demands, strikes and demonstrations over a period of more than twenty years. From the establishment of the Lebanese University in 1951 to the eve of civil war in 1975, core aims of this movement included establishing a public school of medicine and other new faculties; building a university campus; equipping the university with adequate classrooms, laboratories and equipment; improving the working conditions of professors and funding student scholarships; demanding international recognition of degrees; and challenging barriers to employment for graduates. These protests were sustained rather than episodic as successive intakes of students picked up where others had left off over the course of more than two decades (El-Amine 2018a; Ghusayni 1974; Shaheen 2014). At the same time, the data shows the numerical growth and political escalation of the movement, as the student body expanded and demands became increasingly radicalised, from improvements to university infrastructure and working conditions to eventually taking on the entire national education system and mobilising large sections of civil society.

While the movement achieved significant successes, the state's willingness to invest in the Lebanese University was relentlessly fraught with confrontation, including the forceful and sometimes violent quashing of strikes and demonstrations. In 1963, *The Daily Star* (11 December 1963) reported that 'the demands of the students have been the same for ten years. In spite of many similar strikes, the reply of the responsible [parties] has only been indifference'. Little changed over subsequent decades. As one former faculty member explains:



For every single decree or law [to develop the Lebanese University], there were strikes and demonstrations for years and years and years (Interview 12).

Ra'uf Ghusayni's (1974) documentation of student activism at the Lebanese University, based on his detailed survey of national newspaper coverage over 23 years from 1951 to 1974, highlights the consistency of student and faculty demands and the regularity of strikes and demonstrations throughout this period. Even during the presidencies of Fouad Chehab (1958-1964) and his successor Charles Helou (1964-1970), both of whom are characterised as champions of the state and the driving force behind extending public education throughout the 1960s, the government seemed reluctant to adequately resource the public university. In the first place this related to a basic lack of space and facilities to cope with the influx of students to public higher education following the expansion of the university in 1959.

In April 1962, for example, nearly two thousand Lebanese University students went on strike in support of Dr Hassan Musharrafiya, a professor of Science, who had resigned in protest at the poor conditions in the university (*The Daily Star*, 7 April 1962). Holding a press conference, the striking students contended that, 'We are university students, but with no university' (*Al-Nahar*, 10 April 1962). Highlighting the lack of 'classrooms, chairs, a satisfactory library with a good set of reference books and documentary materials, well equipped laboratories, cafeterias, and student housing facilities' (ibid), the students challenged the Ministry of Education, arguing that improving university conditions 'will not cost the state much' (*The Daily Star*, 7 April 1962). A year later in March 1963, the students went on strike again to demand a university campus fit for 'a modern Lebanese University', as well as the establishment of new faculties including Engineering, Medicine, Pharmacy and Commerce. They rallied around the principle of free university education and demanded formal recognition that Lebanese University degrees were equivalent to those of foreign universities in the country (*The Daily Star*, 21 March 1963).

On the surface these demands were confined to improving the infrastructure and conditions of the Lebanese University. However, beneath these demands was a gathering vision for transformative social change in wider society. Covering a wide spectrum of political and ideological differences within the student body, this was never a single, unified vision but encompassed a range of preoccupations, from social and political inequalities to constructions of national identity, to untangling the ties of cultural and economic dependency on the West. As a former student activist and co-founder of a new left-wing party in the early 1970s, recalls:

We thought it was a public university and that it was part of the public education system. And we were somehow trying to promote, I mean our political action even, was trying to promote this sector, because we thought it capable of spreading and developing Lebanese and Arab culture...So it was a university linked to the country, and to the society of the country. This is how we saw it (Interview 19).

By the late 1960s, the Lebanese University student movement was a prominent force on the national political stage and in 1970 formed the National Union of Lebanese University Students. The strike of 1971 was the biggest in the history of the university and continued for two months, with over 12,000 students involved in the demonstrations (*Outlook*, 16 March 1971). By this time the evolution of student demands had become increasingly radical. The state's reluctance to invest in the public university was now explicitly linked to the need to reform the national education system in order to address the social and political ills of society. As reported in *The Daily Star* (23 March 1971):

The executive committee [of the National Union of Lebanese University Students] has clearly shown that it aims at radical changes in all existing political, social, economic and educational structures... 'The insistence on the improvement of education...is to ensure the democratization of education, enabling the low-income class to enjoy its legitimate rights', the [union's] statement added.

Both the student movement and the government were aware of the potential explosiveness of making a link between the education system and wider social and political change, each courting public opinion and invoking the public interest. During the 1971 strike the students accused the government of manipulating the media to turn public opinion against them (*The Daily Star*, 24 March 1971), eventually challenging the Minister of Education to a televised debate. As reported at the time:

After denouncing what it called the 'undemocratic behaviour of the government', the committee challenged the Education Minister to appear in a debate on television and let the public opinion give its judgment. The statement emphasized that the student demands could not be separated from the public interests (*The Daily Star*, 23 March 1971).

The idea of the Lebanese University as a vehicle for social change was also recognised by students at other universities in the country, some of whom joined the demonstrations. For example, students at AUB issued a statement during the 1971 strike calling for solidarity with Lebanese University students and 'protesting the use of [police] violence against our colleagues'. They also framed the continuing neglect of the Lebanese University as a national 'scandal':

Fellow students: We fully support the establishment of a modern Lebanese University that would reflect the bright side of Lebanon. It is a shame that the Lebanese students do not have yet a university that could be called so; and we hold the present and the past regimes responsible for such a scandal (*Outlook*, 12 March 1971).

Despite accusations that the national media was colluding with the government to sow division within the student movement, the newspapers could not ignore the sheer scale of the strike, which at its peak included universities and secondary schools across the country. In an effort to stem the spread of the strike, the government not only took on the students in the streets in confrontations with the police, but also threatened to close down educational institutions and charge headteachers with dismissal if they failed to keep students in school:

Education minister, Dr Najib Abu Haidar was reported Wednesday to have warned that state-run universities and secondary schools on strike would be closed indefinitely or for a limited period should the students continue their boycott of classes... He said that the government would follow 'legal and administrative measures', including the closing down of schools and universities and prosecuting administrators in charge ...the minister also said that directors of government schools who 'fail to carry out their duties' might even be dismissed (*The Daily Star*, 16 March 1971).

In an indication that the strike cut across political divisions, it was rumoured that deputy Amin Gemayel, son of Phalangist leader, Pierre Gemayel, had made a statement in support of the students. While Pierre Gemayel publicly denied the report, saying that the strike was not a political question and 'should remain within its student framework and not exceed it', he also added that he was not responsible for Phalangist students who were taking part in the demonstrations, as 'after all they were students' (*ibid*).

The resonance of the student demands garnered support among trade unions, political parties, and a range of cultural and civil society organisations, who joined the protests, made statements to the press and contributed funds to support students who had been injured in clashes with the Police. This widening solidarity with the student movement across civil society was already evident three years earlier, in 1968, when it was reported:

The escalation of the present strike would take the form of sit-ins in the various labor syndicates and trade unions, peaceful demonstrations and hunger strikes. Meanwhile, the students were understood to be planning to launch fund-raising campaigns in support of those who had been injured during recent student demonstrations ... Similar, but not so bloody demonstrations were reported Friday in Hamra Street after students had attended a lecture at the Arab Cultural Center, entitled 'The Crisis of the Lebanese

University'. The demonstrators were pursued by police from one area to another in the neighbourhood to Hamra before they could be dispersed (*The Daily Star*, 14 April 1968).

In 1971 a joint statement by trade unions and cultural and educational organisations called for the government to concede to student demands and to 'reconsider the whole system of education':

A group of national organizations met Thursday evening [and] declared full support to the student demands...the group consisted of the Lebanese Council for Women, the General Labor Federation, the Farmers Union, the Makassed Alumni Association, the Arab Cultural Club and the Development Studies Society...The group said it considers the question of education essential for the development of Lebanon and vital for the whole nation. It also believes that the present student crisis should be seized as an opportunity to reconsider the whole system of education (*The Daily Star*, 3 April 1971).

Increasingly, the student movement was framed in wider democratic terms. In 1974 it was reported:

Students in all educational institutions in Lebanon will stage a strike Tuesday in protest against what they called 'the government's policy of suppression and intimidation against the student movement'. The strike, the first this year, will be observed by all elementary and secondary schools in Lebanon in addition to the four universities... In a statement distributed Monday, the students stressed the importance of 'continuing the struggle for the realization of a democratic and national system of education' (*The Daily Star*, 10 December 1974).

By the 1970s, the struggle for the Lebanese University was being framed as a democratic struggle against social inequalities and sectarianism in education, also challenging the predominance of Western private education institutions. The perception was of a 'rotten educational system', (*Outlook*, 12 February 1971), rooted in social privilege and colonial legacy. Significantly, the demands of the 1971 strike included the return of 103 students who had been expelled from the American University of Beirut for political activism as well as greater government control over foreign educational institutions. This mix of demands across public and private universities highlights the increasing coordination of the student movement in Lebanon and a rising vision for change across the national education system. It also intensified a deeper conflict over the role and character of the public university and, by extension, diverging constructions of a Lebanese public.

### 5.3 Conflict between the Lebanese University and the state

That the Lebanese University was in conflict with the state throughout the first decades of its existence is well documented in the newspaper coverage of the time. What is more controversial is why this was the case. It is possible to identify four distinct discourses in the recollections of former

students and professors, as well as in contemporary newspaper reports. These discourses relate to class struggle, decolonisation and diverging ideas of statehood and nationhood.

### *5.3.1 A discourse of class struggle*

The fact that there was such slow and halting progress in the development of the public university, despite rocketing enrolment numbers throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, is itself an indication of the unwillingness of successive governments to support the development of the Lebanese University. However, the idea that the state was not only reluctant to support the Lebanese University but actively sought to suppress its growth is echoed in numerous interviews with former students and professors from this period. As one former student activist on the Left explains:

The idea was there that the Lebanese University was imposed on the state. And that in fact the state doesn't want this university, and doesn't want to develop it, to enlarge it, and to open it more to the youth, to the Lebanese youth. So all the time the Left was repeating that the state is not giving enough, enough money, is not putting enough effort to develop the university. On the contrary it's trying to prevent its development (Interview 19).

Taken up particularly by those on the Left, the call for the democratisation of higher education was infused with a Marxist analysis of class struggle, which both informed and galvanised the student movement within and beyond the Lebanese University. Another former student from this era frames the university in these terms:

The Lebanese University is the university of the poor, you see? The social field was very much changing. So those people from poor backgrounds and especially from the countryside, they wanted to have a part of the cake (Interview 10).

In 1968, the Arab Marxist philosopher, Mahdi 'Amil, wrote about the role of the Lebanese University in relation to class struggle, colonial legacy and the interplay of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces within and beyond the university. Pointing to the ways in which the university is irretrievably bound up with social structures in society, he says 'we do not exaggerate if we say that the ruling class is a major enemy of the democratic development of the university, because this development... contradicts the interests of this class' ('Amil 1968, 34).

By the late 1960s, the escalating conflict between the national university and the state was increasingly seen through the prism of class struggle. As one former student describes:

Our struggle, really it was so, so hard in confronting security forces, as well as right-wing parties at the same time, to make the Lebanese University something that is here to stay. Especially when we started asking for the development of this university, the Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, of Engineering, I mean faculties which have a main social task to produce middle classes, engineers, doctors and so on... the ruling class didn't want to see a public university. It wanted, absolutely, to keep the class divide as it was (Interview 10).

From this perspective, a primary reason why the Lebanese state did not support the Lebanese University was because state politicians acted in their own class interests, including those of their own former universities, namely Université Saint Joseph or the American University of Beirut. Whether or not these two elite universities were willing to relinquish their historical influence over government and the professions was a significant point of contention. As another former student reflects:

The foreign universities in the country were not happy with the existence of the Lebanese University and they were trying to keep [it] in the literature and humanities sector, trying to prevent it from having faculties like Medicine or Engineering and so on, applied sciences, because they wanted to monopolise the formation of the technical cadres, the professionals in the country. I don't know if this was really the case, if there was a real effort from the American University or the Saint Joseph University to prevent the Lebanese University from developing, and having new faculties, but this was what the professor movements and the student movements in the Lebanese University thought. They thought there was a kind of *complot*, a conspiracy (Interview 19).

Other respondents are less circumspect about the extent to which the conflict between the Lebanese University and the state posed a threat to the reproduction of existing national elites. In particular, it is argued that the Université Saint Joseph had the most to lose as it effectively controlled the state's supply of French-educated, predominantly Maronite public officials:

I want to point out only one fact. When the Lebanese University was established, nominally in 1951 and effectively in 1959, it was against the will of AUB and of USJ in particular. And in fact it wasn't just a matter of hostility between these two universities and the new born Lebanese University, it was more than that, it was a shift within the Lebanese society (Interview 10).

Others disagree with this analysis and point out that even the old ruling elite had a vested interest in maintaining the existence of the public university given that a rising majority of young people depended upon it across all communities in Lebanon:

The Lebanese University wasn't targeted at all. Even though some people said so, I don't agree with them. Because most of the Lebanese from humble backgrounds joined this

university, so nobody - even the Christians, because the Christian leaders understood this - nobody was trying to close the Lebanese University to support USJ or AUB, this is not really real. Because the poor students in the eastern part are like ten times the [number of] rich students, so nobody would take a decision to stop those poor students or middle class students continuing with their studies, no it wasn't like that (Interview 27, LU student, 1960s-1970s).

Still others have argued that class struggle was an illusion that quickly evaporated with the outbreak of civil war, revealing more essentialist divisions in society. As expressed by one former student in this era who went on to become a prominent intellectual with a Shi'a political party:

The university was viewed from a perspective of class struggle and that was related to the fact that the dominant political vision was that of the Leftists and Marxists. They looked at the university as a struggle of class just like they looked at all conflicts and struggles in Lebanon. Of course, this is before they discovered that this was not right, not accurate. There might be some aspects of the struggle that had this nature, but it was clear later on that the core of the struggle did not revolve around that. I mean that it was not about the poor Christians ready to ally with the poor Muslims against the rich of both parties. No, the poor Muslims were with the rich Muslims fighting against the poor Christians who were with the rich Christians, and the civil war revealed this truth (Interview 40).

### 5.3.2 A discourse of decolonisation

For the best part of a century, foreign universities had dominated the higher education sector in Lebanon and to a large extent the wider region. With the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s, an agenda for Arabizing higher education gained increasing momentum (Anderson 2011; Tibawi 1972). While the Lebanese University was not established with this purpose, the ideas infused the student and faculty movements of this era. The foundation of the Beirut Arab University (BAU) in 1960, which was expressly linked to Gamal Abdel Nasser and the politics of Arab nationalism, also spurred the evolving discourse of decolonising higher education in Lebanon. Yet even BAU was a foreign-controlled institution, effectively functioning as a Lebanese branch of the University of Alexandria in Egypt. In contrast, the concept of '*al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*', 'the national university', implicitly conveyed the meaning of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, whilst also evoking Lebanese nationhood and the public status of the university. A former student activist in this era explains:

It was the public university. In Arabic we say *al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*, the national university. And the others were in fact foreign universities in the country. The Arab University is Egyptian, the Jesuits are the Jesuits, and the Americans are the Americans...The expression *al-jām'a al-waṭanyya* [the national university] was there since the Lebanese University was founded, and there was an implicit opposition of this national university to the foreign universities that were in the country. So it was linked

to the idea of national state, the idea of national culture...we were aware of the fact that when the university is depending on another state overseas, it could be biased somehow (Interview 19).

A major part of this debate related to the language of instruction at the Lebanese University, which triggered fundamentally opposing viewpoints around the 'Arabization' of higher education. Discourses of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism coexisted awkwardly with constructions of a more Western-orientated Lebanese nationalist identity in defining the character of Lebanon's national university. The struggle over whether Arabic or French should be the primary language of teaching was an explosive manifestation of this deep fissure within the university:

[Language was] a big divide...it always depended on the equilibrium of power. And it was a huge battle outside the university. It was the people who constituted the ruling class, [who] wanted to keep French dominant at the Lebanese University. But the other side, new fragmented elites, they started in the mid-1960s to ask for Arabic to be the main language of teaching (Ibid).

### *5.3.3 Diverging discourses of statehood*

As a public university, the Lebanese University was institutionally connected to the Lebanese state. Yet unlike other post-colonial states across the Arab region and beyond, where the expansion of public higher education was often explicitly linked to goals of statebuilding and nationbuilding, discourses of statehood and nationhood at the Lebanese University were much more conflictual. In the first place this turbulence related to fundamental disagreements over the role of the state in the provision of education.

The longstanding consensus that public education should only 'supplement' or 'complement' private education (Bashshur 1997) was severely shaken during the Chehabist reforms of the 1960s, which both expanded the public education system in numerical terms and implicitly rejected the notion of 'complementarity' by introducing new faculties of Law, Humanities, Science and Social Sciences at the Lebanese University (El-Amine 2018a). Opposing views revolved around the extent to which the public university should play a more significant intellectual, cultural and developmental role in society, or if its remit ought to be confined to producing graduates to fill an expanding state bureaucracy. The first president of the Lebanese University, Fouad al-Boustani, who was in position for 17 years from 1953 to 1970, was firmly in the latter camp. As one respondent explains:

So the idea of Fouad Chehab is about the state, about the nation. Boustani's idea is just to train some teachers for schools, employees for *wazā'if* [ministries] (Interview 12).



In an interview with Fouad al-Boustani in *Al-Safir* newspaper in 1991, he explicitly states:

I was keen to introduce everything I could to complement the two old universities (American and Saint-Joseph). My aim was not to compete, and for that reason I did not think of establishing faculties in law or business (cited in Bashshur 1997, 28).

As Adnan El-Amine (2018a, 155) notes, Chehab's expansion of the Lebanese University in 1959 effectively went against the wishes of its then president, Fouad al-Boustani. For this expansion was not only the result of the 'statist' moment in Lebanon but also a driver of it. On coming to power in 1958, following Lebanon's first civil war, President Fouad Chehab commissioned the French research and development agency, IRFED (*Institut de Recherche et de Formation en Vue de Développement Intégral et Harmonisé*) to carry out a nation-wide needs assessment to inform development planning and strategies for reducing poverty and inequality, with a particular focus on education (Abu-Rish 2014; Schayegh 2013; Zbib 2014). It directly resulted in the establishment of the Institute of Social Sciences at the Lebanese University in 1959 in order to carry out the IRFED inquiry and build social research capacity over the longer-term (Interview 4, LU student, 1960s). The IRFED report provided the immediate catalyst for many of the social reforms of this era, while the Institute of Social Sciences continued to play a role in development planning over the longer term. As one respondent explains:

You know in the first half of the '60s, before 1967, there was Abdel Nasser, and the message of Abdel Nasser was really *state*, state planning, all kinds of committees and bodies and ministries... the concept of planning was a very strong concept, and the concept of the state, the role of the state. And here [in Lebanon] the state university became right at the forefront...very much in the vanguard of this kind of activity (Interview 6, professor of education, other university).

A leader of the student union in this era reflects:

We connected the Lebanese situation with the educational situation of the university...we worked for these two things. And we had the inspiration of Fouad Chehab who was an honest man who worked for the state. He was a democratic president who wanted to develop the state and work for the state and the organisations of the state. We were inspired by his developmental work (Interview 28).

The governments of Fouad Chehab and his successor, Charles Helou, briefly abandoned Lebanon's longstanding commitment to *laissez faire* (Gaspard 2003; Traboulsi 2007). The expansion of the Lebanese University in this period, despite inadequate resourcing and escalating political

confrontations, meant that the public university became a key domain for both building and contesting the Lebanese state. After 1970, the political environment shifted once again and the new president of the Lebanese University, Edmond Naim, found himself at increasing loggerheads with the government. In a press conference in March 1975, shortly before the outbreak of civil war, Edmond Naim confronts the increasing hostility of state politicians towards the public university, the same people responsible for the university's development. As reported in *The Daily Star* (2 March 1975):

Dr. Edmond Naim, president of the state-run Lebanese University... dealt with new aspects of the 'educational conflict' in Lebanon and the reasons behind the 'siege' which he said some people were trying to 'impose' on the Lebanese University... the president criticized the present state of college buildings and said some LL. 200 million was needed to build a new university city and student housing units, [saying] 'this is not up to the university president to decide but the executive authorities'.

A number of respondents directly refer to Edmond Naim as a 'man of the state' or a 'man of democracy' (Interviews 23, 28, 42), citing his defence of the Lebanese University as a public institution despite the evident lack of support from the state itself. Others refer to his active commitment to student participation in the governance of the university, which was passed into law in 1972, enshrining student representation in the Lebanese University with the dual purpose of representing student interests and holding the university administration to account.

#### *5.3.4 Diverging discourses of nationhood*

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the Lebanese 'nation' was a powerful, if conflicted imaginary in the Lebanese University student movement. During the strike of 1971, for example, one student leader framed the government's brutal quashing of student protestors as an assault on 'the very being of Lebanon'. Calling on more than two thousand demonstrators to sing the Lebanese national anthem during a sit-in on Hamra Street, he contrasted 'the officials' Lebanon', which he said represents 'ignorance and nepotism', and '*our* Lebanon which looks forward to new and open horizons based on genuine human objectives.' Students were not only demanding their rights as citizens, they were 'the soldiers of Lebanon and the defenders of its democracy' (*The Daily Star*, 24 March 1971).

Yet the role of the Lebanese University in the production of the 'nation' rested precariously upon divergent constructions of Lebanese nationhood. In particular, the split between Arab and Western orientations that infused Lebanon's major political conflicts until the onset of civil war in 1975, also

permeated the tumult surrounding the rise of the Lebanese University throughout this period. Even the term '*al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*' ('the national university') was intensely loaded. As one former faculty member who was allied with Arab nationalist and Palestinian liberation movements in this era explains:

You don't have one definition for *al-waṭan* [the nation]. The word *waṭanyya* [national], it doesn't mean the same for X and Y and Z....That's why they said they wanted to kill *al-jām'a al-waṭanyya* [the national university]. Because those who are pro-Arabism, those who were against the Maronite upper hand, they used to stress *al-waṭanyya*. We are *al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*, not somebody like Fouad al-Boustani [Lebanese University president between 1953 and 1970] (Interview 23).

This exposes profound disjunctions within the public university over the role of the state in the provision of education and the meaning of Lebanese nationhood. The birth of the Lebanese University in 1951 was originally driven by the state's obligation to expand public secondary education and the subsequent need to train more teachers. It was a limited vision for a national university, but one that set in motion a range of intended and unintended consequences. By bringing together students from all parts of Lebanon, all social backgrounds and all political persuasions, young people were introduced to a uniquely diverse arena that both informed their own evolving identities and, for many, came to define the meaning of the 'national university'. This was the making of a new kind of public arena, which was defined not by class, political orientation or national identity, but by difference.

## 5.4 Encounters with difference

In many of the interviews with former students at the Lebanese University during the 1960s and early 1970s, there is an energy, excitement even, in the way that they talk about the diversity of the student body in this period. The encounters with difference relate to both social diversity and political diversity, while the data suggests that the interaction of conflicting ideas and perspectives is valued over and above the pursuit of consensus or finding things in common.

### 5.4.1 Social and cultural diversity

Looking back at their experiences as students at the Lebanese University, respondents recall how much they valued meeting other young people from different parts of Lebanon, from different geographic, social and religious backgrounds, often for the first time in their lives:

It was a great feeling because I was coming from south Lebanon and it was my first experience of other people, people from other areas (Interview 12).

While these interactions were happening across the Lebanese University in this period, the Faculty of Education played a particularly significant role in drawing together students from different parts of the country. Unlike other faculties that were free but offered no living expenses, the Faculty of Education selected the brightest young people from all over the Lebanon to come to Beirut on fully funded scholarships. As the same respondent explains:

It was called the Higher Institute of Teachers... Then in 1967 it became the Faculty of Education by name...it was the core, the first institution of the Lebanese University... And if you concentrate a little bit on that case, you find out how much that faculty was a micro picture of Lebanon (Ibid).

Widely regarded as the hub of student activism throughout this era, the majority of Lebanese University student leaders came from the Faculty of Education, 'Because they had scholarships, they can eat there, they can study there, they can play there, they can make politics there...It was really magnificent this kind of life (Ibid). Another recalls, 'it was a place for movements. We didn't have so much to do, we were smart and intellectual, and we were there all the time' (Interview 28). By the early 1970s the Faculty of Education was dubbed '*maṣna' al-afkār al-yasāryya'*, 'the factory of leftist ideas' (Interview 27).

Unlike the largely homogenous nature of schools, whether public or private, the Lebanese University brought together different elements of society within a common arena. With the exception of the Lebanese Army, no other institution in Lebanon, educational or otherwise, had ever created such a diverse space on such a large scale:

People were coming to the Faculty of Science from all regions, from all [political] tendencies, and from all religions...People were coming from 'Akkar, from Achrafieh, from west Beirut, because the Faculty of Science was so strong (Interview 42, LU student, 1970s).

This social mix... it was beneficial for everybody, for our thoughts about things, our thinking, our discussion, about arts, about activities... there was every week some kind of activity in the Faculty [of Education], poetry, dancing, and there was politics. A really very active movement of politics (Interview 12).

Among our students [the Faculty of Law and Political Science] we also had rich students as well as poorer students. And students from powerful families...We had many political trends, so there was the exchange of ideas, exchange of minds and so on. This was very important indeed (Interview 23).

It is striking that across the interviews, which include a range of social and political perspectives, the encounter with difference is not primarily described in terms of finding things in common. The value is more often placed on the plurality of ideas, identities and perspectives. Even within the predominantly left-wing political atmosphere of the university in this period, which was dominated by the Lebanese Communist Party and the emergence of 'Arab New Left' parties in the early 1970s (Bardawil 2020), numerous respondents talk about the role of difference in the flourishing of intellectual, political and cultural life at the Lebanese University:

I am from south Lebanon, and there is somebody from the north of Lebanon... and this mix, really it was an occasion to produce new ideas and new political parties (Interview 23).

The atmosphere of diversity was creative. This was a very positive aspect. It was the university of the Lebanese people, not the elites. Many cultural figures came from the Lebanese University. Many poets, novelists, people in the theatre, leftist leaders. This was the impact of the university (Interview 32, LU student, 1960s).

In an interview with one former student, himself a well-known writer in Lebanon, he reflects on the fact that many of Lebanon's foremost poets, novelists and journalists were formerly students of the Lebanese University from this era. Another respondent concurs:

A whole new generation of poets and writers were all products of the Lebanese University, dozens if not more. And a lot of them were products of the Left. I'm sure you'll find very little, very few from outside the Lebanese University (Interview 11).

Not only did a generation of Lebanon's prominent artists and writers come from the Lebanese University, so too did a generation of its politicians. The rejuvenation of political life occurred in two significant ways. Firstly, rapidly increasing student numbers at the Lebanese University contributed to the rise of new and existing political parties (El-Khazen 2000). Secondly, the expansion of access to higher education played a role in the social and political mobilisation of different sections of society, a development that ultimately contributed to major ruptures in the production of political elites.

#### *5.4.2 Political diversity*

Despite the predominance of the Left, the university was also intensely divided at the political level, reflecting wider political trends in society. Respondents of all political persuasions highlight that the

entire political spectrum was represented at the Lebanese University during this era, suggesting both a consciousness and a pride in the diversity of political opinions within the student body. As one former student recalls:

I think at this time, the Lebanese University, it was the centre of the meeting of different political opinions in Lebanon. From extreme left to right. So we believed that the Lebanese University should be the centre of different streams, and that this meeting of streams should contribute to the development of belonging to our Lebanese nation (Interview 39).

In this faculty we had all ideas, and we used to be, as members of the student council, from different political parties. From Arab parties, from the Kataeb, and so many others, there were Communists, there were Syrian nationalists, and the student council gathered all of these (Interview 23).

The large majority of Muslim students were on the Left (Barakat 1977). Arab nationalist and Syrian nationalist ideas were resonant among many students, while Shi'a student politics was predominantly Marxist and Communist (Abisaab and Abisaab 2014), along with widespread support for the Palestinian revolutionary movement after 1967. As well as strengthening existing political parties on both the Left and the Right, the Lebanese University environment also contributed to the rise of new political parties in this era. The emergence of the Arab New Left in the 1960s saw the involvement of Lebanese University graduates and teachers in the creation of new Marxist parties such as Communist Action and Socialist Lebanon (Bardawil 2016). As one respondent explains:

What it [the Lebanese University] meant for the Left, it rejuvenated the Communist Party by introducing a new type of member. Our organisation [Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon] was a very recent one, which started in 1970 and had a very strong student component, and was actually a product, partly a product of those fights for students, student rights (Interview 11).

Christian students at the Lebanese University were also forging a new political path. Most prominently, *Harakat al-Wā'ī* (the Consciousness Movement) was founded by Lebanese University students who rejected right-wing Lebanese nationalist parties that had traditionally dominated Christian politics, while also remaining distinct from Marxist and Arab nationalist trends in the university (El-Khazen 2000). As a former leader of *al-Wā'ī* recalls:

There was division between the students and the university was divided. The Leftists were allied with the [Arab] nationalists and the Nasserites, and the Lebanese Christian parties with *al-tayyār al-Lubnānī* [the Lebanese nationalist trend]. As for us, between all that mix, we didn't stand with one side, we chose a different movement for an independent Lebanon which is free, and the party who is defending the rights of the

university...Some of the students called us 'enlightened right', but we weren't with any political parties, we were independent, with the university (Interview 28).

This egalitarian yet explicitly Lebanese framework of ideas was chiselled directly from the Lebanese University context and the growing demands of the student movement. Where traditional Christian parties had no discourse on questions of social justice and anti-sectarianism, the *Wā'ī* movement produced a new political language, linking the future of the public university to the future of Lebanon. Despite the wider predominance of Marxist politics at the Lebanese University during this era, the *Wā'ī* movement won the presidency of the National Union of Lebanese University Students in the early 1970s, possibly because it drew support from across the political spectrum, but also because of its focus on defending and advancing public higher education for the wider public good. As one of the founders of *al-Wā'ī* reflects:

The other Christian parties did not work [for the university] at all. So we said to ourselves we are for this university, if it wasn't for this university we would not have got an education. So we will defend it. And we are Lebanese above all that. So we connected the Lebanese situation with the educational situation of the university. The *Wā'ī* movement worked for these two things (Interview 28).

Following the Arab defeat in the war with Israel in 1967 and arrival of the Palestinian liberation movement, Lebanon was fast becoming a hub for regional as well as national politics. Interacting with the growing militancy of agrarian and urban labour movements across the country, the burgeoning student movement at all four of Lebanon's universities was right at the forefront. A number of respondents reflect on the transnational interaction of ideas at this time, including the 1968 uprising in Paris, the global rise of a new Left, and the post-1967 Palestinian revolution:

The situation in Lebanon was explosive. The atmosphere in the Lebanese University was leftist, Marxist. An echo of the wider context, in Lebanon and in France, and especially the university in 1968 (Interview 32).

I was active between 1968 and 1970 in what is called *Lubnān al-Ishtirāqī* [Socialist Lebanon], did you hear about it? There was, you know an echo to what happened in France that time after '68, so there were leftist groups that were emerging here in Lebanon (Interview 12).

As you know there was a movement in Europe back at that time, '68 and the student movements. And we used to read all about it. We had the ambitions of the youth towards change (Interview 28).

The era of 1968 in Lebanon was also linked to the rising influence of the Palestinian liberation movement, particularly after Jordan exiled the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) to Beirut in 1970. Another former student recalls:

After 1967 and after 1970, *Aylūl al-Aswad* [Black September], when they [the PLO] came, this had a huge impact as well, about being against the state. Against the state, against the army, against the government, against everything. So, the mix between political ideas and egalitarian ideas, about social justice, or about the university, they were mixed with something about nationalism, about Israel, the Palestinians, and this started to play a role in the division between rightists and leftists as well (Interview 12).

The circulation of ideas was also linked to the physical movement of students and professors at this time. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the highest achieving students in each faculty at the Lebanese University were given a scholarship to study for a PhD abroad. Given the connections between the Lebanese University and the French education system, many of these students travelled to France, producing a cohort of Lebanese University graduates who gained their doctorate in France and returned to teach at the Lebanese University. One former student reflects on the flow of ideas in this period:

The system at that time, they take the first and the second in the class and they give the student a scholarship to study abroad...the majority was in France because the Lebanese University was French culture...My colleague got the scholarship, he went in 1972 directly to Paris, and he told me what he is reading, what are the current trends...I was really fascinated by the work of Bourdieu at that time, he told me about him, because he was working with a professor there who was a sociologist of education. So I was eager at that time to go to France, like other students (Ibid).

The large majority of these students returned to Lebanon, often to teach at the Lebanese University. As another former student who became a professor and eventually a dean at the Lebanese University recalls:

We returned [from France] after 1975, the beginning of the war, because we believed that our destination was the Lebanese University. Why? Because it was due to the university and our scholarships that we were able to continue our studies (Interview 39).

Another respondent reflects:

There was in our time a spirit of revolt... thinking politically, doing something different, it is an impact, it's not the feeling only, it is substance... because in France at that time after '68, there were ideas, new ideas, and shifts in political thought, because students



and faculty came back from France at that time to Lebanon, and [there was] this kind of osmose between France and Beirut and Paris (Interview 12).

The political and intellectual vibrancy of the Lebanese University also exerted a pull for Lebanese academics located elsewhere. One professor at the American University of Beirut recalls that a number of his colleagues, particularly those with leftist political inclinations, left AUB in the late 1960s and early 1970s to teach at the Lebanese University (Interview 6). Other academics returned to Lebanon from France and further afield. As one respondent describes:

You had hundreds of people... who had graduated, especially from France, it was one of the easiest and cheapest ways of getting a PhD, and who came back with the idea of serving their country and education at the Lebanese University. You know, Mahdi [‘Amil]... he had already taught in Algeria before he came here, with the same idea of helping in Algeria, teaching in Arabic... there were many people very enthusiastic about building up the national university (Interview 11).

Expanding student numbers at the Lebanese University interacted with the circulation of new and existing political ideas, simultaneously reflecting and constituting shifting social and political dynamics in wider society. This socio-political transformation of Lebanese society was in motion rather than fixed at any end point and would continue through subsequent periods in different forms. The same respondent reflects on the extent to which the Lebanese University in this period produced a new generation of politicians that eventually rose to power in later years, during and after the civil war of 1975 to 1990:

Now a good part of our ruling class is the product of the militias of the war. The leaders of the war on both sides were products of the Lebanese University. So it rejuvenated or transformed political life if you like. Contrary to theories of the *za’im* [communal leader] et cetera, we are ruled by a younger generation of politicians... all the MPs of Hizbollah are products of the [public] education sector, either university students or secondary school teachers. It’s just one example, you can find the rest elsewhere (Ibid).

#### *5.4.3 The conflict of ideas*

The encounter with difference at the Lebanese University is rarely expressed in terms of reaching consensus or finding a common identity among students. On the contrary, the conflictual nature of political and ideological confrontations within the student body is recalled in an emphatically positive way. Former students and professors look back almost fondly on the political conflicts that took place in the university during the years before the civil war. On the one hand the presence of conflict is cited as an expression of the free exchange of ideas. Paradoxically, and perhaps more

significantly, these conflicts are also remembered as a potent illustration of unity in that they did not break or overwhelm the integrity of the common university space:

We were so happy at that time. Of course we had our clashes and so on, but always in a reasonable and cultured manner (Interview 23).

The conflict between these political parties was really tough sometimes, and sometimes I remember very well there was problems in physical, even *saḍamāt* [clashes] sometimes with the police, because I mean there were many demonstrations in the street against the police. And there was in the university sometimes physical fighting between them.... Yes it happened, it happened, but you have a conflict today or this week and next week everything was going well. So it was really a healthy, for me, healthy and natural that some conflict will evolve... but not like *iṣabāt* [injuries] no, just reaction, spontaneous reaction, defending ideas and positions (Interview 12).

Right up until the eve of civil war in April 1975, the principles of dialogue and debate within the Lebanese University continued to withstand the escalation of political conflict in wider society. Even the violent clashes that had occurred between Phalangist and Syrian Nationalist students in February 1975 were resolved through a university pact mediated by the student union:

Rival Phalangist and *Partie Populaire Syrienne* (PPS) students Monday agreed to refrain from resorting to clashes over their ideological differences, and took part in a 'gentleman's agreement', reached by other student groups... it was finally agreed to 1. Resort to a democratic dialogue at the university in professing the views of any group. 2. Denounce any group which disturbs the peaceful atmosphere and resist it whatever the consequences... Fatayri [President of the National Union of Lebanese University Students] was the first to sign the 'gentleman's agreement' and was followed by Phalangist and PPS representatives who later shook hands and embraced (*The Daily Star*, 18 February 1975).

Immediately following the clashes between students from Phalangist, Syrian Nationalist and other political groups, Phalangist leader, Pierre Gemayel, mounted a public attack on the Lebanese University in which he said that its future graduates would 'only be Lebanon's enemies when they were supposed to be Lebanon's apostles' (*The Daily Star*, 20 February 1975). Responding to Gemayel in a statement to the press, the president of the Lebanese University, Edmond Naim, fiercely defended the public university, arguing:

'It is sufficient that the Lebanese University, with its students and professors, serve as a miniature image of the Lebanese community, on whose campus live Christians, Moslems, Phalangists, Communists, the wealthy and the destitute'... Those students had the opportunity for a dialogue for at least four years... The university was therefore rendering the greatest service to Lebanon (Ibid).

The intensity of political, ideological, social and cultural differences was a defining feature of the Lebanese University throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. The presence of difference at the public university not only contributed to a rejuvenation of political and cultural life through the inclusion of tens of thousands of young people from historically marginalised sections of society, it also created a democratic space that was unmatched in wider society. These interactions were often conflictual rather than harmonious and continue to be valued by participants, even fifty years later, for what they represented in terms of the free exchange of ideas within a shared environment. As one former student recalls, the encounters with difference in the Lebanese University are what made it a space of public debate. He specifically invokes the concept of an '*agora*', referencing the central public spaces of ancient Greece:

In the Lebanese University during the '60s and the first part of the '70s, there was a public debate, permanently, inside the University, and sometimes violent. But the debate was there, and the people were together. It was the same arena, the same *agora* (Interview 19).

## Chapter 6:

# The Lebanese University and the unmaking of a public sphere (1976-1990)

In 1975 Lebanon was plunged into fifteen years of brutal civil war. Characterised by a series of interrelated conflicts between multiple internal and external actors, social relations across different groups were shattered as society was politically and physically wrenched apart. It was impossible to insulate the Lebanese University from the war unfolding in and around it and in 1977 the university was partitioned between east and west Beirut along sectarian lines. Many students became actively involved in the fighting, while the plurality of ideas and identities that had defined the public university in the pre-war era was abruptly replaced by a new militia politics that hardened divisions among students and contributed to the breakdown of university autonomy. At the same time, vying against the forces of division and fragmentation, there were stoic efforts among university faculty and administrators to maintain and even develop the Lebanese University throughout the long years of civil war, in anticipation of its future recovery.

### 6.1 Division of the Lebanese University

Within months of the outbreak of hostilities in April 1975, it became impossible for students located in eastern areas of Beirut to safely reach the Lebanese University situated in the west of the city. By early 1976, plans for opening a second branch of the university were already in motion and when the new academic year started in October of that year, the vast majority of Christian students and professors moved to the new branch. On 30 June 1977, Decree No. 122 was passed by the government, formally dividing the Lebanese University between east and west Beirut. It also allowed for further branching of the public university around the country and henceforth became known as the 'Branching Decree' (Decree No. 122, 30 June 1977).

The practical necessity of opening a second branch of the Lebanese University was clear. To cross the city and militia-run checkpoints ran a high risk of being kidnapped or killed. Yet the ambiguity over whether this split was temporary or permanent, ignited anxieties on all sides. Among those who stayed at the first branch in west Beirut, which became predominantly Muslim in terms of its students, faculty and staff, there was a profound fear that partitioning the Lebanese University paved the way for partitioning Lebanon as a country. This stance both highlighted the significance of the Lebanese University as a national, public institution and the depth of its symbolic representation

as a foundation of national unity. Just days after the outbreak of hostilities on 13 April 1975, the Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Zahia Kaddoura, appealed to university professors to play a role in keeping the university and the nation together:

I am pushing my brothers and sisters, the university professors, the men [sic] of thought and culture in Lebanon... to work in the spirit of unity and nationalism...to close every chasm and heal every wound... so that Lebanon remains a country of pioneering national unity... the model of coexistence between different sects, and a haven of the free world (*Al-Nahar*, 22 April 1975).

Students organised protests against the division of the university, raising banners that captured the public significance of the Lebanese University as a mainstay of national unity. As reported in *Al-Nahar*, these slogans included ‘One national university for one nation’; ‘Lebanon’s soul has split but its mind will not’; ‘We reject the branching of the university and the justifications for fragmentation’; and ‘Unity of the university means unity of Lebanon’ (*Al-Nahar*, 26 May 1977; see Appendix 2, selection of images). While the Lebanese University had long been a focus of controversy since its foundation in 1951, the sudden scrutiny and attachment to its national role in the early years of the civil war is highlighted by Sadr Younes, a key figure in the recently founded professors’ union.<sup>16</sup> Pointing out that other universities in the country were also facing grave challenges, he questions why the Lebanese University was the focus of so much public attention, concluding that ‘it has become the symbol of the unity of Lebanon’. Rejecting the suggestion that the impending division of the public university was evidence of its failure, he emphasises the historic role of the public university in guaranteeing ‘the right to education for all in Lebanese society, regardless of their different backgrounds’ (*Al-Nahar*, 26 April 1977).

Echoing the discourse of class struggle that had infused the student and professor movements in the years before 1975, there were also fears that the partition of the Lebanese University was motivated by the establishment’s desire to weaken and even derail the public university. This view was fuelled by the fact that the Minister of Education in 1977 was Camille Chamoun, former President of the Lebanese Republic, and now head of the Lebanese Front, the coalition of Christian nationalist right-wing forces. It was Chamoun who oversaw the ratification of the division of the Lebanese University by passing Decree 122, as recalled by a former student from Tripoli:

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<sup>16</sup> The League of Lebanese University Full-time Professors was founded in 1975, just months before the outbreak of civil war and as such was almost immediately disbanded. Its role is further discussed in Chapter 7, following the restoration of the union after the end of the war in 1992.

When it was split in Beirut, Camille Chamoun at that time, he was Minister for Education. They created in 1977 two universities, which was the beginning of the decline. At that time they say it is because of the civil war, it's a reason, it's a good reason. But it's the beginning of transforming the Lebanese University from one of the most honourable universities in the Arab world (Interview 42, LU student, 1960s-1970s).

Yet the enormous logistical task that now faced the government, that of opening duplicate branches for all Lebanese University faculties in east Beirut, as well as further branches around the country, was hardly the strategy of a person or government committed to reducing the public provision of higher education. It could, however, be interpreted as a strategy for initiating a 'new' public university, which was the language used by Chamoun's supporters at the time. In 1976, the student wing of al-Ahrar Party, which was headed by Camille Chamoun, staged demonstrations calling for the division of faculties and the establishment of a 'new' Lebanese University (*Al-Safir*, 16 March 1976). Some months later, the student union in Zahle, representing 15,000 mostly Christian students, released a statement declaring that a 'new Lebanese University is necessary...because the *old* university was not qualified or equipped to welcome all people...Because of these failures there has to be something new...[with] a curriculum based on Lebanese culture' (*Al-Nahar*, 14 May 1977).

A month before Decree 122 was passed through Parliament on 20 June 1977, students of *Tulāb al-Jabha al-Lubnānyya* (Students of the Lebanese Front) organised a festival for 'New Lebanese University Week' (*Al-Nahar*, 11 May 1977). It was intended as a show of support for opening the new branch of the public university in east Beirut, conveying the strength of feeling behind the division of the university. At one event, a speaker from the Phalange Party describes the decline of the Lebanese University under the influence of leftist groups, arguing that 'these terrorist groups [have taken] control of the university' and 'transformed it into a place for terrorist knowledge'. His co-speaker, a student representative from al-Ahrar Party, argues that teaching in Arabic language is linked to the politicisation of the university by those on the Left and that there is a need to break its hold over the university. Repeatedly referring to students and professors of the 'old Lebanese University' as '*they*', he reveals a new 'othering' of former colleagues and peers:

They never learned any foreign language and they never did any real exams...they changed it into Arabic and, in the students' name, made it worse and failed those students... we will never forget that they politicised the scholarships and left the university in decline (Ibid).

The rationale for publicly funded higher education is not rejected by the proponents for a 'new' Lebanese University and the language of democratising higher education remains. However,

questions of difference, specifically in relation to diverging political identities and constructions of nationhood, are framed as intolerable. Far from being conceived as a temporary solution, the proponents of the new branch of the Lebanese University were prepared to defend it to the hilt, as indicated by statements such as ‘we’re not ready to give up an inch of it’ (*Al-Nahar*, 14 May 1977), ‘the second university is here to stay’ (*Ibid*), and ‘the gates of hell will not be able to break it down’ (*Al-Nahar*, 11 May 1977). At one event, Fouad al-Boustani, the former president of the Lebanese University between 1953 and 1970, and now a prominent member of the Lebanese Front, is pictured alongside students from the Phalange and al-Ahrar political parties. Citing the importance of teaching in foreign languages (i.e. not in Arabic), Boustani declares that ‘their mission is to found a second branch of the university that is independent and has an independent administration’ (*Al-Nahar*, 13 May 1977).

While academic values of free expression, university independence, global knowledge exchange and scientific innovation are repeatedly invoked, the most vocal proponents of the second branch were explicitly identified with the aims of the Christian militia organisation, the Lebanese Front. Their intention was not to ‘kill’ the public university as some feared, but rather to establish a ‘new’ Lebanese University, within a Lebanese nationalist construction of the ‘nation’ and a more narrowly defined ‘public’. In order to do this decisively and effectively, the division of the Lebanese University had to be permanent. As described by one former student who moved to the second branch in 1976:

Divisions became rooted after the war, became acceptable. What we thought was temporary became permanent...To legitimise that situation, it started first with the decision by the Minister, then later by a decree. So from that moment, to get things back to what they were, you have to cancel the presidential decree, which won't happen. So from this point, the situation will not be reversed at all. The second branches were established to stay. That's what it meant (Interview 33, LU student, second branch, east Beirut, 1970s).

## 6.2 The loss of difference

Many former students and faculty members from this period refer back to the ‘moment’ of division as a watershed in the history of the Lebanese University. Whatever the mix of pragmatic and political intentions behind opening a second branch of the university, the consequences were immediate and comprehensive. Once split, the structures of the public university were bluntly reoriented along political-sectarian lines. One respondent who was active with the Communist Party as a student in the early 1970s and later on became a professor at the second branch reflects:

So the university from this date onwards, it lost everything... From 1976 until now, it is a matter of communitarian divide. So instead of class divide, now it's a communitarian divide. Yeah, sure, when we're talking about communitarian divide, it doesn't exclude the class divide, but what is more visible is the communitarian divide (Interview 44, LU professor, second branch, east Beirut, 2000s-2010s).

The student body of the Lebanese University in Beirut, once characterised by intersections of difference, became almost exclusively Muslim in the first branch and exclusively Christian in the second branch. The only exception to this sudden homogenisation was the scattering of Christian professors and students who stayed in west Beirut due to their political allegiances with Leftist, Arab nationalist and pro-Palestinian parties:

All the Christian students went... except those who were committed to political parties and they didn't dare to come here [east Beirut]. Because here in the Christian area, the Christian militias controlled the whole thing. Now if there was a student who was Communist or Syrian Socialist Party, it would be safer for him to go to west Beirut. But I'm talking about less than 5%. I'm talking about 95% of students joined this area (Interview 33).

Others recall that only a few Leftist Christian professors stayed in west Beirut, while the student body was entirely 'categorised' along sectarian lines:

The most significant impact of the war, in Beirut at least, is that the students were categorised... There were some Christian professors affiliated with the Leftist parties who were not allowed to teach in eastern Beirut because they were against the politics of Kataeb [Phalange Party]. For example, those from the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party stayed and taught at our branch. So we had diversity in the professors but not with the students, there was no diversity (Interview 40, LU professor, first branch, west Beirut, 1980s-2010s).

Among the Christian professors who stayed, they also felt little choice in the matter. As one former professor affiliated with the Communist Party at this time remembers:

Little by little, the first branch got emptied of Christians to the extent that I was the only Christian professor left [in the faculty]. It was not a decision to stay, it was clear... the Left and the Muslims stayed in west Beirut (Interview 32, LU professor, first branch, west Beirut, 1970s-2000s).

A number of respondents recall how the atmosphere of the university radically changed in the first and second branches in Beirut, linking the division of the university to the loss of different ideas. Yet a former professor in the first branch makes clear that the loss of difference did not result in a new-



found harmony or cessation of political conflict. On the contrary, the 'disputes' in the university shifted from being a struggle of ideas to a struggle for dominance and control:

When I came back to the university in 1978 as a professor, this was after the Two Years' War, so the university changed. What do I mean by this? We had *gharbiyya* and *sharqiyya*, the western side and the eastern side. So now we don't talk about so many different ideas, generally speaking. On the contrary, now their disputes are between those who belong to the same trends. Disputes remain. I am insisting on this word because it was not about different ideas, it was more than that... the mentality now, the political mentality, which is ruling...they are trying to rule Lebanon (Interview 23, LU professor, first branch, west Beirut, 1970s-2000s).

In the second branch of the university in east Beirut, the intolerance of difference was similarly felt. Not only were the students and professors all Christian, the political differences between them were also suppressed. As one respondent recalls:

It was one sound, one voice. The variety of opinions disappeared because everyone was accountable to the dominant group (Interview 33).

As a student in the Faculty of Education, who moved from the first to the second branch in east Beirut in 1976, the same respondent describes the dramatic change in atmosphere within the faculty. Once known for its political vibrancy and reputation as a microcosm of the entire country, the Faculty of Education in east Beirut was now characterised by a new culture of homogeneity. This homogeneity was both produced and reinforced by the institutional environment, which fostered a more insular identity among students:

Like physically it wasn't difficult at all...so the faculty was there, and the students came, they started directly there [in September 1976]. But of course there is change in the learning atmosphere, there is change in social interaction... You are introduced into a new culture. Like for the first time, you are getting into a faculty with religious identity. Even though it's a government institution and of course the Minister doesn't say it's for Christian students but *khalas* [that's it], when it's opened it's for Christians...This interaction with all sects and all political parties and so on disappeared. We are talking about uniformity in the faculty, students from the same religion, almost share the same ideas, have the same worries... Everybody felt that he or she is threatened by the Palestinians and their allies in Lebanon, meaning it's a matter of survival. So the students who in '75 never thought of that, when they returned to this new campus, everybody had in mind that their existence is threatened. So a kind of solidarity feeling was created out of this physical institution, which is called Lebanese University second branch (Interview 33).

One of the first political casualties of this new uniformity was the *al-Wā'ī* movement, the predominantly Christian party which had linked the struggle for the public university with wider egalitarian aims in society, dominating the Lebanese University student union since its foundation in 1970. While many of the leaders and supporters from *al-Wā'ī* moved to the second branch in east Beirut following the division of the university, there was no political space for it to continue and it disappeared virtually overnight:

When the war started, it was like you are choosing between black and white, no grey ground. So the *Wā'ī* movement went down. Some of its members joined the fighting... because they felt their existence is threatened so there is no place now for arguments or ideology or whatever, at least we have to survive first then we think of other things... I was in the *Wā'ī* movement, but this movement was the biggest loser after the war. When we went back to the university [in 1976] there is no *Wā'ī*. In 1975 or '73 they controlled the student union, all of them were from the *Wā'ī* movement. You see how much they were strong? So after the war started, the *Wā'ī* movement is out of the picture. This is really a loss, a loss for the freedom of opinion, for the variety of ideologies let's say, or variety of approaches to Lebanon as a country, to its future, its identity...all those things disappeared (Ibid).

In general, there was little contact between former colleagues after the split of the university in 1976. Certainly, face-to-face meetings were largely out of the question, though some did keep in touch through other means of communication. This limited coordination became more prevalent in the Faculty of Science than in the arts and humanities, partly due to the more technical and supposedly less value-laden ways that knowledge is produced in the hard sciences. In an interview with a former director of the Faculty of Science in the second branch, he reflects on the relationship he had with the Faculty of Science in the first branch.

Yes, [we were] in touch, but not really with good relations. Because they considered the Faculty in Hadath [west Beirut] as the mother Faculty, the madame, and here was the maid, they didn't consider we were the same level...But in 1982 we started to prepare both together the new curriculum...it was easier to coordinate in Science. Because of the methodology, scientific reasons (Interview 39, LU professor, second branch, east Beirut, 1980s-2010s).

In some instances, communication across the branches included former colleagues on opposite sides of the political spectrum. In an unusual but poignant example, a former professor connected with the PLO recalls telephoning Fouad al-Boustani, the former president of the Lebanese University and by this time a prominent member of the Lebanese Front. It was, as she points out, before the massive escalation of hostilities and casualties during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the

expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon. It is possible to discern a sense of connection across the political divide, which is drawn from their shared history at the Lebanese University:

I remember something, for you just to imagine the psychology of it, when I was a professor and there were wars here in Lebanon, but before 1982. I was coming from the college back home, and I always used to open the radio. There was always a programme at that time by Fouad al-Boustani, my old president. And he talked about many different subjects, also on TV, he had a programme about Lebanese history. I heard him saying something on the radio and I didn't like it, I didn't like it at all, I was annoyed. So I decided to call Fouad al-Boustani, I called him, I said I want to speak with Mr President, and he said, yes who is speaking with me? I said, I'll tell you my name but I don't think you'll remember me, I was your student once. He replied, who said that I'd forget you, now you are teaching at the faculty, I follow your news and I'm proud of you. I told him, don't flatter me Mr President [laughs] because I'm coming against you! I heard you on the radio and you were upset because people named a small street after Jamal Abdel Nasser. Why were you so annoyed, let people do what they like to do, do you want to be Lebanese more than one hundred per cent? It's too much! Why not let them call the street after Rousseau or whoever they want? I am for freedom. He told me, yes I agree with your idea, and he was really very nice. And we agreed, how could I see him? But it was impossible for me to go to his space, he was living in Furn al-Shubāk [east Beirut]. But I liked talking with him very much. I thought there are people in Lebanon who love Lebanon as well. And this should succeed. You see? And, of course, I never forget the man (Interview 23).

Following the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, the Palestinian refugee population was subject to intensifying hostility and refugee camps in Beirut were besieged throughout the latter half of the 1980s. When one former student during the late 1980s is asked if he remembers whether any of his fellow students were Palestinian, he recalls that there were no Palestinians in his faculty, despite the fact that many of the university buildings in west Beirut were located moments from the Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp:

[Were there Palestinian students in your faculty?]

Not at that time, no... I had no Palestinian colleagues. We had two guys from Sudan, maybe one Syrian, but no, no Palestinians, not in my faculty... strange, yeah. By the way, we are just two steps from Mar Elias Camp. We had no Palestinian colleagues (Interview 36, LU student, first branch, west Beirut, 1980s).

A former professor who was born in Jerusalem to a Lebanese father, also recalls the shift in attitude towards her Palestinian identity. While she reiterates the public university's commitment to higher education for all, including for Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon, she is under no illusion that her appointment as a professor at the first branch was on the basis of her Lebanese citizenship:

I always said I am Palestinian... If they ever asked me about my dialect, why do you speak like this, I told them I was born in Jerusalem, and they would say wow, *meyānik!* After the wars in Lebanon this never happened to me again... According to the rules [of the Lebanese University], they can't be pro or against, they must accept all people. So all Palestinians who wanted to join the university could, I never heard that someone tells him no, there was no problem concerning that. About professorship that's something else. Because if they want to appoint someone they look for the nationality. When I was appointed I was Lebanese (Interview 23).

By the latter years of the war, the university branches in Beirut were increasingly homogenous, not only with regard to religion and politics, but also in relation to the narrowing geographical and class backgrounds of students. As a result of the war, students could only reach the university from the immediate local area, while young people from more well-off backgrounds often left Lebanon to live or study abroad. As a student at the first branch in the late 1980s recalls:

We used to be from Beirut, west Beirut and Dahieh [southern suburb of Beirut], that's all. And we used to be, all of us, poor people, all of us, not even middle class... And the majority are Shi'a, some are Sunni... Shi'a and some Druze (Interview 36).

The loss of difference due to the division of the Lebanese University during the civil war transformed the nature of the public university and by extension what it represented in Lebanese society. By the late 1980s, there is a hollowness in the once powerful slogan '*al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*' ['the national university']. Its meaning had been drained, even while it was still repeated by certain groups within the university. The same respondent recalls what he felt about the idea of a national university at that time:

We used to repeat this. We used to use it as a slogan. But what I felt was it's just a sectarian building, belonging to the sectarian system, in which I cannot find my place in. So no, in fact no, I never felt that [it was a national university]. Not before I get in, not after I studied there... But I kept saying that it's the national university and we have to fight in defending it, yeah (Ibid).

### 6.3 Branching the Lebanese University

Following the division of the Lebanese University in Beirut during the early years of the civil war, the university pursued an active policy of opening up further branches of the university around the country. While the legitimisation for these new branches came from the same 'branching decree' of 1977, which had split the university between east and west Beirut along political-sectarian lines, the rationale underpinning the regional branches was linked to arguments for accessibility and decentralisation. In Tripoli in particular, the demand for a northern branch of the public university

pre-dated the civil war, led by parties on all sides of the political spectrum, and was primarily about challenging the longstanding neglect and impoverishment of north Lebanon and other regional inequalities outside of Beirut. As one former professor at the first branch reflects:

It was a different agenda, regional is a different agenda... And everybody in Tripoli, I mean the leftists, the rightists, the regional leaders, were planning for the campus of Tripoli. So you can understand it that way, but here [in Beirut] it's political (Interview 24, LU professor, first branch, west Beirut, 1990s-2010s).

A former student of the Tripoli branch recalls how his brothers were involved in demonstrations for the Lebanese University when they were still in high school, linked to their involvement with the Communist Party in the early 1970s:

My older brothers, in the 1970s, they took part in the demonstrations that demanded the opening of a branch of the Lebanese University in Tripoli... My two older brothers were very active in the Communist Party at that time... It was 1970 to 1975, there was a very dominant discourse talking about the concentration of all the economy in Beirut, and all the peripheries are left poor and unattended by the government... even basic services were not available for people in Tripoli (Interview 5, LU student, third branch, Tripoli, 1990s).

Just as the rationale for the Tripoli branch was different, so too was its student body, which remained diverse throughout the years of the civil war, including large numbers of Christian and Muslim students. The same former student recalls, 'So, in the north we always had the perception that we are half Muslims and half Christian, which is not the case, but we had this perception' (Ibid). Another former student who studied History at the Tripoli branch during the latter years of the war, describes the university during the late 1980s as a space that continued to enable the encounter with difference, despite periods of heavy fighting involving the growing Islamist movement and powerful presence of the Syrian army:

You felt the weight of politics at the university. History [as a subject] is very political. Some professors were kind, some were ideological. There were Marxists, Libanists [Lebanese nationalists], Islamists *et cetera*... The university in Tripoli was very mixed, the location [in Kobbah] was very good. It was at the east entrance to Tripoli, so the students were not just from Tripoli. This was very important as it gathered people from different regions and backgrounds... It was very divided outside, but the university brought people together... I didn't think about it at the time but looking back I feel this mix was very important... I don't think it was the aim of the university, it was the reality... Tripoli was more mixed during the war than it is now. I didn't feel it was academically the best but more important was on a human level, these kinds of discussions we had. It was something positive, it helped me discover society as it is (Interview 18, LU student, third branch, Tripoli, 1980s).

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, the official rhetoric of the university administration was couched in a language of decentralisation and justifications for increasing access to higher education by 'bringing the university to you'. Following the ratification of Decree 122 in June 1977, the primary task of Boutros Deeb, the university president between 1977 and 1980, was to implement the branching of the public university in Beirut and around the country. His justification for the new branches ranged from enabling easier access to higher education and investing in better university infrastructure, to providing a more protected social and educational environment for students. As the newspaper, *Al-Nahar* (27 October 1977) reported:

The Lebanese University is going to the Beqaa', South and North, which is good news for the students and their parents who have been waiting so long, and which marks a great new milestone in the university's history... there will be libraries constructed in the new branches, which will make it easier for students to read and do research... [Boutros Deeb] didn't forget to mention the economic perspective, the living expenses and transportation, and social reasons like moving students from the environments in which they were born to new bigger cities, which is difficult for them...the new branching has nothing to do with the branching [in Beirut] which was caused by the war. Moving the university to the governorates will be a new milestone.

Lebanon has eight governorates (*muhafizāt*) spread across the five principal regions of Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the North, the South and the Beqaa' valley to the east.<sup>17</sup> However, the branching of the Lebanese University did not stop there. By 1982, 'just five years after the controversial law was passed', there were already 31 branches of the Lebanese University (Bashshur 2003, 171). The ever-increasing number of branches was not only seen as a manifestation of decentralisation but also the creeping political territorialisation of the public university. An article in *Al-Safir* (5 November 1988) explicitly points to the 'guise of federalism' as a pretext for hardening political-sectarian divisions within the public university, coupled with the rise of political patronage:

Around ten years have passed since the decision to branch the university. Today major questions are raised about the fate of the Lebanese University in light of the current fragmenting propositions which take federalism and confederalism as a cover under which those seeking to break down Lebanon and turn it into mini sectarian states lurk... A lot of politicians have seen in this branching an opportunity to appoint their networks, relatives and friends in administrative or educational bodies, which have made the process of reuniting the university a very difficult one.

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<sup>17</sup> Lebanon's eight governorates include 'Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel, Beirut, Beqaa', Mount Lebanon, Nabatieh, North and South. Most of the governorates are divided into smaller districts, which are subdivided into municipalities.

While the rationale for branching the Lebanese University remains couched in the discourse of decentralisation, there is considerable regret and anger concerning the politicisation of the branching process. As one former professor at the first branch reflects:

But if not for the war there should have been new colleges all around Lebanon, there should have been. Maybe if it was done in ordinary and natural circumstances. The law used to be [higher education] for all and maybe it wouldn't have been that harsh. But it took on the colour, the trend, the mask in that part of Lebanon. In ordinary circumstances it wouldn't have been like this, this is the difference. But now it is 'they are there so we have to rule here' (Interview 23).

## 6.4 The breakdown of university autonomy

In 1977, the same 'branching decree', Decree No. 122, also transferred decision-making power from the Lebanese University Council to the Minister of Education and the government's Council of Ministers (the cabinet) in coordination with the university president.<sup>18</sup> No longer able to meet due to the war, the University Council, along with other democratically elected bodies such as the National Union of Lebanese University Students and the League of Lebanese University Professors, rapidly dissolved. Their dissolution contributed to a vacuum of governance and accountability in the university that ushered in an era of semi-lawlessness. Speaking of the early years of the war, a professor at the second branch recalls the sense of collapsing institutional authority:

The University Council was dissolved ...So there was no university council, no authority, no government at all, only the bombardment (Interview 39).

Where once the rules of the university had created an autonomous space for the interaction of different ideas, the sudden loss of autonomy and accountability meant that this space became controlled by outside political forces. These external influences included politicians in government, warring militias on the ground, and increasing interference by Syrian security forces during the 1980s. Each branch of the Lebanese University quickly fell under the control of dominant political groups in that area, a situation that was heightened by the fact that many of the students were themselves fighters in the militias. One former student at the second branch recalls how life soon began to change after the outbreak of war in 1975, including seeing many of his fellow students become fighters in the militias:

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<sup>18</sup> Decree No. 122 states that 'In the event that it is impossible to convene the Council of the Lebanese University, the President of the University should exercise its powers, with decisions being accompanied by the approval of the Council of Ministers'.

[By 1976] the situation became clear to everybody it's very serious and very dangerous. So the war took a very vicious way and studying was taken out of our minds because surviving replaced where to go, where to hide, some of them went to fight, many of the fighters were university students (Interview 33).

A decade later, in the mid to late 1980s, a former student at the first branch who was a militia fighter in this period, recalls that many students were affiliated in one way or another to the warring factions in the country, with many directly participating in the fighting:

Yes, the majority. Most of us, yes. And most of us were a little trained, and we had our loyalties... and everyone knowing each other so it wasn't so easy to hide it, so we were clear, we were clear with our identities. I'm Communist, this blah blah guy is Amal movement, and the other one is... you know. So we knew each other. And sometimes we used to meet in clashes, in military clashes outside the university.... Sometimes fight together face to face, be together side by side... it was just a civil war... Yes, this is the chaos (Interview 36).

The influence of the militias in all branches of the Lebanese University placed students, professors and the university administration in an intensely precarious situation. Georges Tohme, the president of the Lebanese University during the 1980s, recalls the need to simultaneously keep the politicians at bay while also nurturing relations with them in order to protect the university. The balance of power between the militias and student fighters on the one hand, and the professors and university administration on the other had to be constantly negotiated. As Georges Tohme records in his memoir (Tohme 1996, 3-4):

[It was] the application of law and regulations in circumstances which sometimes abandoned all authority of the law... How to not allow them [the politicians and militia leaders] to impose their authority, and how to use them sometimes in applying laws and maintaining security within and around the campus...I would like to mention the painful incidents experienced by staff members who have worked hard during the hostilities, despite all the difficulties, threats and abuses that afflicted them.

A former faculty director at the second branch in east Beirut recalls how he was offered the position in 1978 after the previous director was unable to stand up to the militias:

Before the end of 1978 the Dean of the Faculty called me...they wanted to appoint me as director of the Faculty because the current one wasn't able to manage the exams due to the presence of militias, because the militias were stronger than the director. The students wanted to establish order according to their rules and so the Faculty suffered from disorder and the director wasn't able to manage (Interview 39).



A former student in the second branch at this time also recalls the extent of militia control on campus and how it curtailed freedom of expression among students:

The militia, the Christian militia was like controlling all campuses... So this kind of freedom which we were used to before 1975, it disappeared. Now we have to talk the language of those who control the ground, who control the institution, who control the area as a whole. Any criticism would cause you a big problem. And everybody got this message, nobody would dare to criticise or to go into writing anything against the militia and so on (Interview 33).

However, the same respondent goes on to describe how this situation changed over time and that the environment in the second branch of the Lebanese University became less overtly controlled by the late 1980s, when he returned to teach at the university:

Later, after let's say 10 years, this strong belt around campus became loose a little bit, you can talk, you can criticise, you can write, nobody would care, but at the beginning the situation was as such... even though the fighting didn't stop in general, there was rounds of fighting from time to time, but I found that the atmosphere was more relaxed, freedom is there, of course to a certain point, and that was like anything that happens in our life, at the beginning it's very distressing, then later on you relax a little bit (Ibid).

Over the course of fifteen years of war, the balance of power within the university also changed, reflecting shifting dynamics and allegiances outside the university. A former student in the first branch describes how the early dominance of Leftist and pro-Palestinian organisations was eventually superseded by political-sectarian parties after the expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation from Lebanon in 1982:

After the Leftists and Palestinians [it was] mainly the Islamic movements, Sunni and Shia - like Amal, Hizbollah, Jama' al-Islamiyya – they inherited this university and they started to print their own audience, their own supporters in the Lebanese University. Following the same way of the Communists and the Leftists and the Palestinian organisations, it was the same way, but for me it was the enemy... it was a very sectarian socially environment, and a hostile one (Interview 36).

Even while describing the 'hostile' atmosphere in the classroom and the tendency of professors to 'shut up' when arguments erupted between students, the same respondent recalls that a number of his professors remained fiercely committed to their teaching. He links this continuing dedication to their involvement in the student movement for the Lebanese University before the civil war:

Some of them were really, really involved in this university and believed what they are doing. I started to learn English during university, after just 20 sessions I started reading

in English because the professor, I still remember his name...he was a wonderful guy, just neutral politically, but he was one of the students of this university and he became a professor in English and he used to teach us as if it's a matter of life or death... And another one [names professor], also he used to give us some of the Greek philosophy, he was one of those guys who studied in the Lebanese University. He tried so hard to make us understand something, in vain but anyway [laughs]... So some of them yes, but the majority? No, no. They just don't care and corrupted (Ibid).

Professors standing up to intimidation and defending the academic values of autonomy and freedom is a common thread in the interviews, often revealing as much about the prevailing atmosphere in the university as their own personal integrity. One respondent at the first branch reflects on her own commitment to freedom of expression in the context of civil war:

When I started teaching in 1978, this was before 1982. So before 1982 who was very strong in Lebanon? It was the Palestinian revolution. It so happened that my husband was [a senior figure] in the PLO in Lebanon. But I never let my students feel, never, never, never, that because this one is a Palestinian, or that one is a Lebanese, or a Jordanian, that it makes any difference to me. Not by any means. And also students belonging to different kinds of political parties, I never cared about that. Afterwards there were some parties who were against the Palestinians, but it never meant anything to me. I'm proud of this, I'm really proud of this. And I never allowed myself to be threatened, I don't care, whatever they say (Interview 23).

A former faculty director in the second branch is similarly defiant about his experiences of being threatened by students in the Christian militias during the war, even while acknowledging the risks he faced for his personal safety. He recalls presiding over examinations in 1979 and a confrontation over the presence of weapons in the exam hall:

There were 6000 students presenting their exams. The first day of the exams they came with their guns. And they put the guns on the tables... Twenty to thirty per cent of the people, they belonged to the militias. When I saw the guns on the tables I called the director of the centre for exams and I asked him to stop everything and to ask the students to go home, to go away. He told me you are crazy, we cannot do that, everything is the same in the other faculties. I said I don't care about the other ones, here we have to have our exams and if they are not able to do it, we stop it. So we stopped the exams and people broke everything, and they were dissatisfied, all that (Interview 39).

The same respondent goes on to describe how he eventually had to go to Bashir Gemayel, the commander of the Lebanese Forces militia, in order to ask for his public support for the examinations to continue without the presence of weapons:

I told them [other faculty members] my plan, I will call Bashir Gemayel, who was responsible. I wanted to meet him and ask him if you want to have a Faculty you must tell the people to come without arms. If not, I will resign. I called the secretary of Bashir Gemayel and I met him the same day. I told him we stopped the exam because we are under the arms, we cannot have an exam. He asked me are you able - because I remember what he said – are you able, if someone put his gun to your head, are you able to tell him no? Yes, I am able to do it. Okay go ahead. In the morning we announced, from his office, that tomorrow we will resume our exams. The next day, out of 6000 students, we had maybe 400, the number had decreased to 400, and we made the exam without guns, without anything, it was perfect. All the newspapers at that time described the exam as exemplary, an exemplary exam (Ibid).

Yet even when academic values prevailed as in this case, it remained contingent upon the will of an external political leader. When Bashir Gemayel was assassinated in 1982, the same respondent recalls how he soon lost his position within the faculty:

It was 1982 when Bashir Gemayel was killed, and his brother was elected as the president. It was not the same thing. People at the Faculty who belonged to the Phalange, to the Kataeb, wanted to have their revenge on me because I was with Bashir Gemayel. Not ideologically, but because I established some relations between him and the Faculty to support us. Unfortunately, they wanted to replace me with another one who belonged to their party. In 1983 there were elections for the Faculty council, and I was against the Phalange because they wanted to impose their rules, I was against this. The majority of the council was on my side, against the Phalange, but the Phalange, with the complicity of the president of the University, they changed me (Ibid).

As the civil war progressed through the 1980s, different militia leaders rose to power and the influence of the Syrian security apparatus in Lebanon also increased. One respondent recalls the special treatment that Syrian army officers were afforded as students enrolled at the Lebanese University (Interview 19, LU professor, first branch, west Beirut, 1990s-2010s), while another remembers a Syrian army officer cheating during an examination: 'In my naivety I challenged him and he pointed a revolver at me!' (Interview 32). The might of Syrian influence in certain branches of the Lebanese University is also conveyed through recollections of intimidation and harassment. A former professor in the Tripoli branch remembers being summoned for interrogation (Interview 42, LU professor, Tripoli, third branch, 1990s-2010s), while students affiliated with parties that were critical of the Syrian presence in Lebanon were routinely targeted. A former student and Communist fighter during the mid-1980s explains that many of the faculty buildings in the first branch were surrounded by the Syrian army. Bringing up Google Maps on his phone during the interview, he points to the area of west Beirut where most of the faculties were situated and points to the places and checkpoints where the Syrian army was located:

Where I studied, do you know exactly where was it?... Let me show you, I will show you on Google Maps... OK so this is the Lebanese University...this is Habib al-Bishara street, which is full with Syrian army, and we have here the Russian embassy, which was also full with the Syrian army, and we have here, in front of the Russian embassy, a barracks for the Police, and just here, a checkpoint for the Syrian army. Ok, those streets, those buildings are the Lebanese University....We were studying in between the Syrian army... Under one of our buildings, we had an office for one of the Syrian officers, he decided to take an office under a building for the Lebanese University, where if you do anything they can get in and get you down (Interview 36).

The same respondent goes on to describe how Syrian forces would routinely enter Lebanese University premises, to the extent that he does not even regard it as an invasion of autonomous university space, but rather that the boundary itself was missing:

Invaded? They are there anyway. Yeah, came to get some guys and, you know, they took X and Y, from classrooms, or from the cafeteria...Yes, they will arrest you, and torture you for a few hours, or few days, and then send you back. And this is what happened with many of our colleagues (Ibid).

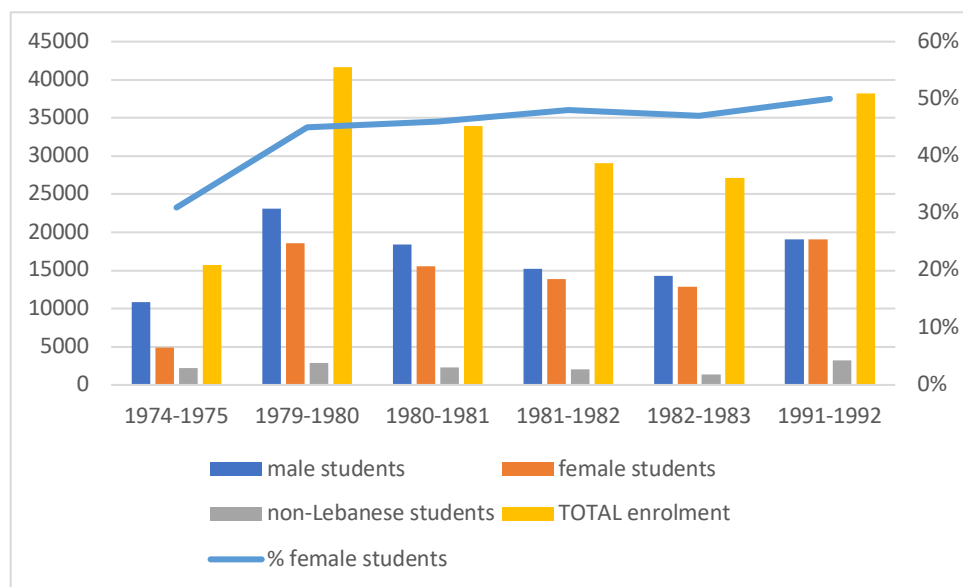
Yet even while the war led to the inexorable breakdown of university autonomy, a residual commitment to academic values within the university administration remained. For those who had been involved in the student struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s, carrying the memory of an earlier vision for the university was enough to sustain their commitment to it. One former professor and administrator, who played a prominent role in the development of the Lebanese University in both east and west Beirut, explains the personal risks he took based on his unerring belief in the Lebanese University as a national, public institution:

I was threatened, many times, to be killed. I was threatened by left and right, same thing. By chance I am here now because I came close to being kidnapped and killed... Once they wanted me to change the result of the exam, it was in 1990, in west Beirut. The people came to kidnap me and ask me to change the result. I told them no. They said you have other people in your committee who are able to change the result why aren't you? I said it is their problem not mine. In this incident, the [former] president of the university was by chance next to me and he heard what they said. Between us he said, you are crazy, change the result and you can save your life, I am not able to go to your wife and tell her that she is now without a husband. It didn't change my mind. They kidnapped me but this time the Syrian army intervened and I was saved. Maybe it is a kind of craziness from me to do it, but I believed in that. Until now I believe, for me the Lebanese University is my home, it is my conviction (Interview 39).

## 6.5 Development in adversity

Despite the years of unrelenting insecurity, which characterised daily life throughout the civil war, the Lebanese University remained open and continued to graduate students. Student enrolment grew sharply in the early years of the war, declined somewhat during the 1980s, and recovered at the end of the war (see Figure 3). For fifteen years, students and professors continued to work and study, often risking their lives travelling between home and class under seemingly endless rounds of fighting and bombardment. The fact that it continued to function throughout the civil war is already testimony to the resilience of the university. That it also continued to expand and develop in this period is remarkable.

**Figure 3: Student enrolment at the Lebanese University during the civil war**



Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD)

Between 1975 and 1990, five new faculties were opened in the Lebanese University including Engineering, Agriculture, Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry.<sup>19</sup> During the same period, multiple branches of existing faculties were also opened around the country. Establishing all of these new faculties involved major logistical operations and a large investment in resources. At the best of times this was a major undertaking, but in the context of unrelenting bombardment and in some

<sup>19</sup> While the Faculty of Engineering was founded by Decree in October 1974, due to the outbreak of the civil war months later, its existence remained on paper until 1980 when three branches of the faculty were opened in Tripoli, east Beirut and west Beirut. <http://www.ulfg.ul.edu.lb/about/us>

cases limited time to prepare, the descriptions of those involved verge on the heroic. As one respondent tasked with building the second branch of the Faculty of Science recalls:

So it was not easy to create new faculties, you need staff, you need a curriculum, you need laboratories, you need buildings etc etc. It was a result of war and they were not well prepared....the location was very, very small and we had more than 4000 students. Can you imagine? In 24 rooms and each room could contain no more than 40 people. That's it, without laboratories, without a library (Interview 39).

In an interview with *Al-Nahar* (2 April 1986), Georges Tohme, then president of the Lebanese University, robustly defends the accomplishments of the university in this era, rejecting any 'prejudgment that its standards are decreasing' and arguing that such an assumption 'emerges out of ill intention and aggression against everything that is national.' Listing the establishment of new faculties as well as developments in the Sciences, Economics, Fine Arts and Media, Tohme is clear that 'the Lebanese University, despite the tragedies engulfing Lebanon for years, has defied destiny and persevered in its work and, more importantly, has taken steps to develop and move forward'.

While the branching of existing faculties generated new university institutions around the country, the efforts behind establishing new faculties carried a distinctively pre-war vision of the public university as a vehicle of social change. Even as the war raged on, the historic monopolies of the two oldest private universities over Medicine, Engineering and other professions continued to be dismantled in keeping with the aims and demands of the student movement in the preceding era. In his memoir, Georges Tohme (1996), president of the Lebanese University between 1980 and 1988, describes meeting with the Lebanese president, Amin Gemayel, and the Ministers of Health and Education, to discuss a draft decree for establishing a Faculty of Medicine at the Lebanese University. The Minister of Health did not support the proposal and the Minister of Education was decidedly ambivalent. Tohme composed his argument not only on the basis of public education but also public healthcare:

I began to answer the Minister of Health. Lebanese hospitals with a good standard are private hospitals and do not accommodate all Lebanese patients. Where do poor patients go? If a senior official in any self-respecting state gets sick, he enters the best state hospital. Where is this hospital in Lebanon? Why do we not equip the [public] hospital in Baabda well and make it a university hospital of high standards for poor and rich patients alike?

A director of the Faculty of Science, and later Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, describes his vision in similar terms:

In Lebanon the private sector is dominant, especially in Health and Education. My dream was to transform the public hospital in Baabda, and the new public hospital in west Beirut, which is now Rafik Hariri Hospital....But in 1984 [there was] only Baabda. Baabda, with 500 beds... The benefit of the creation of the Lebanese University was also to give other hospitals the university standards and level, specifically St George, which is Greek Orthodox, and you have Rizk Hospital [in west Beirut], and Ma'winat in Byblos et cetera. So, in total, I prepared 13 hospitals to receive our students (Interview 39).

While the data reveals an enduring commitment to the wider public good within the Lebanese University administration even in the midst of civil war, the politicians in government were decidedly less visionary. In an earlier exchange between the director of the Faculty of Science in east Beirut and Bashir Gemayel, the president elect who was assassinated in September 1982, Gemayel joked that the draft decree for a Lebanese University Faculty of Medicine would cause an uproar among his parliamentary colleagues. As the same respondent recalls:

Georges Tohme signed a decree to create the Faculty of Medicine [in late 1981]. The Council of Ministers didn't agree, they said it is too early, we don't have the facilities... In January 1982, my daughter was born, and Bashir Gemayel came to my house to congratulate us. During this visit he told me... "look, Georges Tohme sent a decree to the Council of Ministers to create a Faculty of Medicine, he will create a *boucherie* [a bloodbath]!" (Ibid).

Ever reluctant to concede to Lebanese University demands and the expansion of the public sector more generally, whether in education or in health, the government finally agreed to establish a public Faculty of Medical Sciences by decree in 1983. Opened in the midst of war, it was obliged to duplicate the three schools of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy in east and west Beirut, creating six new faculties in total. Yet the imperative for ensuring common medical and scientific standards across the political divide, together with the public orientation of the academic leadership, led to a model of academic unity within the Lebanese University that had been largely abandoned since 1975. As the Dean of the new faculty describes:

I oversaw the development of six faculties, three on the west side, and three on other side, the same, Medical school, Dental school and Pharmacy school... And we followed the same criteria, the same curriculum between them, and we organised every week to coordinate and collaborate. I conducted weekly meetings between the three directors, three Christians, three Muslims... because our product was the same, the person who will take care of the health of the people... You cannot play with this. For me it's a must. Maybe you can play with other things but not with that (Ibid).

Indeed, even before the Faculty of Medical Sciences was established, it was already being framed in a language that conveyed the necessity for prioritising the collective, public interest. In early 1982, as the rest of the university was fragmenting around the country, *Al-Nahar* (26 February 1982) reported the conviction in the Lebanese University administration that:

There must be one medical school with one basis, one stem, one branch, and one section...it must not be dealt with through a mentality of partisan gains or regional gains.

## 6.6 Anticipating peacetime

Between 1984 and 1994, the Lebanese University's Faculty of Science lost 60 per cent of its academic body, including 40 per cent who emigrated abroad and 20 per cent who left to join other universities (*Nahar al-Shabab*, 21 February 1995). During Israel's ground invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the iconic Faculty of Science building, located on the southern fringes of Beirut, was physically occupied by the Israeli army and area in and around it became the site of intense fighting. Later occupied by Lebanese militias, its ruin is captured in the haunting photograph of a fighter seated on sandbags in front of the faculty building (see Appendix 2, selection of images). An article in the Lebanese University journal, *'Awraq Jāmi'yya (University Papers)*, decries the destruction of the Faculty of Science, the 'mother faculty' of the national university, and makes a desperate case for its renovation (Noureddine 1992). Yet despite extensive material losses for the university, including the haemorrhaging of human resources, there is little attention to these impacts in either the contemporary newspaper coverage or the interview data.

In part this is because so much of the infrastructure of Lebanon, particularly in Beirut, was damaged or destroyed during the war, while it is estimated that 40 percent of the population left the country, leaving many institutions a shell of their former existence. However, the data's overwhelming emphasis on the socio-political impacts of civil war on the Lebanese University also tells another story. It is one that relates to the widespread belief that restoring the political and social integrity of the Lebanese University as a democratic public institution could cut across national divides and therefore held enormous significance for the future of Lebanon. In 1989, the Saudi-brokered Ta'if Agreement, which outlined conditions for ending the war, contained a specific reference to the Lebanese University, indicating its projected importance for processes of post-war reconstruction and that it might soon become a greater priority of the state:



The conditions of the Lebanese University shall be reformed and aid shall be provided to the university, especially to its technical colleges (Taif Agreement 1989).

While the Lebanese University faced daunting challenges, the perception was one of intense crisis rather than irreversible decline. The data shows that the end of the war in 1990 was understood by many to be a pivotal point of transformation for the public university with widespread hopes for its future role in society. This historic moment of contingency for the Lebanese University is often forgotten in the new political and economic order that followed in the 1990s and 2000s, which revealed little interest in recovering what had come before.

## Chapter 7:

### The Lebanese University: a contested publicness (1991-2019)

It is almost thirty years since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990. While there are distinct periods in the history of the Lebanese University over the last three decades, the data points to ongoing contestations over what constitutes the ‘publicness’ of the university, including questions of unity and diversity, autonomy and accountability, and the persistent financial neglect of the university by the state. In the context of Lebanon’s post-civil war neoliberal reconstruction, these contestations have unfolded within an increasingly privatised and sectarianised higher education landscape, further highlighting and complicating meanings of ‘publicness’.

#### 7.1 Reunification and the ‘nation’

For many respondents, the partition of the Lebanese University in 1977 came to represent a potent symbol of the division of Lebanon. In the same way, its potential reunification after the war ended in 1990 was also seen in larger terms of national reconciliation. Debates about the future of the Lebanese University and its role in wider society gathered momentum throughout the early 1990s, frequently surfacing in the national press. As one newspaper article reported in 1991:

We are today crossing the phase of destruction and entering through the gate of hope and construction. The Lebanon that was collapsing now has the unmissable opportunity of peace... solidifying the unity of the university and of the nation... we reaffirm the national role of the university and its different dimensions (*Al-Safir*, 17 May 1991).

An interview with a group of university professors in *Al-Nahar* newspaper in 1993 invokes the literal meaning of the Arabic word for university (*jāmi’a*), which comes from the verb ‘to gather’ or ‘to assemble’, echoing the pre-civil war significance of the Lebanese University as a place of assembly and interaction between all elements of society,

The value of the Lebanese University is that it is a *jāmi’a jāmi’a* because it transcends all of the imaginary boundaries separating the Lebanese (*Al-Nahar*, 12 November 1993).

The discourse of reunifying the university as both a symbol and a strategy for reunifying the nation continued throughout the 1990s, even in the face of plummeting public spending on education and rising labour unrest among teachers and professors. Following its long disbandment during the civil war, the League of Lebanese University Full-Time Professors was remobilised in 1992 and immediately launched a new university journal, *‘Awraq Jāmi’yya (University Papers)*, with the

express purpose of facilitating debate around the future of the Lebanese University. Extracts from the first issue were published in the newspaper *Al-Nahar*, underlining the role of the Lebanese University in contributing to future peace and development in the country. For example, an editorial by Hassan Mneimneh, a former student activist and member of the remobilised professors' union, links the history and future of the public university to constructing a new vision of the nation,

Approximately a quarter of a century ago, we were students in this university and our wish was to build a Lebanese university, great and prestigious...the pinnacle of a cherished and flourishing nation, governed by democracy and justice... A change had begun appearing within our own world, the university, and even within our wider society, the nation... The university today needs to be revitalised and renewed because it remains a national and scientific necessity. Indeed, the nation needs it today more than ever to contribute to rebuilding Lebanese unity and to be a part of the emergence of a new Lebanon...The university, as the nation, are our future (*Al-Nahar*, 10 November 1992).

When Prime Minister Rafik Hariri took office in 1992, he pursued a plan to reunify the Lebanese University by building a major new campus on the southern outskirts of Beirut. It would be constructed on the same site purchased for the university in the 1960s, which had remained largely undeveloped since the opening of the Faculty of Science building in 1969. The Hariri proposal was seen by many as the culmination of decades of student and professor struggles for a university campus, adequate infrastructure and modern facilities. However, in the complexity of the post-civil war context, the singular focus on what was essentially a large construction project in the capital Beirut, was in many ways a limited solution to healing the divisions of a fractured national institution. In 1994, Lebanese University professors were on strike, demanding extensive institutional reform of the Lebanese University. As reported in *Al-Hayat* (12 December 1994, my emphasis):

Many professors believe that the government decision to allocate \$250 million dollars to build a university campus will not solve the problem. We must reconsider the entirety of educational values and grant the university its independence. *Constructing buildings does not make universities* and we know this from the experience of many Arab countries.

In the first place, ambiguity surrounded who exactly the new campus was intended to include (Interview 43, LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2010s). The rhetoric implied that the campus would reunify the whole of the university and yet plans appeared to be solely focused on Beirut. Furthermore, while the first concrete plans for the campus were aired in the mid-1990s, it was not

until the mid-2000s that the construction of the campus was finally complete, by which time the vital statistics of the university had substantially changed. As one former professor explains:

Hadath campus was supposed to be a campus for the whole university. When plans started the student body was 35,000 but by the time it was finished it was 70,000 so the capacity was simply not there to unite the whole university on one campus (Interview 4, LU professor and union activist, second branch, 1990s-2010s).

Numerous respondents point to the fundamental contradiction over numbers, while also suggesting that unity should have been conceived in more expansive ways than simply moving all students to one place. Not only did the numbers not add up, the narrow conception of reunification by the Hariri government ignored the significance of the regional branches of the university, as well as evading deeper institutional problems. Another respondent reflects:

With this vision no one would have been able to reunify students in one place. The Hariri government established a campus in Hadath. How much does it gather? 28,000. The university was 72,000. You can't bring the students from 'Akkar to Beirut, they wanted decentralisation (Interview 28, LU professor and union activist, 1990s-2010s).

### *7.1.1 Resistance to 'reunification'*

The post-civil war agenda for decentralisation interacted with continuing demands for 'branching' the Lebanese University around the country, accompanied by growing resistance to its 'reunification' in Beirut. The biggest opposition did not come from the regional branches around Lebanon, as might have been expected, but from the other side of the capital. The city of Beirut was so divided by fifteen years of war that location was far from a neutral question; issues of physical space, political control and sectarian identity had fused together in ways that were not easy to overcome. As one former professor of the second branch made plain:

Hadath campus is in a Shiite area. The Christians didn't want to go there (Interview 4).

Students and faculty in the second branch mobilised to prevent the closure of their campus through intensive waves of strikes and protests. Accused of advocating for division rather than unity in 1995, the Maronite League released a statement in defence of the protests, arguing for greater 'decentralisation' and 'freedom' in public affairs (*Al-Nahar*, 11 August 1995). While the discourse of freedom framed the opposition to reunification at a political level, large sections of public opinion in majority Christian areas opposed the closure of the second branch for more visceral reasons. Fears about joining the campus in Hadath, an area which is geographically located next to Dahieh, a

predominantly Shi'a southern suburb of Beirut, could not be easily assuaged. For fifteen years of war, young people had rarely engaged with anyone outside of their own communities. As one former professor reflects:

There is a generation that was raised in these areas that don't know anything about the other except for bombing. So they were not excited [about reunification], they were afraid... It was a risk that nobody wanted to take or explore. The public opinion was towards this direction and the politicians could not pressure the students to come to other areas (Interview 40, LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2010s).

As the construction of the campus in Hadath finally neared completion in the mid-2000s, the resistance to merging the first and second branches of the university only intensified. One former student in the second branch of the university at this time recalls that very few of her fellow students wanted to move to the new campus in Hadath, underlined by the fierce opposition of the branch administration:

I remember the head of the university at the time did a whole meeting and said, 'don't worry, *ma khaafu* (don't be scared), we will *never* go and join them!' (Interview 45, LU student, second branch, 1990s-2000s).

At the same time, the Beirut-centric approach to unification was problematic. In Tripoli, for example, where the movement to open a branch of the Lebanese University pre-dated the civil war, the lack of popular attachment to the university as a 'national' institution, was both linked to the regional identity of the northern branch and the strength of the Syrian political presence in Tripoli. As one former student who attended the Tripoli branch in the mid-1990s describes:

Tripoli had always been away from the rest of the country... there had never been any attempt to do anything in terms of creating a national feeling [in the university]... we never felt this, and we always had lecturers from the north. We know them, they are from Tripoli, we know their families. Who will be the dean for next year? This is solved on a Tripoli level. With the Syrian intervention, with political intervention from politicians, but it was sorted out in Tripoli... On the other hand, under the Syrian presence a Lebanese identity would be a little bit controversial...any talking about Lebanese identity would be repressed. So all these things together, it deepens the regionalism (Interview 5, LU student, third branch, 1990s).

After more than a decade of institutionalisation, the task of restructuring university branches was fraught with vested interests as well as politics. Hundreds of jobs and people's livelihoods were at stake. As one respondent explains, tackling such vested interests was a far more difficult task than simply moving everyone to one place:

I think the major reason [that reunification failed] is that the idea of reuniting the students for real did not exist. Integration meant the cancellation of working hours for tens of professors... Professors will lose their contracts and nobody wants to go there. So for example, this building has a guard and the other building too. If I unify the whole university... the other guard will be fired and lose his job (Interview 40).

A landmark publication authored by five Lebanese University professors in 1999, further reflects on the entrenchment of political monopolies over different university branches in the post-war period (El-Amine et al. 1999, 45):

Some forms of monopoly were set after the end of the war and were easily maintained ... dividing and distributing public institutions in a way that destroyed their publicness... as they became either the purview of one power or were divided and distributed among various powers. The Lebanese University did not escape this logic... This was the political point of branching.

The authors suggest alternative visions for reunifying the Lebanese University, addressing the concerns of students and professors in different branches, while also restoring a sense of 'publicness' through comprehensive institutional reforms. More broadly, it was also acknowledged that there had to be more than one university campus to meet the social and economic needs of different regions (*Al-Nahar*, 12 November 1993). There were proposals to establish centres of excellence through specialist schools and institutes located in the different regions, while others argued that there was no reason to insist upon maintaining a single public university for all Lebanese students. As one former professor at the second branch states:

The concept of unity and centralisation changed. It is impossible to administrate the university. Why stick with one university, why not five? (Interview 4).

Conversely, a senior administrator in the Lebanese University insists that the university was never divided in the sense that it has always continued to function as one institutional structure, albeit with multiple sections:

We were always unified, always unified but we had branches in the regions. Always, always we were one university, one public university, with one president, one university council, and a dean in each faculty... but because for many reasons, economic reasons, security problems, we have opened branches in different regions in Lebanon (Interview 37, LU central administrator, current).

Entrenched fears combined with political and economic interests, rising student numbers and multiple locations of the Lebanese University produced a heady combination of challenges for

reunification. Most significant of all was the fact that a brand new campus could not mask the need for institutional reform. While many point to Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's role in achieving the establishment of Hadath campus in Beirut, which was no small feat given the absence of a campus for more than 40 years, Hariri did not support calls for reforming the university, leading many to doubt his commitment to its future as a public institution. As a leading activist in the professors' union at that time reflects:

Hariri was for business, not for people, but he was reasonable to talk to. Hariri had no great vision for the Lebanese University as a public democratic institution. But he also recognised that not everyone could go to AUB. In the end he made the Hadath campus happen (Interview 42, LU professor and union activist, third branch, 1990s-2010s).

Another union activist in the 1990s concurs:

Rafik Hariri did one good thing, which is Hadath campus. However, he still sold and bought things, just like anything else... Hariri was a businessman, he was not an intellectual with a long-term vision...Hariri wasn't a man of militias, he wanted to change things, but also don't forget that his aim was to make money. He put some debt on us. He didn't do any reforms from the inside, he just fixed the shell on the outside (Interview 28).

## 7.2 The 'negligent state' and the neoliberal turn

The 'negligent state' (*'al-dawla al-la mubālyya'*) is a phrase coined by Edmond Naim, the president of the Lebanese University between 1970 and 1976. In an interview published in *Al-Nahar* (11 November 1992), he uses the idea of negligence, which might also be translated as carelessness, to describe the long-term neglect of the public university by the state, from its establishment in the 1950s to the years immediately following the end of the civil war. Just when the public university was needed most, according to Naim, the state was once again turning its back:

One of the main reasons that the university did not develop and grow to achieve a high position among foreign universities in Lebanon is the position of the state and the political authority who are indifferent...since its foundation up until this moment [the university] has not received serious and foundational interest from anyone in charge.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Edmond Naim goes on to point out two exceptions to the indifference of the state, including President Fouad Chehab who expanded the Lebanese University in 1959 and Henri Eddé, a Minister of Education for just 3 months between August and October 1972, whom Naim claims was sacked from his position for going against the government in support of the Lebanese University. He was the first ever minister to be dismissed in the history of Lebanon.

However, the reasons behind the state's neglect of the Lebanese University in the 1990s and 2000s were not necessarily the same as those in the 1950s and 1960s, nor were the impacts and ramifications unchanging. In the first place, the enormous political ruptures that had taken place over fifteen years of civil war meant that by the 1990s the Lebanese state was no longer the same and, more specifically, the ruling political class was no longer what it was. Where once the state was perceived as hostile to the public university because it threatened existing class structures and monopolies, by the 1990s the Lebanese University was directly implicated in the production of the new ruling class (Interview 11, professor of history, other university). A former president of the Lebanese University during the 2000s expresses this contradiction, simultaneously pointing to the neglect of the university by 'the state', whilst simultaneously defining the university's importance in relation to producing state politicians:

So the state doesn't give the Lebanese University the importance it deserves. It is important since many of Lebanon's leaders are graduates of the Lebanese University, starting with [Speaker of the Parliament] Nabih Berri and former President Michel Suleiman (Interview 25, former LU president, 2000s).

From the early 1990s there was an acute awareness that the Lebanese University was at the crossroads of two very different trajectories. On the one hand there was a clear sense that the university was in a unique position to contribute to the reintegration of a divided society and to support Lebanon's material reconstruction through strengthening technical capacity across a range of disciplines. At the same time, it was far from a foregone conclusion that the state would rally around the damaged and depleted public university, which faced a stark alternative trajectory of a struggle for institutional survival. For example, a Lebanese University journal article entitled 'Faculty of Science: When will it be rebuilt?' (Noureddine 1992) contrasts the government's quick response to the bombing of College Hall, the administration building of the American University of Beirut, in 1991, with the failure to address the devastation of the Lebanese University's Faculty of Science, widely regarded as the 'mother faculty' of the university due to its foundational role, high prestige and international reputation:

The war destroyed the faculty building, equipment, laboratories and library, which have been abandoned ruins for over seven years now... On the pretext that there is no Arab or international funds or financial aid, the faculty is neglected and completely forgotten... we did not see a single Lebanese official standing in front of [our] faculty building with a single cry of condemnation or regret for a symbol of Lebanese efforts and aspirations to knowledge and development.



In the context of acute economic crisis and increasingly meagre salaries due to high inflation and a devalued Lebanese pound, professors began urgently mobilising around working conditions and the future of the public university. In May 1991, just six months after the end of the civil war, professors went on strike to 'stop the ongoing collapse of the national university' (*Al-Safir*, 1 May 1991). They were clear that their demands were not only to improve their own impoverished living conditions, 'but rather to protect the university and improve its knowledge production... if the university is to play a wider a developmental role' (*Ibid*). Their challenge was immense. According to one report, the average annual income of university employees dropped from \$5795 in 1981-82 to just \$877 in 1991-92 (*Al-Safir*, 15 July 1991). The annual budget of the university was also in freefall. In 1995 it was reported that the university had proposed a draft budget of 124 billion Lebanese Lira, up from 85 billion the previous year, but was allocated just 43 billion by the government, a cut of almost fifty per cent (*Al-Nahar*, 14 December 1995).

As early as 1991, an economist writing in *Al-Safir*, situates the 'dramatic collapse' of the Lebanese University budget in relation to 'austerity measures across the Third World'. A key distinction, he concludes, is that 'a push to limit the presence of the state in economic life, be this through deregulation or through privatisation' was common to many contexts across Africa and Latin America, but 'in Lebanon this has not been implemented...and we do not know if it might soon be coming' (*Al-Safir*, 15 July 1991). Less than a year later Prime Minister Rafik Hariri took office and Lebanon entered its own era of intensive deregulation and privatisation, including in the field of higher education. In 1995, another article highlights the burden of paying interest on Treasury bonds, which already made up 43% of the state budget. Pointing out that decreasing the amount of interest paid on the bonds by 1% 'would save the Treasury 100 billion Lebanese Lira and solve the problem of the university as well as other problems', the spectre of indebtedness is highlighted alongside reduced public spending, deregulation and privatisation, as key dimensions of the state's continuing 'indifference' towards the Lebanese University in the post-war period (*Al-Nahar*, 14 December 1995).

From the mid-2000s, Lebanon's public spending on education dropped from 2.4% of GDP in 2005 to 1.6% in 2011, less than half the spending share of other countries in the region (World Bank 2017, 26). The impacts of this declining public expenditure on education are reflected in the testimonies of students and faculty. They cite, for example, the absence of a research budget and the lack of access to current literature in the libraries, while vivid descriptions of the physical disrepair of the university and lack of campus facilities outside of Beirut evoke a pervasive feeling of neglect among

students and faculty (Interview 26, LU student, first branch, current; Interview 45, LU student, second branch, 1990s-2000s; Interview 21, LU student, third branch, current). Investigating the conditions of different university branches, a series of articles in *Al-Safir* in 2012 relay the problems of crumbling infrastructure, rented buildings not fit for purpose, overcrowded classrooms and poor facilities across the country, from Tripoli and Zahle to Saidon and Nabatieh (*Al-Safir*, 28 March 2012, 4 April 2012, 11 April 2012, 18 April 2012, 9 May 2012).

There is a profound sense of *déjà vu* as student and faculty testimonies in the 1990s and 2000s are strikingly similar to what they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Across the generations, up and down the country, the disrepair of public university buildings, inadequate infrastructure and lack of resources for research and academic development are a tangible expression of the ongoing 'indifference' of the state. To this extent, Edmond Naim's concept of the 'negligent state' has remained relevant over the course of sixty years. However, the rationale behind this indifference also evolved during the post-war period as the historical *laissez faire* character of the Lebanese state morphed into the turbo-charged neoliberalism of the 1990s and the post-Ta'if reorganisation of the state interacted with the new economic and political-sectarian order (Baumann 2016).

### 7.2.1 Patterns of economic neglect

A cartoon in *Al-Nahar* newspaper in 2003 depicts construction lorries, cranes and shiny new buildings on one side of the road, whilst on the other side of the road the buildings have been left to ruin and devastation. A signpost points to 'Lebanese *universities*' in one direction and 'Lebanese *University*' in the other (see Appendix 2, selection of images). The play on words not only contrasts the public and private universities in terms of privilege and neglect but also raises a more fundamental question: what is a 'Lebanese university'?

A slew of newspaper articles during this period describe the new profit-making universities as little more than businesses, comparing them to 'boutiques' and 'grocery shops' (*Al-Nahar*, 1 October 2001; *Al-Nahar*, 2 June 2001). One contrasts the presence of quality standards for petrol stations but not for universities (*Al-Safir*, 1 April 1996), while another lambasts the government's commitment to unity in the national casino but not the national university (*Al-Hayat*, 9 January 1997). An article in *Al-Hayat* also draws attention to rising disparities with the headline, 'The public university is on strike and private ones are growing like mushrooms' (*Al-Hayat*, 19 February 1995). By contrasting the profit-making industry of the new private universities with the neglect of the country's only public university, such articles reveal a deeper questioning of the purpose of higher education as a

private or public good. As recently as 2018, an article in *Al-Nahar* laments that higher education is 'not an investment in humans anymore, it is an investment in money', situating the sector alongside real estate, oil and banking and warning that 'state higher education might end up like state healthcare...on the margins of the nation' (*Al-Nahar*, 1 October 2018).

While private universities have long been predominant in Lebanon, from the mid-1990s the landscape changed entirely as new for-profit private universities began to increase exponentially. The speed of deregulation took many by surprise. In 2001, a scornful headline in *Al-Nahar* reads, 'The government divided the [public] university in a sectarian way and gave 30 licenses to grocery shops', while just three years later, a further 19 new universities were licensed in a single cabinet meeting. The former Minister of Culture, Ghassan Salame, exclaimed in response, 'is this globalization? This is nonsense... I hope Darwin's law will apply to these institutions soon so that they will shrink in number' (cited in Bashshur 2003, 170). At the same time as mounting concerns over the quality and purpose of higher education, there was growing a wariness that the deregulation of the sector signalled a declining commitment to public higher education. A number of former professors and students during the 1990s attest to this view:

The welfare state idea of development from the 1960s was killed off in the 1990s. Hariri said no. He saw the Lebanese University role as 'parking' for low skills; technical and vocational training. He wanted the growth of more private sector universities (Interview 4).

Hariri and his team thought that they should create many private universities. Why? Because privatising higher education would reduce the public money, which was still growing, to finance the workings of the Lebanese University...his main ideological idea is that if we privatise higher education it should help the government not to spend too much money on it (Interview 44, LU professor, second branch, 2000s-2010s).

We had a fear of this Hariri project... because he was clear about the Lebanese University itself, the university of poor people, of poor sectarian people, and [we thought] he wanted to close it, just trying to close it or put some end to it (Interview 36).

Others point to the curious combination of neglect and interference by the state in the affairs of the Lebanese University, as expressed in one article in 1997 which argues:

The university is being exposed to overwhelming competition...as if there was an agenda for private universities, which are mushrooming, to take control of higher education without there being any presence, even partial, of the state. The absence of the state from the issues of the university is in a sense a negative presence. How else can we

explain this instinctive destruction of the institution and the fact that academic standards are being trumped for the sake of political allegiances? (*Al-Safir*, 6 April 1997).

Such concerns were fuelled by the fact that a number of state politicians were personally associated with establishing new private universities. As one former leader of the League of Lebanese University Professors asserts:

They wanted to strengthen the private universities...The sons of the Madame [bourgeoisie] go to AUB and USJ.. and then he [Rafik Hariri] established his own university, the Hariri university. Nabih Berri [Speaker of the Parliament] has his own university. So the politicians don't prioritise education for the popular class. Just to be able to gather the people around them and clap for them. They don't have a vision of how developmental the Lebanese University could be (Interview 28).

While the principle of public higher education appeared to be in peril, conversely, the proportion of students enrolled in the public university continued to rise for ten years after the end of the war. In just seven years, from 1993 to 2000, enrolment in the Lebanese University almost doubled, from 36,503 (48.8% of all students) to 71,050 (59.5% of all students). By the year 2000, just under two-thirds (60%) of all students in Lebanon attended the public university (see Appendix 1, Figure 5). As one former professor reflects:

It didn't work as he [Hariri] wanted. Why? Two words. The social and economic situation after the war was terrible (Interview 44).

Since the mid-2000s, however, the figures shifted decisively as the proportion of students enrolled in the Lebanese University dropped from 60% in 2000 to 36%, just over a decade later, in 2013 (see Appendix 1, Figure 5). While some respondents explain this numerical decline in relation to rising competition in a deregulated sector, others argue that falling demand is also due to problems of reputation, inadequate resources and the rise of anti-democratic practices within the university itself (Interview 16, LU professor, third branch, current; Interview 17, LU professor, third branch, current).

### 7.3 The erosion of autonomy and accountability

Alongside policies of deregulation, privatisation and reduced public spending on education throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the data highlights that the state not only neglected the public university in the post-war period, but actively interfered with its institutional independence. In part this links to the post-Ta'if consensus 'to redistribute the top positions of the state among sects',

including the presidency of the Lebanese University, 'which has since belonged to the Shi'a' (El-Amine 2018a, 186). Since 1992 the position of president of the Lebanese University has been reserved for a Shiite Muslim, in contrast to the previous four decades when four consecutive presidents of the Lebanese University were Maronite Christians and the fifth, Georges Tohme, was Greek Orthodox. However, while it may be argued that the post-war sectarian redistribution of state institutions was in keeping with the consociational system of democracy in Lebanon, the logic of sectarian shares had wider implications for university governance and decision-making.

A newspaper article in 1994 reflects that while there had long been external interference in the Lebanese University, including in the years before the civil war, the decentralisation of the university through 'branching' had led to a situation whereby 'each branch came under the complete influence of one side... politicians see the university as a space of hiring and offering private services just like all other institutions' (*Al-Hayat*, 12 February 1994). Reflecting the rise of clientelist practices and political patronage across the wider public sector, another article in 1995 concludes, 'It seems that the Lebanese society is holding tight to its sectarian leaders and organisations, just without the enthusiasm for war' (*Nahar al-Shabab*, 21 February 1995). In the public university, due to its large size and coverage across the country, the competition for control was particularly apparent. In an interview with union leader, Issam Khalife, the reporter says, 'the war has ended... what about the university's peace?' To which Khalife responds:

Unfortunately the war within the university is ongoing... the most obvious example of this continuing war within and against the university is the state of its representative councils. They have been disbanded since 1977... The key is the return of the law... the expulsion of the war to outside the Lebanese University and the return of representative councils, the encouragement of internal mechanisms to reform institutions and protect them from external interference (*Al-Nahar*, 5 April 1997).

Throughout the post-war years, professors repeatedly called for politicians to 'take their hands off the university' (*Nahar al-Shabab*, 21 February 1995). But in early 1997, external interference in university affairs was effectively legitimised by the state, as the Hariri government secured control over Lebanese University appointments on a permanent basis. Under the guise of intervening to end the deadlocks that had plagued university recruitment processes since the end of the war, decision making power for appointing and promoting all full-time faculty was transferred to the government's Council of Ministers. It was widely perceived as an attack on the autonomy of the Lebanese University as its academic principles were implicitly subordinated to the logic of sectarian shares.

The uproar in response to the government's move in 1997 is well documented. A stream of articles in the national newspapers capture widespread alarm that the basic legitimacy of the public university was at stake. Headlines include, 'The Lebanese University: It's too late what should we do?' (*Al-Safir*, 29 March 1997); 'The earthquake that struck the Lebanese University' (*Al-Nahar*, 28 March 1997); 'They are leading the Lebanese University towards disaster' (*Al-Safir*, 11 March 1997); and 'The politicians are destroying [the university]...If the situation continues then its end is soon' (*Al-Safir*, 3 April 1997). From 1997 onwards, there are repeated references in the national press to 'destroying', 'strangling' and 'killing' the university. A headline in 2000 reads, 'The aim of the state is to strangle the university' (*Al-Nahar*, 21 November 2000). A year later in 2001, the historian and journalist, Samir Kassir, renowned for his trenchant critiques of the Lebanese government and Syrian security regime until his assassination in 2005, wrote a particularly blistering attack on the appointment of a new university president, entitled 'Mercy Bullet':

They could have, at least out of decency, postponed it for another week, after all this waiting. That way, it could not be said that the Lebanese government commenced the new century by issuing a death sentence on its national university... To be accurate, it is not the appointment...that will topple the university to the ground. It is already a wreck upon more wreckage and has been so for many years. This very state is evidence that there is no vision or sense of public interest among all of those who have participated in running the country since the end of the civil war. But this chronic situation does not make the government decision any less dangerous. If the appointment of Mr Qubeisi as president does not mean the destruction of a flourishing institution, it does nevertheless point to the fact that Lebanon's government and political class have relinquished any will to save the national university from its death. This is the mercy bullet (*Al-Nahar*, 5 January 2001).

### *7.3.1 Patterns of political interference*

There continue to be controversies surrounding the recruitment and promotion of full-time faculty at the Lebanese University, the lists of which are published in the national newspapers every few years, often exceeding 500 names at a time. For example, a headline in *Al-Nahar* in 2018 reads, 'The Lebanese University: More sectarian imbalance and nepotism. A list of 700 full-time faculty satisfies the parties by quotas' (*Al-Nahar*, 12 June 2018). Another article argues, 'sectarian groups and political parties are controlling the university...it is a "semi-farm", where they exercise all forms of control and exploitation' (*Al-Nahar*, 19 July 2014). A further opinion piece asserts, 'You can ask about any Dean and you will be told that they are backed by a specific political party just like if you were to ask about any Minister' (*Al-Nahar*, 12 June 2018). In response to these perceptions and

accusations, the university administration routinely denies the use of sectarian quotas. For example, in a meeting with students in February 2019, the Lebanese University president, Fouad Ayoub, said:

I have not promised anyone to establish a sectarian balance in the Lebanese University, first because I am not sectarian, and second because the Lebanese University is a national university that embraces all people based on their competencies... The appointments of directors belong to the law issued in 1966 and I receive nominations from the faculties. I will rely on competence first...and will not accept the appointment of any person who is not competent in order to achieve a sectarian balance (Lebanese University website 2019).

However, in interviews with current and former students and professors, and even with two former ministers of education, they are candid about the rise of political-sectarian influence in the Lebanese University in the post-war period. As one former minister of education asserts:

In terms of by-laws for choosing new deans, it has to come from the schools [faculties], so there is due process involved... when they're left alone they do what's best for the institution, for the university, but they're never left alone... So the Council of Ministers [the Cabinet] makes sure that the division is there, half Christian, half Muslim. Why the hell should it be like that? Let them all be Christian, let them all be Muslim, the best. That's one. Two, they [the Council of Ministers] distribute their folks, hence a lot of political favours which eventually ruins the quality.... I know what happens, I know how the discussion is engineered in the cabinet, it's purely political and nothing to do with higher education... but it's the law, you have to have a new law which says 'hands off' (Interview 52, former minister of education, 2000s).

A former professor at the first branch during the mid-1990s recalls her own dawning realisation of the extent to which the university was being drawn into the systemic logic of political-sectarian shares:

I tell you something, this is a joke, but it really happened. Maybe it was 1996 or 1997 or something like that, it was in the 90s... I was standing with a good colleague, a friend of mine... He was telling me about the names of the new directors and deans for the next year. And definitely it's a political cook and a political kitchen, definitely. And he was saying, for example, this man is going to take that faculty. And I asked him, but why? And he said because he belongs to this sect. I said, why? He said because this faculty is for the Sunni, that one for the Shia, and this one for the Druze. I know this, but for the first time it was in front of me.

Referring to her own identity having been born in Jerusalem and raised as a Muslim by a Palestinian mother and Lebanese father of Druze descent, she continues:

I told him I want to ask you something. If they wanted to appoint me as a director, for example - and he said, yes, what's your question, he understood it - would they consider me a Druze or a Muslim? He said you, a Druze or a *Muslim*? *You are nothing but a Palestinian!* [laughs] *We laughed so much, those were his exact words 'intī mish shī!'* *'You are nothing!'* *'Intī mish shī bass falastanyya!'* [*'You are nothing but a Palestinian!'*] And that's how they look at you so you will never be appointed. And definitely they know that I have a Lebanese passport, definitely they know, but this means nothing, it's not important to them. Because my feelings, my work, my writings...I am Palestinian (Interview 23).

Just as the politicisation of recruitment at the Lebanese University bulldozed through the nuances and multiplicity of Lebanese identities, a sense of unavoidable culpability in the system is conveyed in interviews with younger faculty who have been employed at the Lebanese University since the late 1990s. A current faculty member who studied for her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the Lebanese University, with consistently high grades and academic accolades, explains how she was eventually recruited in her department:

I knew that the Dean of the faculty didn't want to recruit me... somebody in the committee told my husband. They don't tell me in formal way that we won't recruit you, but by telephone they talk with my husband. My husband has a position in a sectarian political party and [he] tells me that there's something wrong in your recruitment. Ok, he told me, it's simple, I want to move my relation with another political party to recruit you against the will of the Dean. So I enter [the university] to teach... with this relation with a political party. My friend had a very good PhD and she didn't. Because she has no relationship. I am sorry to tell you this (Interview 22, LU professor, first branch, current).

Alongside the politics of recruitment, others point to the ongoing branching of the Lebanese University, which began during the civil war and has continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s within the framework of decentralisation. As one former professor at the first branch explains:

Since Ta'if, there was a lot of talk about administrative decentralisation... This increased the demands to open new branches, for example, opening a branch for the Faculty of Agriculture in Beqaa, or Faculty of Sciences in Nabatieh, or a new faculty in the North. Third, fourth and tenth [laughs], the logic of sectarian shares says that if the university wants to open a new branch in Nabatieh, which is a Muslim area, the university should also open a branch in Zahle, which is a Christian area (Interview 40).

Just five years after the branching decree of 1977, there were already 31 branches of the Lebanese University, rising to 47 branches by 2003 (Bashshur 2003), and 64 branches by 2019 (Lebanese University website, n.d.). While there is a need for some level of decentralisation to the regions, the rationale for continuing to duplicate faculties despite the university's chronic lack of financial resources, is both questionable and extremely difficult to challenge. The same professor goes on to



describe how the logic of sectarian shares has caught the university within a complex web that is linked to the bigger political system which relentlessly reproduces itself,

A few months ago, the president of the university announced the decision to appoint a director for the faculty of Social Sciences in Zahle, a Muslim director. Before, the director was Christian but there was no Christian professor that met the requirements. What happened? All the Christian deans, all of them objected... In Tripoli, the opposite happened. They appointed a Christian in the place of a Muslim and there were objections and strikes and 'we don't agree' and what not... the university is not able to play a role in the national unity as expected or imagined because it cannot jump over the political decisions and its sectarian dimensions (Ibid).

## 7.4 Struggles for university democracy

The struggles to defend the public university from both political interference and economic abandonment by the state have had variable outcomes over the course of the past thirty years. The trajectories of these movements also shed light on the barriers to university reform, along with the constraints on counter-hegemonic forms of activism among both faculty and students.

### 7.4.1 *Remobilising the professors' union*

As the civil war drew to a close, a fierce power struggle surfaced in the university around its future direction. A generation of professors, many of whom had been students at the Lebanese University in the 1960s and early 1970s, viewed the internal battles taking place as a struggle between democratic and anti-democratic forces inside the university. As one former professor describes:

The university was under feudal, sectarian control after the war. We tried during the 90s to counter this (Interview 49, LU professor, third branch, 1990s-2010s).

The League of Lebanese University Full-time Professors, referred to as '*al-Rābiṭa*' ('the League'), was at the forefront of this struggle.<sup>21</sup> Founded just before the start of the civil war in 1975, it was soon suspended following the eruption of hostilities (Interview 46, LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2000s). In 1992, in the context of dire economic conditions within and beyond the university, *al-Rābiṭa* was remobilised. According to one former professor, the union had two main aims:

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<sup>21</sup> League of Lebanese University Full-time Professors, *Rābiṭa al-Asātdha al-Jām'a al-Lubnānyya al-Mutafarighīn*, will henceforth be abbreviated to its common name, '*al-Rābiṭa*' ('the League').

It was versus anti-democratic forces in the university and at the same time wanted to improve employment conditions for professors' (Interview 49).

Throughout the 1990s, the professors' union regularly took on the Hariri government and eventually won major concessions, radically improving the salaries, pensions and benefits of full-time professors in the public university. Yet despite the successes on working conditions, the demands for the reform of the university were much more fraught. The wider context for trade union activism in this period faced government resistance and a palpable determination from the Syrian-Lebanese security apparatus to crush the channels of cross-sectarian labour unrest (Salloukh et al 2015, 70-87). Referencing the arrest of the leader of the General Workers Union, Elias Abu Rizek, a newspaper article in 1997 directly compares 'the assault on the General Workers Union and the degradation of the Lebanese University, placing it in its dreadful situation today' (*Al-Safir*, 6 April 1997). A former activist in the professors' union in the 1990s further explains:

The government, the Syrian interference, they were building what they call the security regime, in Arabic we say *al-nizām al-'amnī*... After the Ta'if Agreement, we created a body called Coordinating Committee with *al-ittihād al-'ummālī* [General Workers Union], the leader at that time was Abu Rizek. We used to fight together against this regime which was taking over the syndicate [trade union] movement.... we did a lot of things, marches, strikes, resisting... it was like we were fighting all of us together in order to save the university.

Former Lebanese University professor and union activist, Adnan El-Amine, identifies 'two generations' of *al-Rābiṭa*, marked by the ascendancy of a younger generation of faculty who were allied to the parties in government (*Al-Nahar*, 22 September 2018).<sup>22</sup> By the late 1990s, this younger generation assumed control of the union and the struggles for democratic reform in the university were eclipsed by a narrow focus on working conditions. A number of respondents who were part of the earlier generation convey a sense that that the agenda for reforming the university was ultimately pacified by the state. As one professor asserts:

By the year 2000, debates about the reform of the university were off the table, nobody even talked about it anymore (Interview 43).

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<sup>22</sup> Also see Adnan El-Amine's chapter, *Al-Jām'a al-Lubnāniyya taḥt waṭā' al-taḥlāt al-siyāsīyya* [The Lebanese University under the weight of political transformations], in Adnan El-Amine (2018b) *Siyar 'Ashr Jamī'āt Ḥakūmiyya 'Arabiyya* [Narratives of Arab Public Universities], Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

#### *7.4.2 Constraints on student activism*

Like the professors' union, the National Union of Lebanese University Students, which was established in 1970, disbanded after the onset of civil war in 1975. Unlike the professors' union, however, student representation in the Lebanese University was not revived on a national level after the war but organised on a branch basis. As each branch tends to be coloured by a particular political-sectarian affiliation, the student councils also came to reflect these influences, to the extent that in some of the interviews, students describe academic faculties as 'belonging' to different political parties (Interview 8, LU student, first branch, 2000s; Interview 34, LU student, first branch, current).

Student activists without an affiliation to one of the dominant political parties describe having to mask their activities as 'cultural events' for fear of being banned or harassed by the student councils (Interview 8; Interview 34). A student in the first branch asserts that 'you will get beaten' if you are known to be politically active but not affiliated to one of the main political parties (Interview 34). A student in the second branch who was involved in organising a 'secular students group' in the early 2000s recalls, 'apparently it was the first secular group ever and we had loads of fights and problems, they would say something to us like "we are Branch 2 we don't have seculars here"' (Interview 45). Reflecting on the constraints on student activism since the end of the civil war, a professor at the second branch and former student at the first branch says:

We said in the past a policeman was not allowed to go into the campus. Nowadays there is no need for policemen, the students who belong to this party or to that militia they take care of their colleagues, they made them stop talking or having any activity, it's the force of the militia now. It's so unfortunate to reach this point, we're talking about higher education, I'm talking about the elite of our young generation, and if the elite doesn't accept the other person to say one word, how would he accept him as a citizen, having different kinds of ideas in the society? I don't blame the president of the university, I blame the other people around who are supporting those students telling them go and do whatever you like, we are behind you. And here even the president of the university cannot interfere and stop that (Interview 33).

In 2007, the Lebanese University administration banned student elections in response to rising political instability in the country and violent clashes on another university campus. While the decision was taken to prevent violence on campus and protect the security of students, it effectively marked the end of student democracy within the public university for the next twelve years. In the absence of student elections, the political parties that held faculty branches in 2007 have continued to represent them on the basis of 'inherited control'. Since then, students have demanded the

reinstatement of student elections, with regular protests on campus over recent years. In 2019 the university president announced that student elections would finally be reinstated at the start of the new academic year (Lebanese University website 2019).

Despite constraints on student activism outside of the dominant political parties, current and former students in this period also emphasise the ways in which they find ways to organise. As one respondent who graduated from the first branch in the mid-2000s explains:

Always, always, always, there are different groups, with no support... Not only we don't have support, there is pressure on you to stop your activities... with all the pressure, you still find, until now, groups are working in the Lebanese University and challenging everybody (Interview 8).

As well as making use of online platforms to connect with students at other branches, a student in the first branch describes how she and other student activists began to think more spatially in order to circumvent controls over different faculties and reassert the shared use of campus spaces. She resurrects the idea of the *agora*, unintentionally echoing the term used by another respondent to describe the Lebanese University some fifty years earlier (see Chapter 5, p.123).

We started doing cultural events, but we changed the way which we conducted events. So rather than having a book fair, we would have students make speeches, make open seminars in the gardens...we went out of the classes, out of the halls... we changed the actual panorama of what a university is.

[Why did you do that?]

Well the first incentive was that the faculties were torn apart. So we said space outside is the only way to unify them...The administration faculty is controlled by Hizbollah, we are controlled by Harakat Amal. But we are in the same building and there is a small dome in between the place that is given for the administration faculty and the place that is given for political science. And under this small dome, there is something like an *agora*, you know? It's the only one that connects the two, it's symbolic, being this space of interaction (Interview 34).

Some months after the end of data collection for this research, in October 2019, a popular uprising erupted across Lebanon. While events are still unfolding, the protests were widely perceived to be in response to the deepening economic crisis and corruption of state institutions since the end of the civil war. Demonstrations included mass student walk-outs from schools and universities across the country, while professors from different universities held public 'teach-outs' in different cities to debate the issues that were mobilizing protests (*Jadaliyya*, 18 October 2019). At the Lebanese

University, which emerged as ‘a major site of mobilization’ (Ibid), campus scenes that were hardly imaginable just months previously, had a dual significance. As a public institution, the demands of protesters were simultaneously directed internally, towards the university administration, as well as externally to the government (*Al-Fanar Media*, 29 October 2019). At a sit-in at the first branch, for example, students demanded ‘transparency, accountability and participation’ in university decision-making. In street demonstrations across the country, thousands of students marched under banners such as: ‘Universities of Lebanon Unite’, ‘Students and teachers at the forefront of the revolution – Tripoli’ and ‘From the Lebanese University to the Nation’ (see Appendix 2, selection of images).

## 7.5 Contested meanings of ‘public’

In 2019, there are over 80,000 students in the Lebanese University (Lebanese University website, n.d.). It is not only the largest university, but one of the largest public institutions in the country. It also remains the only publicly funded university in Lebanon and has continued to provide higher education to those in society who could not otherwise afford it. When asked why they had chosen to study at the Lebanese University, almost all respondents, across the generations, replied that they had limited options due to their financial circumstances. Some also added that having been educated in the public school system, their foreign language skills were not strong enough to enter leading private universities that teach in English or French. Respondents enrolled in subjects requiring competitive entrance examinations further highlighted that the Lebanese University has remained among the most prestigious institutions in their field, in contrast to the perception of declining quality in non-selective faculties (Interview 45; Interview 34; Interview 22; Interview 16; Interview 17).

The issue of affordability also intersects with gender in the data. Female student enrolment in the Lebanese University continued to climb throughout the pre-war and civil war periods until gender parity was reached by 1991 (see Figure 4, last column). By the mid-1990s, the proportion of female students had begun to overtake that of male students, a trajectory that has continued throughout the 2000s. In 2018-2019, out of a total of 80,874 students enrolled in the Lebanese University, some 70% of them are women (see Figure 4, last column). Largely unexamined in the wider literature, some respondents attribute this feminisation of the Lebanese University student body to the deregulation of higher education in the 1990s and 2000s, and the possibility that families with limited means are choosing to send their sons rather than daughters to private universities (Interview 44; Interview 38, LU professor, first branch). Others point to the fact that many young

men from poorer backgrounds may not be going to university at all (Interview 50, LU professor, first branch).

**Figure 4: Lebanese University students by gender and nationality 1964-2018**

Year	male	female	Lebanese	Non-Lebanese	TOTAL	% female students
1964-1965*	3820	573	4393	814	5207	13%
1969-1970*	6649	1754	8403	1322	9725	21%
1970-1971*	7445	2315	9760	1928	11688	24%
1974-1975	10852	4870	13503	2219	15722	31%
1979-1980	23130	18554	38769	2915	41684	45%
1980-1981	18368	15569	31646	2291	33937	46%
1981-1982	15190	13858	27044	2004	29048	48%
1982-1983	14312	12835	25786	1361	27147	47%
1991-1992	19105	19103	35012	3196	38208	50%
1992-1993	19889	20037	37248	2678	39926	50%
1993-1994	16918	19585	32517	3986	36503	54%
1994-1995	19702	22005	36118	5589	41707	53%
1996-1997	22616	27139	44645	5110	49755	55%
1997-1998	22225	29436	46784	4877	51661	57%
1999-2000	25087	37515	57666	4936	62602	60%
2000-2001	27568	43482	65564	5486	71050	61%
2014-2015	32742	37252	65230	4764	69994	53%
2015-2016	21442	51076	68778	3740	72518	70%
2016-2017	22075	53881	72257	3699	75956	71%
2017-2018	23602	55758	75485	3875	79360	70%

Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD) \*Figures by gender exclude non-Lebanese students.

Further complicating the narrative of accessibility is the marginalisation of refugees in higher education. One in four people in Lebanon is now a refugee, yet just 6% of Palestinian and Syrian refugees in the country access higher education (Fincham 2020). In 2017-18, 4.8% of students at the Lebanese University were non-Lebanese, a figure that can be assumed is largely made up of Palestinian and Syrian students, most of whom are refugees (see Figure 4).<sup>23</sup> Significantly, Palestinian students are free to enter the public university and pay the same

<sup>23</sup> There is no breakdown of 'non-Lebanese' students by nationality or refugee status. While Palestinian students at the Lebanese University are all refugees, Syrian students are not. Prior to 2011, there were higher numbers of Syrian students at the Lebanese University but they were not, of course, refugees. It can be assumed that after the eruption of war in Syria in 2011, an increasing proportion of Syrian students at the Lebanese University are refugees.

nominal registration fees as their Lebanese counterparts, in contrast to their exclusion from public primary and secondary schools. As one Palestinian student reflects:

Unlike all Lebanese laws which discriminate against Palestinians, in the Lebanese University a Palestinian is treated like Lebanese...we actually pay less than a Lebanese does because we don't get health insurance (Interview 34).

However, the same respondent goes on to describe a common perception among her peers that the Lebanese University is a hostile environment for Palestinians:

Generally for me I wasn't afraid of entering, but observing my fellow students we were only two Palestinians among a 500 student class... Because Palestinians would rather not enter the Lebanese University. And the reason for that is since the Lebanese University views everyone in a sectarian lens they are always afraid of being viewed in a sectarian way.

Another respondent also points to a wariness among Palestinians to enter the Lebanese University, though she qualifies that this varies significantly according to different university branches:

Palestinians fear to access the Lebanese University in unfriendly areas... The Lebanese University is not located in Beirut, it's in Dahiyeh [southern suburb of Beirut], which is not friendly to Palestinians. Tripoli and Saida are better (Interview 2, director of Palestinian civil society organisation).

The interview and newspaper data for this period throw up a range of questions relating to the meaning of a 'public' university in a stratified and divided society. While issues of affordability and accessibility are prominent, the data also shows that these alone are not sufficient. For example, even while reflecting on the accessibility of the public university for students from poorer backgrounds, a former professor at the first branch insists:

Sure, but it's locked, it's not open, it's not open... And if you compare since the '90s, let's say the public debate in certain [private] universities, like the Jesuit University, or the American University, or Balamand University, the public debate is much more *vivace* than in the Lebanese University. The Lebanese University is now a series of ghettos (Interview 19, LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2010s).

A common refrain in many of the interviews is that for the Lebanese University to change the country's entire political-sectarian system needs to be transformed. Some point to the fact that proposals for reforming the Lebanese University have been in circulation for almost thirty years and that their implementation proved impossible in the post-Ta'if organisation of the state. As one

student says, 'If you restructure the university you will make a revolution!' (Interview 26, LU student, first branch, 2010s). Another says, 'a better Lebanese University would be a better country and a better country would be a better Lebanese University' (Interview 5). A former professor concurs:

To have the answer you have to analyse our system, the political system, which is based on belonging to religion and belonging to persons, to parties. Our nation, our Lebanon, which should be the only reference, doesn't exist...our Council of Ministers who assign, who appoint the president of the Lebanese University, is also part of the same system. For example, the current one, or the one before, or after, they belong to their party, to their religion, not to the society (Interview 39, LU professor, second branch, 1980s-2000s).

Within the official language of the Lebanese University, it is still possible to discern the themes of publicness that have defined the university's history, demonstrating the ways in which historical commitments to the public university have been bound up with the public sphere. For example, a banner on the Lebanese University website, in honour of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university, implicitly echoes the pre-civil war movement behind its embattled rise. While the English and French versions, 'National pride, international scope' and 'Couvrir le Liban, s'ouvrir au monde', speak to new internationalising trends in higher education, a literal translation of the Arabic motto is 'University of the Nation, University of Citizens' (*jām'a al-waṭan, jām'a al-muwaṭanīn*) (Lebanese University website, n.d.). The stated mission of the Lebanese University further refers to 'deepening social and national integration' (Ibid), while a senior Lebanese University administrator emphasises principles of access, liberty and democracy in higher education:

Our mission is for the freedom of higher education, public higher education...democracy of higher education. And we don't have any difference between any religion, any religion or social [background], this is the mission of the Lebanese University.

Another respondent dismisses the use of these older discourses as little more than 'salt' to flavour current rhetoric, arguing that they only thinly disguise the ongoing complicity of the university and its professor and student unions in the current political-sectarian order (Interview 43). For over the course of sixty years, a major narrative arising from the data is one of loss. In the first place this relates to the loss of the Lebanese University as a diverse and democratic institution that actively challenged exclusionary structures in society and in doing so not only contributed to long-term social and political change, but also forged a cross-class, cross-sectarian and cross-national arena on an unprecedented scale. The sense of loss also relates to the fact that these conditions could not be adequately revived after the civil war, while the longer history of the Lebanese University appears to



have been partially forgotten. At the same time, a wider current in society has come to assume that 'private' is inherently better than 'public'. As one recent graduate reflects:

It's not only the Lebanese University, even Lebanese TV, nobody looks at it. Anything Lebanese, or everything that's common is neglected. Look to the public coast [beaches], or look to the public transportation... everything that's public is not really working (Interview 8).

Among the older generation of interview respondents, there are those who have dedicated their lives to the Lebanese University, sometimes over more than forty years. When one former leader in both the student and professor unions was asked how he saw the future of the Lebanese University he replied:

You are asking a question that keeps me worried every day. I dedicated my life to the Lebanese University. Ever since I was student in the '60s I think of the university every day and defend it. I had injuries in the head seven times from protests. If you go to my office you will find bookshelves full of statements, memories of *al-Rabita*, publications and magazines. We are pushing forward but reality is pulling us back (Interview 28).

Another former professor states:

Look, I am a fan of the Lebanese University. I am one of the builders of the Lebanese University. And it is my conviction that if we don't have a national university we cannot build a nation, cannot build belonging for people, or create the opportunities for fairness in access and quality of education (Interview 39).

Meanwhile a current student in the first branch explains her own efforts to recover a history of the Lebanese University that only a handful of her fellow students had ever heard about:

When I entered the Lebanese University... I started asking more questions about why is this the only national [public] university first of all, so my financial status pushed me into asking that. And why in this national university, which is presumably the university of the poor, why is it so fragmented? And when I read a bit about it, so I understood that there was a movement that led to it (Interview 34).

Across these varied perspectives is a relentless turning over of what the Lebanese University represents in wider society, in terms of access to higher education, bringing young people together or pushing them apart, and the university's evolving relationship with the state. In presenting the interview and newspaper data for this research, the last three chapters have narrated the twists and turns of the Lebanese University's trajectory over sixty years, between 1959 and 2019, conveying

distinct and overlapping processes of making and unmaking the university as a public sphere and ongoing struggles over publicness. The next chapter draws on this case material, in discussion with the theoretical literature, to address the research questions stated at the outset of this study on the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere.

## Chapter 8:

### Trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere

The trajectories of the Lebanese University over the past six decades offer a *longue durée* perspective on the evolving publicness of the university linked to processes of making and unmaking the university as a public sphere. In the previous three chapters, these trajectories were explored through a chronological presentation of the interview and newspaper data covering a period of sixty years, from the expansion of the Lebanese University 1959 to the end of data collection in 2019. In this chapter I address the three research questions that directly relate to the case study, identifying and discussing the evolving conditions of the Lebanese University as a public sphere, what happened to those conditions during the civil war, and the extent to which the university has recovered as a public sphere in the post-civil war period. Through this discussion of the data, in dialogue with public sphere theory, four key themes of ‘publicness’ emerge in relation to the university, whether through their presence, absence or ongoing struggles for realisation. These include difference, autonomy, accountability and domain. The wider significance of these four propositions for understanding the ‘publicness’ of universities will be discussed in the following concluding chapter.

#### 8.1 How did the Lebanese University contribute to the making of a public sphere?

Arising from the interview and newspaper data covering the 1960s and early 1970s there is a palpable explosion of the Lebanese University as a public sphere. Highlighting dynamics of difference and contestation within a distinct space that was autonomous yet linked to the state, the data reveals the making of a democratic publicness within the Lebanese University that was scarcely present elsewhere in society. The Lebanese University not only challenged *the* public sphere from a multiplicity of counter-hegemonic perspectives, but actively redefined it. In this way, the university was neither a universal public sphere in the Habermasian sense, nor was it a specific ‘counterpublic’ in Nancy Fraser’s (1990) theorisation. Crucially, the Lebanese University did not represent any particular interest group but contained a wide spectrum of interests, identities and standpoints, including those of the state itself. Negating the need to find consensus or agree upon a common identity, the conflicting currents within the Lebanese University enacted an alternative public sphere that countered multiple social and political exclusions in the wider public domain, exhibiting the characteristics of a ‘more comprehensive arena in which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity’ (Fraser 1990, 69).

### *8.1.1 The presence of difference*

If there is one theme that emerges from the case study data more forcefully than others, it is the significance of difference within the Lebanese University and the ways in which plurality and contestation are acknowledged and openly embraced. In the first place this relates to the diversity of the university community during the 1960s and early 1970s and the multiplicity of identities, social backgrounds and conflicting political ideas among students, faculty and staff. It also relates to the significance of this plurality within the university for challenging the layers of domination and exclusion in wider public life, exemplifying key critiques of classical public sphere theory (Benhabib 1996; Fraser 1990; Honig 1993; Mouffe 2013). While Habermas's (1989) original conception of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth century Europe emphasised conditions of liberty and rationality through unfettered conditions for communication and opinion formation, the egalitarian critiques of Habermas have rejected his underlying premise of 'bracketing' unequal societal relations through elevating freedom of access to the public sphere (Fraser 1990). Pointing to issues of gender, race, class and other forms of subordination in stratified societies, critics of Habermas offer a range of agonistic perspectives on the role of conflict and counter-hegemony as the 'life blood' of democracy in plural societies, debunking the liberal focus on consensus as the rationale of public spheres (Mouffe 2013; Honig 1993; Fraser 1990).

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the Lebanese University brought young people together from all around the country, enabling interaction across social barriers of class, sect, gender and region, in ways that were unparalleled elsewhere in society. A number of respondents who were students during this era connect their own emerging sense of identity to their experiences of encountering difference. As one former student describes, 'It was a great feeling because I was coming from south Lebanon and it was my first experience of other people, people from other areas' (Interview 12, LU student, 1960s). On first glance, such descriptions might be interpreted through the lens of contact theory, which focuses on reducing prejudice through interpersonal contact between majority and minority groups (Allport 1954). However, the emphasis of contact theory on changing individual attitudes rather than addressing systemic structures is strongly countered in the data, which illustrates that the bigger significance of the Lebanese University was precisely in its interrogation of unequal power relations.

It is a striking feature of the interview data that respondents often relay their experiences in a combination of broad sociological, collective and personal terms. As one former student from south Lebanon describes, 'the Shi'a were at the bottom of the educational and social ladder and the percentage of illiteracy was high. We did not have higher education opportunities until the Lebanese University' (Interview 40, LU student, 1960s-1970s). Another from the north of Lebanon states, 'We came from the middle class, we came from the village. If it wasn't for the Lebanese University we wouldn't be able to go to university' (Interview 28, LU student, 1960s-1970s). At the same time, the data shows that the expansion of access to higher education was not only linked to processes of socioeconomic change but was also explicitly connected to participation in public life and having a political voice. A key critique of Habermas's universal public sphere, which assumes an equal basis for free and rational debate, is that some voices are invariably louder and more powerful than others (Benhabib 1996), while consensus-making is always achieved through relations of dominance (Mouffe 2013). The relations of power within Lebanese public life were particularly significant for the Shi'a and also for women as groups that were drastically underrepresented in politics and the state bureaucracy, in large part due to their historical exclusion from higher education. As one respondent says of the Shi'a:

If you have a look on the discussion about the Shi'a rights during the 1940s and 1950s, you see that always the answer to the Shi'a demands was 'you don't have people prepared enough to take on high responsibilities in the state administration, and that's why you are not represented enough in this administration, that's the reason' (Interview 19, LU student, 1960s).

While many factors were at play elsewhere in society, from the unionisation of agricultural and urban workers (Abisaab 2010; Traboulsi 2007) to the rise of ideology and mass politics (El-Khazen 2000), the Lebanese University became a publicly visible arena for sections of society that had hitherto been marginalised in public life. Significantly, however, the university was more than a 'counterpublic' in the sense that it did not represent a single set of interests but rather multiple, conflicting positions in society. The Lebanese University therefore emerged as a significant field of contestation, tackling questions of domination and exclusion in public life relating to identity, social class and regional inequalities. This field of contestation incorporated the interests of the state as well as different elements within society. This is partly expressed in the notion that the Lebanese University represented a 'little Lebanon'. As one former professor explains in relation to the Faculty of Education, 'if you concentrate a little bit on that case, you find out how much that faculty was a micro picture of Lebanon' (Interview 12). In a statement to the press in early 1975, just two months before the outbreak of civil war, the president of the Lebanese University, Edmond Naim, explicitly

links the multiple differences of identity, class and politics in the country with the essential public purpose of the Lebanese University:

the Lebanese University, with its students and professors, serve as a miniature image of the Lebanese community, on whose campus live Christians, Moslems, Phalangists, Communists, the wealthy and the destitute'... Those students had the opportunity for a dialogue for at least four years... The university was therefore rendering the greatest service to Lebanon (*The Daily Star*, 20 February 1975).

To some degree, the data suggests an evolving discourse of 'unity in diversity' within the Lebanese University, which was simultaneously extended to reimagining the wider public arena (Hall 1993). In bringing together diverse elements of society within a common institutional space, the 'unity' of the national university was explicitly linked to the unity of the 'nation'. As one former student in this era expressed, the Lebanese University enabled 'the meeting of different political opinions in Lebanon. From extreme left to right. So we believed that...this meeting of streams should contribute to the development of belonging to our Lebanese nation' (Interview 39, LU student, 1960s). Other respondents talk about the presence of difference at the Lebanese University as a creative force in itself, linking it to the flourishing of intellectual, cultural and political ideas. As one former student says, 'I am from south Lebanon and there is somebody from the north of Lebanon... and this mix, really it was an occasion to produce new ideas and new political parties' (Interview 12). Another says, 'The atmosphere of diversity was creative... Many cultural figures came from the Lebanese University' (Interview 32). Above all, the presence of difference in the public university was not constructed as a 'problem' to be bracketed or overcome. On the contrary, the conditions of difference and contestation were recognised as an essential basis of its democratic legitimacy (Mouffe 2013).

### *8.1.2 Democracy as conflictual*

Chantal Mouffe's (2013) theorisation of agonistic politics asserts that conflict in plural societies is not a danger to democracy but a basic condition of its existence. According to Mouffe, the liberal preoccupation with consensus-making not only results in a 'post-politics' that suppresses difference by marginalising weaker, counter-hegemonic voices, but also leads to more essentialist forms of identification that ultimately risk destroying democracy. Within this conception of 'radical democracy' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), democratic institutions are vital arenas for agonistic conflict in plural societies, enabling 'the continuous *contestation* of public purposes' as well as providing 'a means of *containing* the moral ambivalence of citizens' (Hoggett et al. 2005, 168, my emphasis).

‘Containment’ in this sense is not about the suppression of conflict but rather enabling agonistic conflict through democratic outlets, avoiding a descent into antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013, 8).

In the persistent interplay of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests in the 1960s and early 1970s, the data reveals the Lebanese University to be both an object and a space for the intensive contestation and democratic containment of opposing points of view. From a political economy perspective, this related to competing class interests in the provision of higher education, clashing ideological positions on the role of the state and opposing conceptions of nationhood. From a political theory perspective, the contestation and containment of agonistic relations within the Lebanese University was itself a dimension of the making of the university as a public sphere. Bonnie Honig’s (2017) theorisation of ‘public things’, which draws upon Hannah Arendt’s notion of ‘action in concert’ and D.W. Winnicott’s conception of a ‘holding environment’, helps to shed light on the inherent contestability of the Lebanese University as both as an *object* of public debate and a *space* for agonistic contestation. By bringing different elements of society together in the growing movement for the democratisation of higher education, the public university simultaneously facilitated the conditions for ‘action in concert’, whilst also providing a ‘holding environment’ for the contestation and containment of society’s deepest conflicts.

Resonating with the theorisation of agonistic relations as a condition of democracy, respondents repeatedly refer to the conflict of ideas within the Lebanese University in an emphatically positive, even nostalgic way. One former student says, ‘We were so happy at that time. Of course we had our clashes and so on, but always in a reasonable and cultured manner’ (Interview 23, LU student, 1960s). Another former student explains, ‘it was really a healthy, for me, healthy and natural that some conflict will evolve’ (Interview 12). With the perspective of historical hindsight, such references to ‘reasonable’ and ‘healthy’ conflict also contain the spectre of Mouffe’s (2005) extended argument that the alternative to *agonism* is a descent into *antagonism* between enemies who seek to destroy each other. Right up until the eve of civil war in 1975, clashes between Phalangist and Syrian Nationalist students were reported to have been resolved through a pact negotiated by the student union agreeing to ‘Resort to a democratic dialogue at the university in professing the views of any group’ and ‘Denounce any group which disturbs the peaceful atmosphere and resist it whatever the consequences’. After signing the agreement in February 1975, Phalangist and Syrian Nationalist representatives ‘later shook hands and embraced’ (*The Daily Star*, 18 February 1975). Just weeks later, on 13 April, the Lebanese civil war erupted and the agonistic environment of the public university rapidly disintegrated.

On the one hand agonistic conflict in the Lebanese University is valued as an expression of the free exchange of ideas. Paradoxically, and perhaps more significantly, the common occurrence of conflict is also remembered as a potent illustration of *unity* in that it did not break the integrity, or ‘holding environment’, of the common university space (Honig 2017). As one former student activist reflects, ‘there was a public debate, permanently, inside the university, and sometimes violent. But the debate was there, and the people were together. It was the same arena, the same *agora*’ (Interview 19). In the context of plurality, contestation and perpetual interaction of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests within the university environment, the presence of difference emerges as a defining feature in the making of the Lebanese University as a public sphere.

### 8.1.3 ‘Public’ as a contestable terrain

In higher education, the meanings of ‘public’ and ‘state’ are frequently conflated. Yet as John Dewey (1927) observes, public is vitally distinct from the state as well as connected to it, while Habermas (1989) also locates the public sphere as an arena or realm *between* civil society and the state. It is therefore something of an irony that while public sphere theory is peppered with spatial references to ‘domain’, ‘arena’, ‘realm’ and even ‘space’, it is often completely detached from the theorisation of public space, leading to a ‘lost geography of the public sphere’ (Low and Smith 2006, 7). The ‘places and spaces of publicness’ (ibid, 7) are further obscured by monolithic understandings of ‘the state’ and an ‘unhelpful’ dichotomy between state and civil society (Traboulsi 2005), which ignores the role of ‘public things’ in binding and unbinding us as citizens (Honig 2017). Given these multiple conceptual obfuscations, Doreen Massey’s (2005) propositions for a relational understanding of space and place help to explicate why and how the Lebanese University emerged as such a significant public domain in the 1960s and early 1970s. Carving out a distinct space between society and the state, the publicness of the Lebanese University was both an object of public contestation and a terrain of open-ended struggle.

There is a detectable energy, even euphoria around the emergence of the Lebanese University as a public sphere in the 1960s and early 1970s. This is not to suggest, however, that this was because the public university was intrinsically good or democratic. On the contrary, this period is variously referred to in the interview and newspaper data as a ‘struggle’, ‘educational crisis’ and ‘conflict’, reaching epic and sometimes violent proportions. Jessica Gerrard (2015) points out that the rise of public higher education on a more global scale came out of long periods of struggle and warns against depoliticising the public dimensions of higher education, which are not a given but invariably hard won. Bonnie Honig (2017) also emphasises that public infrastructure may be built on histories



of exploitation and exclusion as well as serving to segregate, oppress and marginalise different social groups. The value of public things is therefore not in their inherent 'goodness' but in their contestability:

[Public things] furnish a world in which we encounter others, share the experience of being part of something that is larger than ourselves, and work with others, acting in concert, to share it, democratize access to it, to better it, to desegregate it, to maintain it... Public things are things around which we constellate, and by which we are divided and interpellated into agonistic democratic citizenship. They are not innocent or pure. They are political (Honig 2017, 36).

In this regard, the Lebanese University was not only a *site* of student and faculty unrest, it was also the *object* of intensive contestation between students, faculty, wider civil society and the state. Covering a wide spectrum of political and ideological differences, the mounting contestability of the Lebanese University by the late 1960s and early 1970s encompassed a range of opinions and preoccupations relating to questions of social justice, the role of the state and the meaning of a Lebanese public. Highlighting that 'publicness' is both distinct from and connected to the state, as well as inherently political, one former student activist on the Left recalls, 'We thought it was a public university and that it was part of the public education system. And we were somehow trying to promote, I mean our political action even, was trying to promote this sector...So it was a university linked to the country, and to the society of the country. This is how we saw it' (Interview 19).

In carving out a distinct space between society and the state, the Lebanese University student movement extended the significance of their movement for developing public higher education to much broader questions of democracy, accountability and the wider public interest. At a sit-in on Hamra Street during the largest ever mobilisation of students in the strike of 1971, a newspaper report quotes a speech by a student leader who contrasts 'the officials' Lebanon', representing 'ignorance and nepotism', and '*our* Lebanon which looks forward to new and open horizons based on genuine human objectives.' As 2000 protesters sang the national anthem, he insisted that the students were 'the soldiers of Lebanon and the defenders of its democracy' (*The Daily Star*, 24 March 1971). A statement by the National Union of Lebanese University Students during the same strike also 'emphasized that the student demands could not be separated from the public interests' (*The Daily Star*, 23 March 1971). The state's perpetual ambivalence towards the country's only public university eventually pitched it in opposition to one of the largest social movements in Lebanon's history. The data shows that public higher education was not simply 'provided' by the

state, but fought for over generations of conflict with successive governments. This is significant for two reasons. It both underlines the conceptual distinction between 'public' and 'state' and demonstrates that the 'publicness' of the Lebanese University was continuously produced by interrelations that were very often conflictual (Mouffe 2000).

Doreen Massey's (2005, 9) relational perspective on space helps to understand the Lebanese University, in all its plurality, as the product of interrelations 'from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny'. While the emergence of '*al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*' ('the national university') came out of interrelations within Lebanese society, the prominent discourses of state-building, class struggle and anti-imperialism in the data are also linked to a more transnational movement of ideas. For example, the developmentalist model of the Lebanese University, championed by President Fouad Chehab in the 1960s, is recognisably linked to a global rise of public higher education in the era of independence from colonial rule, alongside ideas of the welfare state and a new 'democratic complex' (Mamdani 2007; Holmwood 2017). At the same time, the vibrancy of ideas circulating in the university in this period, particularly those associated with the emergence of a 'new left', attracted hundreds of professors to the Lebanese University from across Lebanon and beyond. Respondents cite the influence of the post-1967 Palestinian revolutionary movement in Lebanon and direct connections with Paris in the era of 1968. Due to the constant flow of Lebanese University graduates who studied for their PhDs in France and came back to teach at the Lebanese University, students and professors actively contributed to 'carrying' transnational ideas across time and space. As one former student explains:

There was in our time a spirit of revolt... thinking politically, doing something different, it is an impact, it's not the feeling only, it is substance... because in France at that time after '68, there were ideas, new ideas, and shifts in political thought, because students and faculty came back from France at that time to Lebanon, and [there was] this kind of osmose between France and Beirut and Paris (Interview 12).

Writing twenty years before Pierre Bourdieu published *Homo Academicus* about the role of the university in 1968 (Bourdieu 1988), the Lebanese theorist, Mahdi 'Amil (1968), similarly traces the ways in which the university is intimately bound up with societal relations. Himself an example of the transnational movement of ideas, having studied in France and taught in Algeria after the war of independence, he joined the Lebanese University in 1976. Rejecting the idea that the university can be insulated from society as an 'ideological view with classist connotations' (ibid, 21), 'Amil insists that 'the Lebanese University is a social institution defined within the social structure not in isolation from it...albeit with its own institutional autonomy and a distinct, relative independence' (ibid, 19).

However, unlike Bourdieu's conclusion that the French academy perpetually reproduces social stratification, 'Amil places greater emphasis on the simultaneous processes of reproduction and transformation within the Lebanese University, observable in its increasingly tumultuous relationship with the state. By challenging longstanding class-based, sectarian hegemonies in professions such as politics, law, engineering, medicine and academia itself, the Lebanese University found itself caught between popular mobilisation for social change on the one hand and a determined defence of the status quo on the other. This conflict played out within the university, as well as in parliament and in demonstrations on the streets.

At a strike at the Lebanese University in 1962, a student was reported as saying, 'We are university students, but with no university' (*Al-Nahar*, 10 April 1962, cited in Ghusayni 1974, 137). Over a period of almost two decades, a consistent aim of student and faculty movements was the demand for a campus. In part this was about practical necessity and the need for more classrooms and laboratories to cope with the rapid growth of the university. Perhaps more significantly, it was also about claiming space and recognition within the wider public sphere. As one former student insists, 'the struggle for the Lebanese University should be taken as a struggle over public space'. The idea of the public university as a physical and symbolic *space* in Lebanese society is recurrent in the data. In the first place, the 'politics of interrelations' forced the state to build and expand the public university (Massey 2005, 10). At the same time, few if any other spaces or places brought people together from all parts of society on such a large scale. The presence of difference meant that no single identity or narrative defined the university space; on the contrary, its heterogeneity not only produced the Lebanese University in the 1960s and 1970s, but also came to actively define it.

## 8.2 What were the impacts of civil war on the Lebanese University as a public sphere?

Within months of the outbreak of the civil war in April 1975, the Lebanese University experienced an abrupt loss of its conditions of difference and contestation. Rather than breaking down societal divisions, the university became a vehicle for segregation along the very same lines. No longer providing democratic 'containment' for the agonistic conflict of ideas and ideologies, the university was drawn into the production and consolidation of 'non-negotiable moral values [and] essentialist forms of identification' (Mouffe 2013, 7). It was engulfed by the territorialisation of space and place as different militias sought to control university branches, demolishing conditions of institutional autonomy and accountability. At the same time, the defence of university autonomy is evident in the daily resistances of professors and administrators, sometimes under the threat of extreme violence.

An enduring determination to develop and advance the public university is also illustrated in the establishment of the first public school of medicine, which retained a commitment to principles of diversity by actively rebuilding coordination between the different branches of the university. Ultimately, however, these efforts were no match for the wider degeneration of the university as a public sphere and it was only towards the end of the civil war, marked by a peace agreement that specifically invoked the role of the public university, that many dared to hope that the publicness of the Lebanese University might be recovered.

### *8.2.1 The loss of difference*

In 1976 the Lebanese University opened a second branch in east Beirut to enable Christian students and professors to reach the university without fear of being killed, a move which was later ratified by the 'Branching Decree' of June 1977. While created by necessity, the division in Beirut effectively split the university along political-sectarian lines and paved the way for further branching around the country. There is a powerful sense of loss that comes through the data covering this period, which is primarily attributed to the moment of partition in 1977. As one former student activist in the 1960s says, 'So the university from this date onwards, it lost everything' (Interview 10, LU student, 1960s). Another student who moved to the second branch in 1976 reflects, 'what we thought was temporary became permanent' (Interview 33, LU student, 1970s, and LU professor, second branch, current). The same respondent goes on to say, 'it was really a loss, a loss for the freedom of opinion, for the variety of ideologies let's say, or variety of approaches to Lebanon as a country, to its future, its identity...all those things disappeared' (Ibid). On closer analysis, the theme of loss in the data not only relates to the division of the university but also to an impending sense of loss of a wider Lebanese public. As one professor stated to the press in 1976, the overwhelming attention devoted to the Lebanese University in the early months of the war was not because it faced significantly more challenges than other universities in the country, but because it had effectively 'become the symbol of the unity of Lebanon' (*Al-Nahar*, 26 April 1977). For many, the loss of difference in the Lebanese University was inextricably connected with a loss of national unity.

At the same time, there was also significant support for establishing a second branch of the Lebanese University in east Beirut. The data shows that while some saw the establishment of a second branch as an emergency measure, others seized it as an opportunity to recast the public university within a Lebanese nationalist frame. Far from being conceived as a temporary solution, by 1977 proponents of the new branch were already proclaiming, 'we're not ready to give up an inch of it' (*Al-Nahar*, 14 May 1977), 'the second university is here to stay' (Ibid), and 'the gates of hell will

not be able to break it down' (*Al-Nahar*, 11 May 1977). Among the most prominent protagonists for a 'new' Lebanese University were the leaders of the Lebanese Front, including the Minister of Education Camille Chamoun, and former president of the Lebanese University, Fouad al-Boustani.<sup>24</sup> While arguments for a 'new' Lebanese University invoked liberal values of autonomy, freedom, choice and decentralisation, the underlying desire to wrest control of the university from other political trends is unmistakable. As one student spokesperson exclaimed in 1977, 'terrorist groups [took] control of the university' and 'transformed it into a place for terrorist knowledge' (*Al-Nahar*, 11 May 1977).

Taking up Chantal Mouffe's theorisation, the loss of difference within the Lebanese University signalled the descent from an agonistic struggle of ideas into an antagonistic battle for existence, dominance and control. One former student in the second branch in east Beirut describes how many of his peers joined the fighting, 'because they felt their existence is threatened so there is no place now for arguments or ideology or whatever, at least we have to survive first' (Interview 33). He goes on to recall, 'It was one sound, one voice. The variety of opinions disappeared' (Ibid). A former professor in the first branch in west Beirut concurs, 'So now we don't talk about so many different ideas, generally speaking...it was not about different ideas, it was more than that' (Interview 23). The sudden shift from agonistic to antagonistic relations within and beyond the university is palpable in the data. What had previously been framed as difference of opinion and perspective was transformed into a struggle for survival and control. The interrelations and cross-sectarian mobilisations that had produced the university space in the pre-civil war period was replaced by a new homogeneity that did not allow for difference or contestation. Speaking of the two university branches in Beirut, one former professor states that, 'from 1976 until now, it is a matter of communitarian divide' (Interview 44, LU professor, second branch, 2000s-2010s).

### *8.2.2 Dismantling and defending university autonomy*

A president of the Lebanese University during the civil war, George Tohme, records in his memoir how the independent governance structure of the University Council was disbanded by the same decree that had ratified the partition of the university in 1977. Henceforth, all decision-making power was transferred to the university president in direct coordination with the government. Like

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<sup>24</sup> Founded in 1976, in opposition to the leftist, pan-Arabist and pro-Palestinian Lebanese National Movement (LNM), the Lebanese Front was the umbrella organisation for Christian Lebanese nationalist parties and militias during the civil war. It was led by prominent Christian political figures and intellectuals, including Camille Chamoun, Pierre Gemayel and former president of the Lebanese University, Fouad al-Boustani.

the branching of the university in Beirut, it was implemented as a necessary emergency measure, as council members could no longer easily meet. However, it interacted with the dismantling of university autonomy by external politicians and militias, along with the breakdown of the state itself and the cessation of the rule of law. The sense of collapsing institutional authority is captured by one former professor who says: 'there was no university council, no authority, no government at all, only the bombardment' (Interview 39).

The governance structures that did remain, such as faculty councils, were inexorably drawn into the myriad allegiances and divisions created by the war. For example, a faculty director at the second branch in east Beirut recalls how he lost his position following the assassination of Lebanese Forces commander and president-in-waiting, Bashir Gemayel, in 1982 (Ibid). His clarification that he was not ideologically disposed to Gemayel but dependent upon him to protect the basic functioning of the department highlights the extent to which university administrators and professors had to tread a difficult line between defending the university's independence and protecting its ability to continue functioning throughout the war. As Tohme (1996, 4) explains in his memoir, 'It was the application of law and regulations in circumstances that sometimes abandoned all authority of the law... How not to allow them [the politicians and militia leaders] to impose their authority, and how to use them sometimes in applying laws and maintaining security within and around the campus'.

As the war moved into different phases over the course of fifteen years, changing actors vied for control over the different branches of the Lebanese University. In the early years of the war, parties on the Left who were allied to the Palestinian liberation movement were the dominant presence in the first branch of the university in west Beirut. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the power balance in the first branch shifted from the Left to sectarian political parties. A former student during the mid-1980s describes this shift saying, 'they inherited this university and they started to print their own audience, their own supporters in the Lebanese University, following the same way of the Communists and the Leftists and the Palestinian organisations. It was the same way but for me it was the enemy' (Interview 36, LU student, first branch, 1980s).

The idea of 'inheriting' control over the public university and enacting this control through the reproduction of political power, portrays the university as part of a territorial realm, even a kingdom. Evoking Habermas's transformation of the public sphere but in reverse, the Lebanese University was evolving from a site of democratic participation to something more akin to an absolutist regime or,

to be more accurate, multiple regimes. As a former student at the second branch in east Beirut describes, 'the militia, the Christian militia was like controlling all campuses... so this kind of freedom which we were used to before 1975, it disappeared. Now we have to talk the language of those who control the ground, who control the institution, who control the area as a whole' (Interview 33). In the context of changing power relations within the wider political environment, the role of the Syrian army, which entered Lebanon in 1976 as a peacekeeping force, also became a dominant force within the Lebanese University, as reflected in government and other public institutions. A former student at the first branch in Beirut describes how Syrian security forces would routinely enter the university to harass and arrest university students to the extent that there was no sense of an autonomous university space or boundary at all: 'Invaded? They are there anyway' (Interview 36).

The recollections of the breakdown of university autonomy are often visceral, carrying memories of lawlessness and fear. The involvement of large numbers of students as fighters in the war also strengthened the formidable presence of different militias in the university. As one former director in the second branch recalls, 'The first day of the exams they came with their guns. And they put the guns on the tables... Twenty to thirty per cent of the people, they belonged to the militias' (Interview 39). Other former professors recall being coerced by students and threatened with violence if they did not comply with demands. Yet even while highlighting the breakdown of university autonomy, such recollections also show that individuals sometimes risked their lives in defence of academic values. For example, one former professor insists that she never allowed the political affiliations of students to colour her opinion of them saying, 'I'm proud of this, I'm really proud of this. And I never allowed myself to be threatened, I don't care, whatever they say' (Interview 23). Another respondent recalls, 'I was threatened, many times, to be killed. I was threatened by left and right, same thing... Maybe it is a kind of craziness from me to do it, but I believed in that' (Interview 39).

This compulsion to defend the autonomy of the university, often at great personal risk, may partly be explained by the integrity of the individuals involved. However, the data also points to the fact that many of these professors came from the generation of students in the 1960s and early 1970s who were involved in the movement for democratising higher education. For some, there is a sense of having literally dedicated their lives to the public university, a conviction that continues across the pre-civil war, civil war and post-war eras. As one former student and professor at the university says, 'Until now I believe, for me the Lebanese University is my home, it is my conviction' (Ibid). Another says, 'Ever since I was student in the

'60s, I think of the university every day and defend it' (Interview 28). In this way, even as the civil war severely damaged the conditions of publicness at the Lebanese University, there also remained a strong 'sediment' of commitment to those conditions in the minds of those who had been involved in bringing them to fruition (Newman and Clarke 2009).

This sedimentary 'publicness' is particularly evident in the determination to continue developing the Lebanese University in the face of extreme adversity. For example, the work to establish a public school of medicine at the height of the civil war in the 1980s, was both a culmination of popular demands since the late 1960s and a direct challenge to continuing resistance within the government. A former faculty director in east Beirut recalls that the idea of a public school of medicine was so contentious at the highest political levels that Bashir Gemayel joked that it would cause a 'bloodbath' among his parliamentary colleagues (Interview 39). The former president of the Lebanese University, George Tohme (1996, 34), also recalls challenging the Ministers of Health and Education who did not support the proposal for a public school of medicine in the 1980s. His argument evokes a discourse associated the Chehab era and the idea of a welfare state,

If a senior official in any self-respecting state gets sick, he enters the best state hospital. Where is this hospital in Lebanon? Why do we not equip the hospital in Baabda well and make it a university hospital of high standards for poor and rich patients alike?

Crucially to this endeavour, the plans for a medical school at the Lebanese University resisted political-sectarian interference from the outset. As early as 1982, *Al-Nahar* reported that the intention of those behind it was that, 'There must be one medical school with one basis, one stem, one branch, and one section...it must not be dealt with through a mentality of partisan gains or regional gains' (*Al-Nahar*, 26 February 1982). The founding Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences also describes his insistence on the autonomy and unity of the three new schools of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy in relation to public health. While the schools were initially obliged to have different branches for the remainder of the war, the Dean ensured close coordination between them explaining, 'I conducted weekly meetings between the three directors, three Christians, three Muslims...because our product was the same, the person who will take care of the health of the people...You cannot play with this. For me it's a must. Maybe you can play with other things but not that' (Interview 39).

The breakdown of autonomy at the Lebanese University during the civil war was all-engulfing. At the same time, the data reveals numerous examples where university autonomy and academic freedom



were defended against the odds, sometimes as a matter of life and death. This is not to reify those instances but to question the motivations behind them. The data suggests that the determination to develop the Lebanese University over fifteen years of violent civil war and occasionally defend its autonomy in the face of extreme threat, was linked to an enduring and sedimented commitment to the university as a public sphere (Newman and Clarke 2009).

### *8.2.3 Territorialisation of university space*

Following the division of the university in Beirut in 1976 and subsequent branching of the university around the country, the Lebanese University became increasingly fragmented in relation to spatial geographies linked to political-sectarian power. From both physical and symbolic perspectives, the territorialisation of university branches and faculties by different political parties and militias destroyed the foundations of university autonomy and accountability, while spatialised political-sectarian controls over the university unravelled its meaning as a national, public institution. The idea of '*al-jām'a al-waṭanyya*' ('the national university'), which had emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as an expression of unity, anti-imperialism and democratisation of higher education, remained a slogan on the Left but was drained of meaning. University buildings that had once powerfully represented spaces of publicness were now 'sectarian buildings' in the words of one former student and militia member in Beirut (Interview 36). Their physical presence demarcated territorial boundaries of control by different militias, while the symbolic presence of the university as an institution serving the whole of society cracked and splintered.

Conversely, in Tripoli, where popular demand for a northern branch of the Lebanese University predated the civil war, the campus retained a diverse student population and continued to function as a space of interaction between students from different backgrounds even in the midst of civil war. While this is not to suggest that the Tripoli branch was not also vulnerable to the breakdown of university autonomy, particularly in relation to the heavy presence of the Syrian army in the city as well as diverse militia groups, it did continue to exist as a diverse educational and social space. Echoing the conditions of difference in the wider university before 1975, a former student in Tripoli during the 1980s says, 'It was very divided outside, but the university brought people together... I didn't think about it at the time but looking back I feel this mix was very important' (Interview 18, LU student, third branch, 1980s). Reflecting on the regional significance of the northern branch of the Lebanese University another former student explains, 'Tripoli had always been away from the rest of the country' (Interview 5, LU student, third branch, 1990s). Infused with a historical narrative of challenging social inequalities on the periphery of economic and political power in Beirut, the

regionally located publicness of the Lebanese University in Tripoli remained at least partially intact throughout the years of the civil war.

While the territorialisation of university spaces through external political-sectarian interference was a common feature in this period, direct military attacks on Lebanese University buildings were rare. A notable exception is the Faculty of Science building in Hadath, which was occupied by the Israeli army in 1982 and later by Lebanese militias. Given the enduringly iconic status of the Faculty of Science building, which is sometimes referred to as the ‘mother faculty’ of the Lebanese University, there is very little reference to what happened there during the war, an absence which is reflected in the interviews (Nouredine 1992). Perhaps reflecting a wider state-driven agenda for ‘forgetting’ the traumas of war (Haugbolle 2010), there is little documentation of the ways in which the impacts of war on specific organisations, including the Lebanese University, contributed to the long-term fracturing of society (Bashshur 1988; Haugbolle 2011; Salloukh et al. 2015) .

### 8.3 Has the Lebanese University recovered as a public sphere?

The end of the civil war in 1990 was a historic moment of contingency for the future of the Lebanese University. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, issues of university autonomy, accountability, location and diversity were vigorously debated in the national newspapers. Even the Ta’if Peace Agreement of 1989 was unusually attentive to the urgency of reforming and investing in the public university, stating that ‘The conditions of the Lebanese University shall be reformed and aid shall be provided to the university, especially to its technical colleges’. Yet those who hoped to rebuild the democratic publicness of the Lebanese University in the post-war years soon found themselves at loggerheads with local-global forces pushing in the other direction. In the first place, the post-Ta’if redistribution of state institutions along communal lines, under Syrian tutelage until 2005, consolidated the logic of sectarian shares, including at the Lebanese University. At the same time, the neoliberal economic policies of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and successive post-war governments saw a steep decline in public spending on education, alongside the deregulation of higher education and rapid proliferation of for-profit private universities. The post-war sectarianisation and fragmentation of the Lebanese higher education sector, including its intensive stratification and the widening disparities between different institutions, has had manifold implications for the only public university in Lebanon.

#### *8.3.1 Local and global dynamics in changing university-state relations*

The relationship between the Lebanese University and the state in the post-civil war period is characterised by a combination of economic neglect on the one hand and high levels of political interference on the other. It is difficult to disentangle these concurrent processes of economic neglect and political interference from an overall perception, embedded in the data, of the abandonment of the Lebanese University as a democratic public institution. Further complicating this entanglement is the fact that the declining conditions of the Lebanese University in the 1990s and 2000s coincided with the rapidly diminishing publicness of universities on a global scale (Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012). Like many other post-war contexts in the 1990s and 2000s, the cuts to public spending on education in post-civil war Lebanon were accompanied by the deregulation of higher education and the flourishing of new private universities (Milton 2017). This ‘mushrooming’ of private universities led many to compare and contrast the burgeoning for-profit sector with the declining conditions of the Lebanese University (*Al-Hayat*, 19 February 1995; *Al-Nahar*, 1 October 2001; also see Appendix 2, selection of images).

While university autonomy was severely compromised during the civil, the data shows that the politicisation of Lebanese University structures and processes was consolidated during the post-war era. In 1997, the government’s Council of Ministers took over the recruitment of all Lebanese University appointments by decree. From this point, there is a widespread perception that the state was ‘destroying’, ‘strangling’ and even ‘killing’ the Lebanese University, both as an academic institution and also as a public one, in the fullest sense of the meaning of ‘public’. This is expressed in Samir Kassir’s momentous article in 2001, ‘Mercy Bullet’, which directly accuses the government of ‘issuing a death sentence on its national university’. Citing a lack of ‘vision or sense of public interest among all of those who have participated in running the country since the end of the civil war’, Kassir concludes that ‘Lebanon’s government and political class have relinquished any will to save the national university from its death’ (*Al-Nahar*, 5 January 2001). Trying to make sense of the confusing currents of simultaneous political interference and economic abandonment, another commentator reflects:

The [Lebanese] University is being exposed to overwhelming competition...as if there was an agenda for private universities, which are mushrooming, to take control of higher education without there being any presence, even partial, of the state. Yet the absence of the state...is in a sense a negative presence. How else can we explain this instinctive destruction of the institution and the fact that academic standards are being trumped for the sake of political allegiances? (*Al-Safir*, 6 April 1997).

The former president of the Lebanese University, Edmond Naim, points out in an interview published in *Al-Nahar* (11 November 1992), the longstanding ‘negligence’ of the state towards the Lebanese University long predates the rise of neoliberalism. It is also linked to Lebanon’s historically *laissez faire* economy and the dominance of foreign private universities since the late-nineteenth century. This flags a key distinction between the ‘negligence’ of the *pre-civil war* bourgeoisie who were resisting the ‘encroachment of the more developmentalist Chehabist state’, of which the Lebanese University was a prime example, and the state-led neoliberal reconstruction of Lebanon in the *post-civil war* era (Baumann 2019, 66). From this political economy perspective, the state’s ‘negligence’ of the public university was not static but evolving in both its rationality and effects across different time periods.

Contrary to assumptions that neoliberal policies represent the weakening of ‘local’ state power in relation to ‘global’ market forces, neoliberalism is better understood as the repurposing of the state to *create* deregulated free markets (Harvey 2007). The state is therefore not passive or absent, but actively involved in restructuring the economy for private gain. There is consequently a local-global shape to the neoliberal transformation of Lebanon’s higher education landscape throughout the 1990s and 2000s, which can neither be solely attributed to the Hariri-led post-war governments, nor to wider global trends of deregulation and privatisation in higher education (Escobar 2001; Massey 2005; Robertson 2012). To adopt Hannes Baumann’s (2016, 7) application of Pierre Bourdieu’s theorisation of neoliberalism to post-war Lebanon, the Lebanese University was caught between the ‘left hand’ of the state, which vacated its welfare role and divided the spoils through political-sectarian patronage and clientelism; and the ‘right hand’ which actively transformed the country’s higher education sector for private profit and political-sectarian gain.

Unlike other countries in the Arab region, the principal driver behind the deregulation of higher education in Lebanon was not the World Bank or International Monetary Fund but Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Buckner 2011; Baumann 2016). As one former professor says, ‘the idea of the Welfare state was killed off in the ‘90s, Hariri said no’ (Interview 4, LU professor, second branch, 1990s-2010s). In 1995, it was reported that a 1% decrease in the interest paid on loan repayments would cover the annual budget of the Lebanese University and prevent debilitating cuts to public higher education (*Al-Nahar*, 14 December 1995). Almost twenty-five years later, in the Spring of 2019, Lebanese University professors and other public sector workers coordinated a two-month strike against what the Prime Minister himself described as ‘the most austere budget in Lebanon’s history’ (*Arab News*, 18 April 2019). Now the third most indebted country in the world, the

proposed cuts to the Lebanese University were ostensibly to reduce the public debt, in order to secure a further \$11 billion in aid and soft loans pledged by foreign donors (*Al-Fanar Media*, 27 June 2019). Just 3 months later, in October 2019, popular protests against failing public services, endemic political corruption and impending economic catastrophe erupted across the country.

Wendy Brown (2015) argues that the decline of public higher education as a dimension of the 'demos' is linked to the shift from political to economic rationality. As the purpose of the Lebanese University and the wider higher education sector was locally and globally reoriented from democratic and developmentalist principles to the logics of human capital and market competition, the role of Lebanon's only public university in the post-war recovery of society became increasingly remote. As one former professor reflects, 'They [the politicians] wanted to strengthen the private universities... They don't have a vision of how developmental the Lebanese University could be' (Interview 28). The devastating interaction of political interference and economic neglect in the post-war era caught the Lebanese University in a 'local' quagmire that tied it to the logics of a consolidating political-sectarian system and a 'global' quagmire that was simultaneously 'undoing' the relationship between higher education, democracy and the public sphere (Brown 2015; Holmwood 2017; White 2017).

### *8.3.2 Linking university autonomy with democratic accountability*

There is a powerful sense among the older generation of professors, particularly those involved in the revival of the professors' union in the early 1990s, that they were engaged in a battle for the future of the Lebanese University against anti-democratic forces of tyranny and sectarianism. As one former professor says, 'The university was under feudal, sectarian control after the war. We tried during the 90s to counter this' (Interview 42, LU professor, third branch, 1990s-2010s). In an interview with *Al-Nahar* newspaper in 1997, another professor argues that despite the end of the civil war seven years earlier, 'Unfortunately the war within the university is ongoing' (*Al-Nahar*, 5 April 1997).

In 1999, the Lebanese Association of Education Studies (LAES) published a report on the conditions of the Lebanese University and recommendations for its reform, authored by a number of Lebanese University professors (El-Amine et al. 1999). In the febrile political environment surrounding the Lebanese University at that time, the publication 'caused a major uproar in the academic community, and resulted in the director of LU [Lebanese University] sending a letter threatening legal action against the association' (Shuayb 2019, 560). Among its recommendations and principles

for comprehensive university reform, the authors of the 1999 report make a direct linkage between ‘independence and responsibility’, adding a third dimension – responsibility - to the usual academic couplet of university autonomy and academic freedom. The authors argue that ‘independence directly assumes being responsible and *therefore subject to accountability and questioning*’ (Ibid, 138, my emphasis). Elsewhere in the research data, university autonomy and accountability are also expressed alongside each other. For example, the increasingly ubiquitous calls for ‘hands off the Lebanese University’ (*Nahar al-Shabab*, 21 February 1995), are accompanied by demands for ‘the return of the law... and the return of representative councils’ (*Al-Nahar*, 5 April 1997). In this way, the data highlights that university autonomy is not only linked to academic freedom (Ignatieff and Roch 2018) but also to conditions of democratic accountability.

In tracing the ‘rise and fall of the public university’ in the UK and North America, John Holmwood (2017, 927) points out that any organisation or company can claim autonomy and as such the concept of autonomy is not sufficient to theorise the relationship between the university and the public sphere. Bonnie Honig (2017) also maintains that contestability and accountability are what make ‘public things’ *public*, while Paul Hoggett et al (2009) are insistent that being part of the public sphere entails being open to public contestation through channels of transparency and accountability. Ultimately, democratic accountability is what constitutes the ‘critical edge’ of public sphere theory, which is not only about freedom of discourse but the process of democratising societal relations (Fraser 2007, 20).

Despite the return of administrative and financial autonomy of the Lebanese University after the end of the civil war, the revival of conditions for public scrutiny and accountability proved more elusive. The 1997 decree which made the government’s Council of Ministers responsible for university appointments continues to perpetuate the lack of transparency and accountability of the university, despite due process in its laws and regulations. As one former minister of education in the 2000s explains, ‘In terms of by-laws for choosing new deans, it has to come from the schools [faculties], so there is due process involved... when they’re left alone they do what’s best for the institution, for the university, but they’re never left alone... I know what happens, I know how the discussion is engineered in the Cabinet, it’s purely political and nothing to do with higher education (Interview 52, former minister of education, 2000s). The controversies over ‘sectarian quotas’ in the promotions and appointments of university faculty continue to be regularly reported in the national newspapers (*Al-Nahar*, 12 June 2018; *The Daily Star*, 28 March 2018).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s there are many references to the erosion of university autonomy and accountability in the interview and newspaper data. While the remobilised professors' union waged a long battle against the erosion of university autonomy and accountability and its surrender to the post-Ta'if logic of sectarian shares, by the end of the 1990s the balance of power within the union had shifted to parties in alliance with the government and the Syrian security regime (Interviews 4, 24, 42, 43 and 46). While some respondents regard this as a 'defeat' in the battle for university democracy, others feel that the union ultimately privileged labour conditions over institutional reform. Either way, as one former professor and union activist remarks, 'by the year 2000 the reform of the university was off the table, nobody even talked about it anymore' (Interview 24, LU professor, first branch, 1990s-2010s).

### *8.3.3 Accessibility and difference*

In the immediate post-civil war years there was a widespread hope that by bringing together a generation of young people divided by war, the Lebanese University could play a role in reunifying the Lebanese 'nation'. But as the government's reunification agenda became increasingly conflated with building a central campus in Beirut, the more significant challenge of reforming the university was deflected by a bricks and mortar approach. At the same time, fears of moving to the new Hadath campus, located close to Dahieh, the predominantly Shi'a southern suburb of Beirut, interacted with wider spatial divisions in the city. As one professor reflects, 'Hadath campus is in a Shiite area. The Christians didn't want to go there' (Interview 4, LU professor, second branch, 1990s-2010s). In the absence of a state-supported approach to reconciliation and reintegration within and beyond the Lebanese University, the fundamental question of how to rebuild democratic relations inside the university was pushed aside.

Faculty branches are commonly described by younger respondents as 'belonging' to the dominant sectarian-political parties, a situation aggravated by the fact that until 2019 there had been no student elections for over a decade. While the decision to disband student elections in 2007 was to avoid the risk of reigniting violent conflict, the data suggests that, conversely, it has directly contributed to an atmosphere of oppressive control over the student body by dominant political parties in each branch. The dwindling channels for agonistic conflict has intensified antagonistic relations within the student body, leaving students fearful of expressing dissenting political views for fear of being harassed or even beaten (Interviews 8 and 34). Illustrating Chantal Mouffe's (2013) insistence on agonistic contestation as the ineradicable basis of democracy, one professor laments, 'We said in the past a policeman was not allowed to go into the campus. Nowadays there is no need

for policemen, the students who belong to this party or to that militia they take care of their colleagues, they made them stop talking or having any activity, it's the force of the militia now (Interview 33).

Yet even while the early post-civil war vision for reviving the Lebanese University as a diverse and democratic space was marred by division, external interference and economic neglect, the university nevertheless remains accessible to those who would not otherwise have access to higher education. Certain faculties such as Medicine or Architecture are selective and extremely competitive (contributing to their highly distinguished academic reputations), while others remain open to all. Across the generations, almost all former and current students interviewed refer to the absence of fees as the primary factor in their choice to study at the Lebanese University, with many clarifying that they did not have other options due to financial circumstances. Some respondents also point to the language barriers at other universities, reflecting wider education inequalities between public and private schools. The absence of fees at the Lebanese University (beyond a nominal amount covering registration costs and, for Lebanese citizens, health insurance) makes it more accessible to those who might not otherwise go to university, whether due to social class, language, gender, rural location or refugee status. In 2019, a remarkable 73 per cent of the student body at the Lebanese University is female, a figure which both denotes the accessibility of the university for young women from poorer, often rural backgrounds, while also raising questions about the extent to which young men from similar backgrounds are opting for private universities or are not going to university at all (Interview 44 and Interview 38, LU professor, first branch, current).

It is estimated that in 2019 Syrian and Palestinian refugees make up a quarter of Lebanon's population, representing the highest density of refugees per capita in the world. What then is the meaning of 'public' in a country where one in four people is not a citizen? (Fraser 2007, 2014). The Lebanese University is already significant in that unlike public schools in Lebanon, it does not prevent access to Palestinian (or Syrian) refugees, thereby potentially extending its 'publicness' to include non-citizens (Interviews 34 and 37). Yet the data also suggests a perception among Palestinians that they would rather avoid the sectarianised landscape of the Lebanese University, despite it being more affordable than other options. As one student explains, 'the thing is that you have quotas, so each sect has a quota. The Palestinian is not viewed within the quotas... Palestinians would rather not enter the Lebanese University and the reason for this is that the Lebanese University views everyone in a sectarian lens' (Interview 34). A former Lebanese University professor, who was born in Palestine to a Lebanese father and hence has Lebanese citizenship,



recalls her own realisation about her prospects for promotion in relation to sectarian quotas. Asking a colleague in the mid-1990s, ‘would they [the university administration] consider me a Druze or a Muslim?’, her friend replies, only partially in jest, ‘You, a Druze or a Muslim? You are nothing but a Palestinian!’ (Interview 23).

In the immediate post-civil war years, characterised by severe economic hardship for much of the population, the proportion of students enrolling in the Lebanese University continued to rise, reaching 60 per cent of the total student population in the year 2000 (see Appendix 1, Figure 5). By 2013, this proportion had fallen to 36 per cent, reflecting the proliferation of new private universities and, possibly, the reputation of the Lebanese University itself. For while certain faculties, which have entrance examinations, remain highly distinguished in their fields, others are perceived to have declined in the post-civil war era, linked to the increasing politicisation of the university environment in the post-Ta’if order (Interviews 16, 17, 23, 44 and 52). Nevertheless, in 2019, the Lebanese University remains by far the biggest university in the country, enrolling 37 per cent of all students (see Appendix 1, Figure 5). The data further emphasises the accessibility of the Lebanese University in relation to socioeconomic barriers of gender, social class, location and refugee status. Yet many respondents simultaneously point to the loss of difference in the Lebanese University environment and the implications for its publicness. As one former professor says of the university’s continuing accessibility, ‘sure but it’s locked, it’s not open, it’s not open...The Lebanese University is now a series of ghettos’ (Interview 19).

#### *8.3.4 Across the lines of fragmentation: the Lebanese University as a ‘public thing’*

The fragmentation of the Lebanese University during the civil war, followed by its politicisation and economic neglect during the post-civil war era, have directly contributed to the loss of meaningful spaces of interaction and integration among young people in wider society (Larkin 2010; Yassin 2012). By following the trajectory of the Lebanese University from 1959 to the present day, it becomes clear that the fracturing and post-war abandonment of the university as a public sphere was not inevitable. Rather it was constructed and consolidated through the intertwining of post-war neoliberal policies of economic neglect coupled with political-sectarian interference by successive governments throughout the post-civil war era. In charting the politics of sectarianism in post-war Lebanon, Bassel Salloukh et al (2015, 181) argue that beyond systemic and structural reforms, there is ultimately a need to ‘imagine new forms of inter-sectarian citizenship’ by ‘creating public space’. Unlike the ‘banal’ nature of shopping malls, bars, cafes, offices and even universities that may be *shared* by young people but amount to ‘coexistence without empathy’ (Yassin 2012, 212), the

creation of *public* space entails the ‘practical arts of democratic integration’ (Tully cited in Salloukh et al. 2015, 180).

Bonnie Honig distinguishes her theorisation of ‘public things’ from concepts of ‘shared space’ or ‘the commons’ on the basis that public things not only ‘press us into relations with others’, but that their publicness is inherently political and accountable (Honig 2017, 6). From this perspective, recovering the democratic publicness of the Lebanese University is not only about recreating physical spaces of interaction but reintroducing the conditions for agonistic relations (Mouffe 2013). A common refrain in many of the interviews is that for the Lebanese University to change there needs to be a transformation of Lebanon’s entire political system. As one former professor says, ‘To have the answer you have to analyse our system, the political system, which is based on belonging to religion and belonging to persons, to parties. Our nation, our Lebanon...doesn’t exist’ (Interview 39). A former student regards the connection between university reform and wider systemic change as indivisible saying, ‘a better Lebanese University would be a better country and a better country would be a better Lebanese University’ (Interview 5). A current student remarks, ‘If you restructure the university you will make a revolution!’ (Interview 26).

While the older generation of respondents mourn a sense of ‘lost publicness’ of the Lebanese University in relation to its role as a public sphere, the younger generation also reach for explanations, particularly as most are not familiar with the history of the Lebanese University, reflecting a wider amnesia of its role in the social, cultural and political transformations of Lebanese society over the last half century. For example, one student explains that, ‘When I entered the Lebanese University... I started asking more questions about why is this the only national [public] university first of all... And why in this national university, which is presumably the university of the poor, why is it so fragmented?’ (Interview 34). Counteracting the narrative of a lost publicness, there is also agency in remembering the Lebanese University as a public sphere. By holding past conceptions of publicness in tandem with present absences and future re-imaginings, reframing the Lebanese University as a public sphere contains the potential for excavation, reclamation and evaluation of alternatives.

In this dialogue between the case study data and public sphere theory, four meta themes of difference, autonomy, accountability and domain have emerged as propositions for conceptualising the ‘publicness’ of the Lebanese University. In the following final chapter, I conclude with a

discussion of these conceptual propositions to address the essential question driving this research:

What constitutes the publicness of universities?

## Conclusion:

### What constitutes the ‘publicness’ of universities?

The aim of this research is to understand what has contributed to *making* the Lebanese University ‘public’ in a political sense and how the conditions of its ‘publicness’ have evolved over time. While this is, at heart, a theoretical question, the methodology is an empirical one. Through narrative research interviews and newspaper archive work, this extended case study of the Lebanese University seeks to capture the trajectories of the Lebanese University over the last sixty years, which are scarcely documented in the literature despite the epic role of the university through periods of social and political transformation, protracted civil war and neoliberal reconstruction. In ‘linking the past to the present in anticipation of the future’ (Burawoy 1998, 5), this research not only contributes to extending a theoretical understanding of the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere, it also contributes to excavating aspects of the partially forgotten history of the Lebanese University. In a close dialogue between the case study data and public sphere theory, I conclude that the publicness of the Lebanese University is neither intrinsic nor fixed but an inherently contestable terrain, shaped by conditions of difference, autonomy, accountability and domain. These four propositions for conceptualising the publicness of universities are not economically or instrumentally defined but relate to the processual making and unmaking of the university as a public sphere.

### 9.1 Three contributions to knowledge

This research addresses three major gaps in the literatures relevant to understanding the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere. In the first place there is an under-theorisation of what makes a university ‘public’ in a political sense and a particular lack of attention to the evolving relationship between universities and the public sphere in the Global South. Secondly, there is a longstanding neglect of universities in societies affected by conflict, linked to their wider marginalisation in international development goals and policies. While this is now changing, the emerging discourse of ‘Higher Education in Emergencies’ is constrained within a neoliberal paradigm that further relegates the public purposes of universities. Thirdly, there is a lack of research on the history of Lebanon’s only public university and its trajectories before, during and after the civil war of 1975 to 1990, reflecting a wider dearth of empirical research on what happens to universities in societies affected by protracted conflict. In a dialogue between the case study data and egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory, this research makes

knowledge contributions to all three absences in the literature, towards extending public sphere theory to conceptualise the publicness of universities from a non-Western institutional case; re-centring the public purposes of the university in societies affected by conflict; and reimagining alternatives to the current neoliberal, sectarian present in Lebanese higher education.

### *9.1.1 Reconstructing public sphere theory to understand what makes a university 'public'*

The predominantly economistic and instrumental understandings of public and private in higher education largely revolve around 'who pays' for higher education and 'who benefits' from it. The arguments for higher education as a public good are also more often defined in *instrumental* terms of knowledge production, professional training and other material benefits to society, with limited attention to the *intrinsic* public dimensions of the university, linked to the under-theorisation of the relationship between the university and the public sphere (Unterhalter et al. 2018). Alternative framings such as the 'common good' attempt to re-centre the democratic purposes of higher education (Locatelli 2018), yet fall short when it comes to the ineradicable questions of difference, hegemony and conflict in the relations between universities, society and the state (Honig 2017; Mouffe 2013). This thesis argues that moving from an economic to political rationality in higher education requires re-framing the university as a public sphere (Brown 2015; Burawoy 2011). However, the existing literature on universities and the public sphere not only predominantly focuses on the experiences of universities located in the Global North, it also overlooks the longstanding critiques of classical public sphere theory from both egalitarian and postcolonial perspectives (Fraser 1990, 2007; Santos 2012).

Addressing these multiple weaknesses in the literature, this research draws on the egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory to conceptualise what constitutes the *publicness* of universities (Fraser 1990, 2007; Santos 2012; Shami 2009). As well as 'talking back' to the Eurocentric literature on public spheres by theorising from a case located outside of the Western liberal democratic order, the research also reaches well beyond simplistic, binary categorisations of 'public' and private' in higher education to capture the evolving publicness of universities. In linguistic terms, the meaning of publicness refers to the state or quality of *being* public, while the suffix '-ness' also implies a spectrum, as there are *degrees* of publicness just as there are degrees of happiness. Through an extended case study of the Lebanese University, in dialogue with public sphere theory, the research finds that the publicness of the Lebanese University is inherently and necessarily contestable, linked to ongoing processes of making and unmaking the university as a public sphere (Honig 2017; Massey 2005; Mouffe 2013). Highlighting both the significance and the

precarity of universities in the democratic fabric of society, four propositions to conceptualise the publicness of universities emerge from the research, including difference, autonomy, accountability and domain. These are further outlined in section 9.3 below.

### *9.1.2 Re-centring the public purposes of universities in societies affected by conflict*

For a long time higher education has been ignored in societies affected by conflict, branded a 'luxury' by the World Bank in the early 1980s, leading to decades of neglect through policies of structural adjustment and the overwhelming focus on primary education in international development goals and funding (Sall and Lebeau 2011; Teferra 2016). In the field of Education in Emergencies, an internationally driven agenda for including education in humanitarian response that gained traction throughout the 2000s, higher education was similarly overlooked (Milton 2017; Millican 2018). While this is now changing and higher education is belatedly entering the discourse, it is within a neoliberal paradigm that is focused on access, human capital and securitisation arguments, ignoring the socio-political dimensions of universities and the ways in which they both contribute to the causes of conflict as well as to processes of post-conflict recovery (Milton 2017). Barely engaging with foundational debates in the field, such as the 'good and bad faces of education in conflict' (Bush and Saltarelli 2000), the emerging discourse of 'Higher Education in Emergencies' also fails to address the multiple critiques of the Education in Emergencies literature, relating to its a-historical, Eurocentric, overly technicist and weakly theorised nature (Murray 2008; Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Novelli et al. 2014; Brun and Shuayb 2020).

The experiences of the Lebanese University through the civil war of 1975 to 1990, followed by three decades of financial neglect in a neoliberal policy context, with intensifying political-sectarian interference in university affairs, underline the necessity of moving from an economic to political rationality in higher education in order to address the challenges facing universities in societies affected by conflict. In contexts where university autonomy may be compromised by the intrusions of militias, the state or a foreign military occupation; where the homogenization or territorialisation of university spaces by particular groups may contribute to reinforcing societal divisions or repressing differences in identity, narrative and opinion; and where deep socioeconomic and political inequalities reproduced through higher education may directly contribute to the causes of conflict and ongoing patterns of discrimination, the current neoliberal higher education paradigm, focused solely on questions of access, human capital and skills for the labour market, is a wholly inadequate basis for building a field and a literature on higher education, conflict and peacebuilding. Political democratic questions of university autonomy and academic freedom, together with the role of

higher education in the reproduction or transformation of hegemony, inequality and injustice, all require re-centring the public purposes of universities in societies affected by conflict. The research and policy implications of this re-centring for the emerging discourse on ‘Higher Education in Emergencies’ are outlined in section 9.4 below.

### *9.1.3 Excavating a partially forgotten history of the Lebanese University*

Finally, this research makes an empirical contribution to a small but growing literature on the experiences of universities in societies affected by conflict. Despite the momentous role of the Lebanese University in the social and political tumults of the last half century, there is little published research about its history (El-Amine 2018a; Shaheen 2014). This has contributed to a partial forgetting of the democratic significance of the Lebanese University as a space of contestation and social transformation in the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as the ways in which the fracturing of the university during the civil war and its increasing abandonment as a democratic public institution in the post-civil war period were not inevitable but fiercely debated and contested. Intersecting with the exclusive focus on school education in the wider Education in Emergencies field, the experiences and trajectories of Lebanon’s universities are notably absent from the burgeoning literature on education, conflict and peacebuilding in post-civil war Lebanon. This absence in the literature is in marked contrast to the decades of debate within and beyond the Lebanese University about its role and future directions as public institution (Bashshur 2003; El-Amine et al. 1999; El-Amine 2018a). These deep contestations over the publicness of the Lebanese University are captured in the national newspaper archives and in the experiences and memories of students, professors and administrators of the university. This research has sought to draw these sources together towards understanding what has contributed to making the Lebanese University ‘public’ and how the conditions of its ‘publicness’ have evolved over time.

## **9.2 How has the ‘publicness’ of the Lebanese University evolved over time?**

Adopting a *longue durée* timeframe, this research traces the evolving publicness of the Lebanese University linked to its changing trajectories as a public sphere. From the expansion of the university in 1959, through the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990, to the end of data collection in 2019, there is both a waning of past conceptions of publicness and a continuation of their sedimentary presence, alongside ongoing contestations and efforts to re-frame and reimagine the university as a public sphere. Addressing each of the sub-research questions that guided the case study, the research concludes that while the overall narrative arc in the data captures the inherent temporality and

fragility of the university as a public sphere, it also illuminates simultaneous processes of making and unmaking the university as a public sphere across the different time periods.

### *9.2.1 What constituted the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1959 and 1975?*

The case of the Lebanese University powerfully illustrates the critiques of classical public sphere theory, particularly relating to the politics of difference and the democratic vitality of agonistic conflict (Benhabib 1996; Fraser 1990; Mouffe 1993). In pushing back against the enduring colonial legacies of sectarianism in Lebanon's education system and constructing a distinct space between society, the market and the state, the data reveals the making of a democratic publicness within the Lebanese University that was scarcely present elsewhere in society. While the expansion of the public university under President Fouad Chehab was a significant factor in its rise as an academic institution, the emergence of the Lebanese University as a public sphere went well beyond freedom of access to higher education. The Lebanese University contributed to the unravelling of longstanding socioeconomic and political exclusions in Lebanese public life, relating to sect, class, language, gender and region, as well as creating a democratic arena for the interaction of conflicting ideas and points of view (Honig 2017; Mouffe 2013). By bringing together conflictual interests in society, including those of the state itself, the Lebanese University was neither a universal public sphere in the Habermasian sense, nor was it a 'counterpublic' in Nancy Fraser's (1990) theorisation. Connecting with wider processes of social and political change, the university became both a site and a vehicle for building and contesting the Lebanese state, exhibiting the characteristics of a 'more comprehensive arena in which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity' (Fraser 1990, 69).

### *9.2.2 How did the Lebanese civil war impact on the publicness of the Lebanese University between 1976 and 1990?*

Reflecting the inherent temporality and fragility of public spheres, the making of the Lebanese University as an alternative public sphere proved to be painfully short-lived (Habermas 1989; Shami 2009). Soon after the eruption of civil war in 1975, the same conditions that had contributed to 'making' the Lebanese University as a public sphere also contributed to its 'unmaking', in a kind of reverse corroboration of the necessity of those conditions. Its deterioration as a public sphere was linked to the sudden loss of difference as the university split between east and west Beirut, not only bringing an end to the interaction of young people from different backgrounds but also extinguishing the former creativity and productivity of ideas, art, writing and politics that had characterised the



previous era. Agonistic conflict within the university arena gave way to antagonistic forms of expression as essentialist forms of identity, while the clashing of different perspectives was no longer a conflict between adversaries but between enemies vying for ideological and territorial control over the university (Mouffe 2013; Massey 1998). At the same time, the university's trajectory during the civil war was not linear and there are extraordinary examples of defending university autonomy and advancing principles of difference in the face of extreme adversity. This is particularly evident in the successful efforts to establish a public school of medicine in the 1980s. While the conditions of the Lebanese University as a public sphere were severely eroded during the civil war there was no sense that its publicness was irrecoverable. On the contrary, as the civil war drew to a close in 1990, many regarded the recovery of the Lebanese University as a key dimension in rebuilding a democratic publicness in wider Lebanese society.

### *9.2.3 In what ways has the publicness of the Lebanese University evolved since the end of the civil war between 1991 and 2019?*

The end of the civil war in 1990 represented a historic moment of contingency for the future of the Lebanese University and throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, issues of diversity, autonomy, accountability and location of the university were vigorously debated. Even the Ta'if Peace Agreement of 1989 was unusually attentive to the urgency of reform and investment in the public university. Yet those who hoped to rebuild the democratic publicness of the Lebanese University soon found themselves at loggerheads with local-global forces pushing in the other direction. The post-Ta'if sectarian redistribution of state institutions, under Syrian tutelage until 2005, consolidated the logic of sectarian shares and concurrent processes of political patronage and clientelism within the university. At the same time, the neoliberal economic policies of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and successive post-war governments saw a steep decline in public spending on education and the rapid proliferation of private for-profit universities. Given this devastating combination of economic neglect on the one hand and high levels of political interference on the other, there is an overall conviction, arising from the data, that the Lebanese University was abandoned as a democratic public institution at the very moment it was needed most. In the context of an increasingly privatised, stratified and sectarianised higher education sector, ongoing contestations over the publicness of the Lebanese University remain as fraught and relevant as ever.

### 9.3 Four propositions for conceptualising the ‘publicness’ of universities

Neglected in public sphere theory and in the higher education literature, there is little consensus on what makes a university ‘public’ in a political, democratic sense. This has led to overly simplistic and binary categorisations of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in higher education that focus on the instrumental and economic dimensions of universities (Holmwood 2017; Locatelli 2018; Marginson 2018; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017). By exploring the trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere over the *longue durée*, in dialogue with egalitarian and postcolonial critiques of classical public sphere theory, four propositions emerge from this research for conceptualising the publicness of universities. These four propositions of ‘difference’, ‘autonomy’, ‘accountability’ and ‘domain’ make methodological, theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding what constitutes the publicness of universities. They are not intended to be prescriptive or universalised but are a contribution to ongoing debates about what makes a university ‘public’.

#### 9.3.1 On ‘difference’

Is difference something to be overcome in pursuit of consensus, common narrative and shared identity? Or is democracy rooted in the inherently conflictual interaction of ideas, narratives and values? The case study of the Lebanese University is a resounding illustration of the latter. For the making of the Lebanese University as a public sphere hinged on both the interaction of diverse ideas, identities and narratives, and the struggles of student and faculty movements for democratising higher education in a highly stratified and unequal education system shaped by the legacies of a colonial past. In problematising Habermas’s ‘bracketing’ of difference, Nancy Fraser (1990) draws attention to the inherently unequal and conflictual relations in public spheres. Further theorising the ineradicability of conflict between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests in plural societies, Chantal Mouffe (2013, 8) argues that without democratic outlets for agonistic conflict, there is a risk of sliding into more essentialist forms of identification whereby opponents are no longer political adversaries but enemies to be destroyed. As such ‘difference’ goes well beyond contact theory, to ‘the continuous *contestation* of public purposes’, whilst also ‘*containing* the moral ambivalence of citizens’ (Hoggett, Mayo, and Miller 2009, 168). While the global higher education literature is more often concerned with questions of access than of difference, maintaining accessibility without also desegregating, decolonising and democratising universities does little to address the role of higher education in reproducing and even hardening social and political divisions in society.

### 9.3.2 On 'autonomy'

Jürgen Habermas (1989) defined the public sphere as the space *between* society and the state. In the case of universities, this *betweenness* is upheld by the principle of university autonomy (White 2017), which explains their striking, even 'paradigmatic', connection to the classical theorisation of the public sphere (Delanty 2005, 530). However, universities can never be insulated from the conflicts and power relations in the rest of society, and on the contrary are important spaces for the contestation of those conflictual experiences and perspectives. As the Lebanese University and countless other university contexts around the world continue to demonstrate, carving an autonomous space between society, the market and the state cannot be conclusively achieved or bestowed but is a perpetual focus of democratic struggle (Choudry and Vally 2020). In the case of the Lebanese University, its trajectories as an autonomous institution is closely linked to the waxing and waning of its democratic accountability. For 'academic freedom is not just a matter of free speech and individual rights. It is a matter of institutions and public purposes' (Calhoun 2009, 561). Autonomy as a condition of publicness is therefore a political question, related to the *betweenness* of universities between society, the market and the state; not as 'fortified' ivory towers (Santos 2015, 3), but as sites of perpetual public contestation (Honig 2017).

### 9.3.3 On 'accountability'

The realisation of university accountability not only relates to democratic and transparent decision-making structures and processes within the university itself, it is also contingent upon the significance of the university as an *object* of public contestation and scrutiny. While classical public sphere theory focuses on the university as a *space* of contestation, the case of the Lebanese University simultaneously illustrates its democratic significance as an *object* of contestation. This relates to the fact that the Lebanese University is funded by the state, which does not in itself guarantee the political conditions of its publicness, but does locate the university as a 'public thing' and therefore subject to public accountability (Honig 2017). Drawing on Bonnie Honig's theorisation of the role of public things in democratic politics, this research concludes that state funding is a prerequisite for *being* public, not because public universities are intrinsically good, inclusive or democratic, but because they are, by definition, more publicly accountable and therefore *political*. In the current neoliberal paradigm in higher education, the institutional accountability of universities, including nominally public universities, is far from assured and often diminished. As such the condition of accountability is key to conceptualising and advancing the democratic

publicness universities, including the particular democratic significance of the public university funded by the state.

#### 9.3.4 On 'domain'

Despite frequent references to the public sphere as an 'arena', 'space' and 'domain', it is rarely considered in spatial terms, leading to 'a lost geography of the public sphere' (Low and Smith 2006, 7). The Lebanese University case illustrates the democratic significance of the university as a *space* of contestation (Shami 2009, 31) and a *place* 'where stories meet' (Massey 2005, 74), emphasising both the physical and symbolic production of the university as a public sphere. Following the split of the Lebanese University between east and west Beirut during the civil war, the role of the university in physically dividing generations of young people along political-sectarian lines, coupled with the territorialisation of university spaces by the interests and agendas of particular groups (Massey 1998, 127) further underlines the spatial dimensions of making and unmaking the university as a public sphere. At the same time, neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatisation in higher education have interacted with the loss of 'places and spaces of publicness' in post-civil war Lebanon (Low and Smith 2006, 7), intertwining with the fracturing of the wider sector along political-sectarian lines (Bashshur 2003; Salloukh et al. 2015).

The significance of domain for the publicness of the Lebanese University also relates to the interaction of local-global trends in higher education. In a post-Westphalian world, universities are simultaneously located between society and the state *and* globally situated within a wider set of relations that have profoundly shaped the trajectories of public universities across the globe, with unequal effects on universities located in the Global South (Marginson 2021). The evolving publicness of universities, including questions of democratisation and decolonisation, are therefore produced and contested in institutional, state-level and global arenas of higher education (Mbembe 2016). From a transnational perspective, public spheres can no longer be solely understood within a Westphalian frame (Fraser 2007). As well as recognising that that matters of public concern invariably transcend the borders of the nation-state, one in four of the population in Lebanon is now a refugee, demanding a rehauling of a nation-centric understanding of publicness.

## 9.4 Implications for the emerging field of higher education, conflict and peacebuilding

Having been ignored for the past forty years, there is now rising attention to the role of higher education in societies affected by conflict. Yet the emerging literature sits uneasily within a neoliberal higher education paradigm that is actively dislocating universities from society and the state. Focused solely on questions of access, quality assurance, financing and the labour market, the current economic rationality in higher education marginalises the political, democratic significance of universities in societal processes of reproduction and transformation, including the immense challenges of recovering from protracted violent conflict. The emerging policy discourse of 'Higher Education in Emergencies', neither addresses foundational debates in the field relating to the role of education institutions in contributing to the causes of conflict as well as to post-conflict recovery (Bush and Saltarelli 2000), nor does it engage with longstanding critiques of the a-historical, technicist and Eurocentric nature of the wider Education in Emergencies literature (Brun and Shuayb 2020; Murray 2008, Novelli and Cardozo 2008).

Moving from the 'unique' to the 'general' through the extension of theory (Burawoy 1998, 5), the findings of this research suggest that re-centring the publicness of universities is not only relevant to ongoing struggles for liberty and equality in higher education, it is a vital component of rebuilding democracy in the aftermath of conflict. Without such a re-framing, directly confronting the embedded logics of the knowledge economy paradigm, the emerging literature on higher education, conflict and peacebuilding will remain constrained and contradictory. To this end, three recommendations for re-centring the publicness of universities in the emerging field of higher education, conflict and peacebuilding are outlined below.

### *9.4.1 Support the role of universities in recovering difference in public spheres*

Universities have an integrative power in bringing young people together in spaces dedicated to the exchange and contestation of ideas (Barakat and Milton 2015; Millican 2018; Brewer 2018). The case of the Lebanese University shows that in the years immediately following the end of the Lebanese civil war, there was an acute awareness that the public university could help to bring future generations together or continue to push them apart. The reunification of the Lebanese University was the subject of intense debate throughout the 1990s, while the Ta'if Peace Agreement of 1989 specifically invoked its role in post-war reconstruction. A combination of fear, political

disinterest and economic agendas for deregulating higher education meant that the public university remained divided as well as chronically under-resourced. The political-sectarian fragmentation of the wider higher education sector in the post-civil war period has had significant and long-term implications for Lebanese society. Young people from different sects remain separated (Larkin 2010), traversing the same shopping malls and cafes but with little meaningful interaction (Yassin 2012), while the spaces for discussing and reflecting upon opposing historical, cultural and political narratives in society are limited (Haugbolle 2010).

The homogenisation of universities in societies affected by conflict is not unique to Lebanon and is seen in Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. In post-conflict contexts the loss of difference in universities cannot be resolved through a narrowly defined understanding of 'access'. From a social justice imperative, the question of recovering difference relates to ensuring diversity among students and faculty from class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, location and other perspectives, recognising the ways in which horizontal inequalities very often contribute to the causes of conflict. From a democratic imperative it also relates to enabling the clashing of opposing ideas, values and knowledges within an agonistic environment, without which universities can easily become vehicles for hardening social, cultural and political divisions in society. Chantal Mouffe (2013, 8) argues that democratic outlets for the expression of conflict are vital to preventing a slide into essentialism, civil war and the destruction of democracy. By acknowledging the 'ineradicability' of conflict and counter-hegemonic movements in society, the conceptual power of 'difference' goes well beyond the limitations of contact theory. It is about recognising the need for spaces of interaction of ideas and identities but also, crucially, allowing for the politics of contestation and confrontation (Mouffe 2013; Honig 2017).

#### *9.4.2 Prioritise universities in restoring infrastructures of deliberative democracy*

Just as universities have been largely ignored in strategies for post-war recovery, the question of what it takes to rebuild public spheres shattered by war is similarly overlooked in the discourses of post-war reconstruction. So how might universities contribute to salvaging and rebuilding public spheres from the post-war wreckage of public life? Given the intensive privatisation and marketisation of higher education in many post-war contexts, this research points to the possibility that universities, and specifically public universities, are being abandoned at the precisely the moment that they are needed most. A powerful conviction arises from the case study data that the Lebanese University was discarded as an important democratic public institution after the civil war, both economically and politically as the university became chronically under-resourced, while

practices of clientelism and patronage were allowed to flourish even in the face of urgent calls for reform (El-Amine et al 1999). Universities are not simply engines of the economy and neither can they be reduced to developmentalist institutions of the state. Situated *between* the market and the state, universities, and particularly public universities, are closely connected to realising the conditions of deliberative democracy (Holmwood 2017; Pusser et al. 2012; Unterhalter et al. 2018; White 2017).

Wendy Brown (2015, 17) observes that the conversion of political to economic rationality is 'quietly undoing basic elements of democracy', while Bonnie Honig (2017) asks whether democracy is even possible in the absence of public services, spaces and institutions. In the African higher education context, Mahmood Mamdani (2007, 262) argues that the commoditisation of universities has actively eroded their democratic role in society as spaces dedicated to the contestation of ideas and critical reflection on society's needs, aspirations and challenges (Mamdani 2007, 2018). In societies affected by conflict, this 'undoing' of democratic relations through neoliberal policies of post-war reconstruction has the added dimension of inhibiting the recovery of public spheres that may be splintered by societal divisions and political tyranny. As Fawwaz Traboulsi (2005) notes, we have only to look to post-invasion Iraq to see the tragic repercussions of this abandonment of public institutions. In post-civil war Lebanon, Bassel Salloukh et al. (2015, 180) conclude that breaking the sectarian system of governance not only entails far-reaching political reform and structural change, it also fundamentally requires 'creating public space' in different parts of society. Drawing on what James Tully calls the 'practical arts of democratic integration', they specifically highlight the role of universities and other education institutions as a means of nurturing 'inter-sectarian forms of democratic recognition, integration and citizenship' (Ibid, 180). While universities are by no means the only possible sphere for cross-class, cross-national and cross-sectarian interaction, they are by their very nature a space for gathering or dividing future generations.

#### *9.4.3 Advance and protect the democratic significance of public universities*

From a liberal, classical interpretation of the public sphere, which emphasises freedom of opinion formation, communication and expression, it might be said that both public and private universities can contribute to the making of public spheres. However, more egalitarian perspectives recognise the presence of hegemony, inequality and conflict in public spheres, requiring attention to the social as well as liberal dimensions of advancing the democratic publicness of universities (Fraser 1990, 2007; Hoggett et al. 2009). As such, this research considers state funding a prerequisite for *being* public, even while it does not guarantee the publicness of the university beyond that. Not only is

state funding a means of enabling greater equality of access to higher education, it is also linked to the democratic significance of the university as a *public thing* (Honig 2017). Taking up Bonnie Honig's exploration of the role of public things in democratic politics, this research argues that the particular democratic importance of the public university relates to its location in society as both a *space* and an *object* of public contestation and scrutiny. This is not to suggest that public universities are intrinsically good, inclusive or democratic, but they are, by definition, more publicly accountable, thereby contributing to their 'adhesive and integrative powers' (Ibid, 90).

At the same time, Nancy Fraser's (2007, 2014) call for 'transnationalising' the public sphere throws down the gauntlet on the changing relationship between publics and territorially-defined (-nation) states in a post-Westphalian world. In the radically changing global landscape of higher education, movements for decolonising the university and its colonial epistemic monoculture' (Santos 2007: xxxii) must engage with transnational imperatives beyond the nation state (Mbembe 2016), while also recognising the locatedness of universities, linked to complex social forces in higher education and the imperative for responding to society's needs, demands, capacities and aspirations (Mamdani 2018). In a field that is riven with local-global pressures in the twenty-first century, it is vital not to exceptionalise the experiences of universities in societies affected by conflict and to understand the effects of local-global trends in higher education such as privatisation and marketisation, as well as the ways in which these intersect with the particular challenges facing universities in contexts of conflict. The emerging field of higher education, conflict and peacebuilding must therefore neither ignore the specificity of contextual circumstances, nor the interlocking nature of institutional, state-level and global conflicts in higher education.

## 9.5 New directions for researching the publicness of universities

This research set out to explore the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere through an extended case study of the public university in Lebanon. Identifying four theoretical propositions arising from the data in dialogue with public sphere theory, the thesis concludes that re-centring the publicness of universities is not only relevant for ongoing struggles for liberty and equality in higher education, but a vital component of rebuilding deliberative democracy in the aftermath of conflict. In addition to addressing the research questions posed at the outset of the thesis, the findings of this research also point to new directions for researching the public dimensions of universities. These potential research directions are outlined below, following a number of reflections on the research approach itself.



### 9.5.1 Reflections on the research approach

Early on in the research process, I became aware that in order to understand the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere, I needed a research methodology that could capture the changing trajectories of a university over time. Drawing on ideas of the *longue durée* (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009), narrative research (Andrews 2007; Plummer 2001) and historical sociology (Abrams 1982; Delanty and Isin 2003; Thomson 2014), I settled upon Michael Burawoy's (1998, 5) Extended Case Method, which already embraces 'linking the present to the past in anticipation of the future.' This historically inflected approach proved to be productive for two main reasons. The first is the theoretical observation that public spheres are subject to processes of transformation and degeneration (Habermas 1989) and as such are inherently temporal and fleeting (Shami 2009). The second relates to the strong narrative arc that arose from the data itself as research participants repeatedly sought to tell the 'whole story' of the Lebanese University, from the 1950s to the present, albeit with many different narratives contained within it. It soon became clear that if this research was to shed any light on the trajectories of the Lebanese University as a public sphere, it would need to interpret this long narrative arc in the data and follow it through, historically and sociologically.

The selection of a case is suffused with methodological considerations, including the relationship between the researcher and the case study context, the practical and ethical circumstances for data collection, and the epistemological basis for drawing generalisable conclusions from the specificities of a single case. Is the Lebanese University representative of all universities in societies affected by conflict? Can it reveal something about the challenges facing universities in such contexts? The answer to the first question is of course no. The answer to the second is emphatically yes. A longstanding criticism of the case study approach relates to issues of representativeness and generalisability. How can a single context, in all its micro detail, say anything about the wider world? Guided by Michael Burawoy's (1998) reflexive route to moving from the 'unique' to the 'general' through the extension of theory, four conceptual propositions emerge from the research data, in dialogue with public sphere theory. These four propositions illustrate that the Lebanese University, as the only public university in Lebanon, may be considered a paradigmatic case, enabling analysis of the meaning of 'public' in a political sense, as well as the shifting historical relations between the state and higher education.

Extending theory through an empirical study is an iterative process, being at once immersed in the data and also reflecting outside of it in an ongoing dialogue between data and theory. For example,

it is not an exaggeration to say that certain concepts, specifically ‘difference’ and ‘autonomy’, leapt directly from the interview transcripts and newspaper coverage about the Lebanese University, actively explicating and extending public sphere theory, including its egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational critiques. Other concepts, including ‘accountability’ and ‘domain’, were strongly present in the data, but a deepening engagement with theory helped to bring their explanatory power to the surface, both in relation to analysing the case study data and conceptualising the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere.

Rigorous reflexivity in research entails turning the gaze back, towards me as a Western researcher; towards the Eurocentric foundations of public sphere theory; and towards the wider role of international actors and local-global relations in the field of Education in Emergencies (Murray 2008; Novelli and Cardozo 2008). The tendency to exceptionalise universities in contexts of conflict implicitly ignores the historical and political constructions of sectarian relations in society (Makdisi 2000), while mythically objectifying communal violence and civil war as an anathema to Western democracies (Mouffe 2013). Overcoming this essentialising tendency entails recognising histories of coloniality, Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and ongoing struggles for social and epistemic justice in higher education (Bhambra 2014; Santos 2015).

The purpose of this study was not to produce a history of the Lebanese University and it should not be read as one. It is a collection of accounts and reflections based on some fifty interviews with current and former students, faculty, administrators and government ministers, triangulated where possible with over 400 articles of contemporary newspaper coverage. While I cannot claim a ‘representative’ sample, and indeed did not set out to achieve one, the research approach does capture a range of diverse and competing perspectives about the Lebanese University over time (Ackerly and True 2008). Over the course of sixty years, from 1959 to 2019, my aim was not to sift fact from perception but to draw all of it together through the theoretical prism of the public sphere with the purpose of understanding the evolving ‘publicness’ of the Lebanese University over time. Through this dialogue of data and theory, this approach contributes to deepening a conceptual understanding of the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere.

### *9.5.2 New directions for research*

As ‘higher education represents one of the most important sites over which the battle for democracy is being waged’ (Giroux 2013), the stakes are particularly high in societies affected by conflict (Choudry and Vally 2020). As well as recentring the public dimensions of universities, there

is a need to 'talk back' to the Eurocentric literature on the public sphere (Shami 2009) by examining and reconstructing it from egalitarian, postcolonial and transnational perspectives (Fraser 1990; Fraser 2014; Santos 2012). While the Lebanese University case is replete with insights that underline the significance of the relationship between universities and the public sphere, it is nevertheless a single case within a particular set of historical, political and sociological circumstances. One avenue for further research is the application of this research approach to other higher education contexts affected by conflict. For example, what might an extended case study of the National University of Colombia, or the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka tell us about the relationship between universities, conflict and the public sphere and to what extent might they support or contradict the four theoretical propositions of 'publicness' emerging from the Lebanese University case?

This research also raises questions beyond simply extending the research approach to other contexts. These include the trajectories of public universities across the Global South, which are under-researched in the emerging literature on higher education and the public sphere (Holmwood 2017; Marginson 2018; Pusser et al 2012; White 2017). For example, how have the trajectories of postcolonial universities established in the 1950s and 1960s interacted with the wider unfolding of the post-colonial project? What do these trajectories reveal about the role of universities in reproducing or transforming local and global hegemonic relations? In what ways do current movements for decolonising universities overlap with struggles against neoliberal higher education from decolonial, democratic and social justice perspectives? In the context of rapid privatisation of higher education across the Global South, what are the implications for conditions of deliberative democracy?

Universities are not the only 'places and spaces of publicness' that might play a role in rebuilding public spheres in societies recovering from conflict (Low and Smith 2006, 7). While they are uniquely placed in terms of bringing large numbers of young people together in arenas predicated on the exchange of ideas (Millican 2018), countless other 'public things' in society also contribute to the conditions of democracy (Honig 2017). Given the cross-sectoral impacts of post-war reconstruction strategies driven by neoliberal free market policies (Klein 2007), it may be productive to extend the propositions of 'publicness' that emerge from this research to examine the broader relationship between conflict and the public sphere. While schools, universities, museums and the arts are already suggestive of 'places and spaces of publicness' where diverging narratives might be examined and contested, Bonnie Honig (2017, 36) asserts that even the most utilitarian of public things 'furnish a world in which we encounter others, share the experience of being part of

something that is larger than ourselves, and work with others, acting in concert, to share it, democratize access to it, to better it, to desegregate it, to maintain it'. Rather than abandoning public things in the aftermath of conflict, a recognition of their political significance and fragility might mean that we are more inclined to sustain and protect them (Shami 2009).

Moving back from the 'general' to the 'unique' (Burawoy 1998), the mass of data generated by this extended case study of the Lebanese University raises a number of questions that lie beyond the remit of this thesis. For an institution that has had such a major role in the social and political transformations of Lebanon over the past half century, there is very little literature on the history of the Lebanese University (El-Amine 2018a). While I hope that this research makes a small contribution in this regard, there are many outstanding avenues for research. For example, this research does not address questions of knowledge production within the Lebanese University and the ways in which this is shaped by local, regional and global relations in higher education (Hanafi 2011; Hanafi and Arvanitis 2015). Secondly, this research does not explore in any depth the changing nature of student movements and political subjectivities within the Lebanese University over time and how these relate to shifting political hegemonies in wider society. Thirdly, this research stops short of examining the wider socioeconomic impacts of the Lebanese University and how these have contributed to reproducing and transforming societal relations from class, sect, gender and regional perspectives. All of these and more are significant investigations and worthy of more research.

This thesis contributes to exploring the relationship between universities and the public sphere and the particular democratic significance of the public university, funded by the state, in societies recovering from protracted conflict. As an extended case study it is not exhaustive, yet its *longue durée* perspective sheds light on the evolving nature of the university as a public sphere. Theorising from a non-Western, non-European context also contributes to 'talking back' to the Eurocentric literature on public spheres, while challenging Orientalist notions of Lebanon and the wider Middle East as inherently sectarian, anti-democratic, and 'lacking in...“public-ness”' (Shami 2009, 14). This research underlines both the significance and fragility of the university as a public sphere, as well as the ineradicability of conflict in universities as spaces *and* objects of public contestation (Mouffe 2013; Honig 2017). Far from a 'luxury', the research demonstrates that the relationship between universities and the public sphere particularly matters in plural and stratified societies where social and political divisions threaten to overwhelm or destroy the ties of publicness that hold us together.

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## List of interviewees

Interview number	Description of interviewee (anonymised)	Gender	Date of interview	Place
1	LU student, fifth branch (Saidon), current	F	10 May 2016	Beirut
2	Director of a Palestinian civil society organisation	F	10 May 2016	Beirut
3	LU student, 1960s; and LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s-2010s	M	13 May 2016	Beirut
4	LU student, 1960s-70s; and LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), 1990s-2010s	M	16 March 2017	Beirut
5	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), 1990s	M	17 August 2017	London
6	Professor of education at other university	M	11 October 2017	Beirut
7	Researcher on refugee access to higher education	F	12 October 2017	Beirut
8	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), 2000s	M	13 October 2017	Beirut
9	LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s-1990s	F	15 October 2017	Beirut
10	LU student leader, 1960s; and LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), 2000s-2010s	M	16 October 2017	Beirut
11	Professor of history at other university	M	17 October 2017	Beirut
12	LU student leader, 1960s; LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s-2010s	M	18 October 2017	Beirut
13	LU student, fifth branch (Saidon), 1990s	F	19 October 2017	Beirut
14	LU student, 1960s; and LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), 2000s	F	22 October 2017	Beirut
15	Researcher on higher education	F	23 October 2017	Beirut

16	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), 1990s; and LU professor, third branch (Tripoli), current	M	24 October 2017	Tripoli
17	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), 1990s; and LU professor, third branch (Tripoli), current	F	24 October 2017	Tripoli
18	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), 1980s	M	24 October 2017	Tripoli
19	LU student leader, 1960s; and LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s-2000s	M	25 October 2017	Beirut
20	Professor of education at other university	F	27 October 2017	Beirut
21	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), current	M	16 January 2018	Beirut
22	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s-2000s; and LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), current	F	17 January 2018	Beirut
23	LU student, 1960s; and LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), 1970s-2000s	F	17 January 2018	Beirut
24	LU student leader, 1960s; LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s-2010s	M	18 January 2018	Beirut
25	LU president, 2000s	M	19 January 2018	Beirut
26	LU student, first branch (west Beirut)	F	20 January 2018	Beirut
27	LU student leader, 1970s; and LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), current	M	22 January 2018	Beirut
28	LU student leader, 1960s-1970s; LU professor and union activist, second branch (east Beirut), 1980s-2010s	M	24 January 2018	Fanar, Matn
29	LU student leader, 1960s-1970s; LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s; and minister of education, 2000s	M	24 January 2018	Beirut
30	LU student, 1960s	F	28 January 2018	Beirut
31	Professor of education at other university	M	7 March 2018	Beirut
32	LU student leader, 1960s-1970s; and LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s-2000s	M	7 March 2018	Beirut
33	LU student 1970s; and LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), current	M	8 March 2018	Beirut
34	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), current	F	11 March 2018	Beirut
35	LU central administrator, current	F	14 March 2018	Beirut

36	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s	M	28 March 2018	Beirut
37	LU central administrator, current	F	31 May 2018	Beirut
38	LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), current	F	1 June 2018	Beirut
39	LU student leader, 1960s; and LU professor and administrator 1980s-1990s	M	2 June 2018	Beirut
40	LU student 1960s; LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s-2010s	M	4 June 2018	Beirut
41	Project manager at NGO working on refugee access to higher education	F	5 June 2018	Beirut
42	LU student, 1960s-1970s; LU professor and leading union activist, third branch (Tripoli), 1990s-2010s	M	6 June 2018	Beirut
43	LU student leader, 1960s; LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s-2010s	M	7 June 2018	Beirut
44	LU student leader, 1960s; LU professor, second branch (east Beirut), 2000s-2010s	M	11 June 2018	Beirut
45	LU student, second branch (east Beirut), 1990s-2000s	F	11 June 2018	Beirut
46	LU student, 1960s; LU professor and union activist, first branch (west Beirut), 1980s-2010s	M	12 June 2018	Beirut
47	Director of EU programme on higher education, Ministry of Education and Higher Education	M	12 June 2018	Beirut
48	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), current	F	14 June 2018	Beirut
49	LU student, third branch (Tripoli), 1970s; LU professor, third branch (Tripoli), 1990s-2010s	M	7 August 2018	Tripoli
50	LU student, first branch (west Beirut), 1990s; LU professor, first branch (west Beirut), current	F	1 January 2019	Beirut
51	Former president of other university	M	18 February 2019	London
52	Former minister of education	M	12 March 2019	London



## Cited newspaper articles

\*The majority of articles dated between 1977 and 2019 are drawn from the Munir Bashshur Newspaper Archive, located at the American University of Beirut. Additional articles are drawn from national newspaper archives and from online.

\*\*For all original titles in Arabic and English, please see Appendix 3.

Newspaper	Date	Title	Language
The Daily Star	7 April 1962	Strike at university	English
Al-Nahar	10 April 1962	Strike at Lebanese University	Arabic
The Daily Star	21 March 1963	Students at Lebanese University go on strike	English
The Daily Star	11 December 1963	Student demands at Lebanese University	English
The Daily Star	14 April 1968	Lebanese U students planning to escalate strike next week	English
The Daily Star	17 January 1970	Police battle Lebanese U. students: 42 injured including 12 security force men	English
<i>Outlook</i> , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	12 February 1971		English
The Daily Star	12 March 1971	Photo of student demonstration outside parliament	English
<i>Outlook</i> , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	12 March 1971		English
The Daily Star	16 March 1971	Abu Haidar threatens to close schools should strike continue	English
<i>Outlook</i> , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	16 March 1971		English
The Daily Star	23 March 1971	Lebanese U students spell out full demands	English

The Daily Star	24 March 1971	Students stage sit-in along Hamra	English
The Daily Star	3 April 1971	Students get unexpected encouragement	English
The Daily Star	10 December 1974	Students at universities, schools go on strike today	English
The Daily Star	20 February 1975	New clashes reported at Lebanese University	English
The Daily Star	2 March 1975	Naim: Lebanese U needs LL. 200M to be developed	English
Al-Nahar	22 April 1975	Appeal of Dean of Faculty of Letters to University Professors – Your Role is to Guide and Lead the Way	Arabic
Al-Safir	16 March 1976	Students of al-Ahrar Party call for the division of the Lebanese University	Arabic
Al-Nahar	26 April 1977	Sadr Younes: Are there no other universities and problems? The benefit of this attention is that it has become the symbol of Lebanon's unity	Arabic
Al-Nahar	11 May 1977	Lebanese University Week Began in Baabda	Arabic
Al-Nahar	13 May 1977	Ceremony to End Lebanese University Week. Al-Boustani: Our ancestors were translating different languages 4000 years ago, how can they want us to learn in just one language?	Arabic
Al-Nahar	14 May 1977	Zahle student union: Let's call it the "New Lebanese University"	Arabic

Al-Nahar	14 May 1977	Students, Charles Malik and Bashir Gemayel inaugurated the "university of freedom, truth and creativity." "Be aware of the dangers...we are not prepared to give up an inch"	Arabic
Al-Nahar	26 May 1977	Lebanese University Week: "Lebanon's soul has split but its mind will not"	Arabic
Al-Nahar	27 October 1977	Deeb: The university went to the governorates [regions] to be closer to the students	Arabic
Al-Nahar	26 February 1982	Faculty of Medicine in the Lebanese University	Arabic
Al-Safir	2 April 1986	The Lebanese University and its professors, library and standards is seen by George Tohme as defiant, persevering and developing	Arabic
Al-Safir	5 November 1988	Management disease infiltrates the national university; Bribes, deals and corruption pave the way for division under the guise of federalism	Arabic
Al-Safir	1 May 1991	The professors authorise their bodies to strike: Our goal is to stop the collapse and improve the performance of the university	Arabic
Al-Safir	17 May 1991	Faculty of Media celebrates the anniversary of its foundation; speeches affirm the unity of the Lebanese University and its role	Arabic

Al-Safir	15 July 1991	Policy of decreasing the budget is impacting on the quality of the Lebanese University	Arabic
Al-Nahar, Hassan Mneimneh	10 November 1992	The nation and the university are our future	Arabic
Al-Nahar	11 November 1992	The necessary university and the negligent state	Arabic
Al-Nahar	12 November 1993	The Lebanese University, its role and its hierarchy	Arabic
Al-Hayat, Hassan Daoud	12 December 1994	Professors are heading towards strike; constructing campus buildings is the most rushed of policies	Arabic
Al-Hayat, Zameer Muwari	19 February 1995	The public university is on strike and private ones are growing like mushrooms; what is the future of Lebanon's 'Babel Tower'?	Arabic
Nahar al-Shabab	21 February 1995	The Lebanese University, a story of struggle and resistance	Arabic
Nahar al-Shabab	21 February 1995	Let the politicians take their hands off the university and a law ignites strikes of iron	Arabic
Al-Nahar	2 June 1995	Maronite League opposes university campus where 100,000 students will be cramped and thrown together	Arabic
Al-Nahar	11 August 1995	So as not to 'cancel' the second branches	Arabic
Al-Nahar	12 August 1995	The second branch is not calming down and is fixated on survival	Arabic
Al-Nahar	14 December 1995	Lebanese University disrupted by one-day strike repeating demands on salary cuts	Arabic



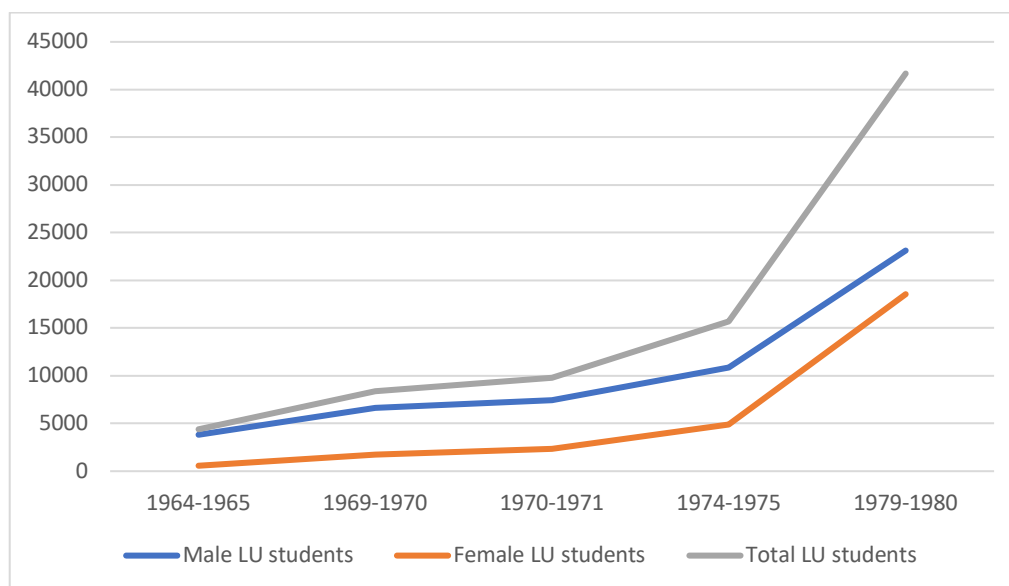
Al-Safir	1 April 1996	Open dialogue with Halabi about higher education: standards for petrol stations but not for universities	Arabic
Al-Nahar	6 September 1996	Emergency council for students of the second branch, position is it remain and not to close'	Arabic
Al-Hayat	9 January 1997	Lebanon: the unified casino and the branched university	Arabic
Al-Safir	11 March 1997	They are leading the Lebanese University to disaster	Arabic
Al-Nahar	28 March 1997	The earthquake that struck the Lebanese University!	Arabic
Al-Safir	29 March 1997	The Lebanese University: It's too late, what should we do?	Arabic
Al-Safir	3 April 1997	Students of the Lebanese University: the politicians are sabotaging it if the situation continues then the end is near	Arabic
Al-Nahar	5 April 1997	Issam Khalife raises the alarm: The Lebanese University is in danger	Arabic
Al-Safir, Zuhair Huwari	6 April 1997	The appointment of Lebanese University deans: the interference of the state and the degradation of the university	Arabic
Al-Nahar	21 November 2000	The aim of the state is to strangle the university	Arabic
Al-Nahar, Samir Kassir	5 January 2001	Mercy Bullet	Arabic
Al-Nahar	2 June 2001	Muawad: "The government divided the university in a sectarian way and gave 30 licenses to grocery shops"	Arabic

Al-Nahar	1 October 2001	Salameh: Boutiques call themselves universities and the Lebanese University cannot train 100,000 students	Arabic
Al-Nahar	4 December 2003	Cartoon of Lebanese University and new private universities	Arabic
Al-Safir	28 March 2012	In Nabatieh, university faculties and buildings tell the suffering of the students and the inabilities of the administration	Arabic
Al-Safir	4 April 2012	In Tripoli the street is the continuation of the university's faculties	Arabic
Al-Safir	11 April 2012	In Zahle... 'historical' buildings and courses continue in Beirut	Arabic
Al-Safir	18 April 2012	In Saida, absent courses and noise from the street	Arabic
Al-Safir	9 May 2012	Faculties of the second branch of the Lebanese University: a geographic maze where demands get lost	Arabic
Al-Nahar, Issam Khalife	19 July 2014	An honest look at the 'semi-farm' of the Lebanese University	Arabic
The Daily Star	28 March 2018	Criticism levelled at "sectarian" Lebanese University	English
Al-Nahar	12 June 2018	The Lebanese University: More sectarian imbalance and nepotism. A list of 700 full-time faculty satisfies the parties by quotas'	Arabic
Al-Nahar, Adnan El-Amine	22 September 2018	The Lebanese University and the politics from above and below	Arabic

Al-Nahar, George Kallas	1 October 2018	Who will save higher education in Lebanon? The Lebanese University is the solution'	Arabic
Arab News	18 April 2019	It's austerity or catastrophe, Saad Hariri tells Lebanon	English
Al-Fanar Media, Olivia Cuthbert	27 June 2019	Professors' strike at Lebanon's only public university reveals social and economic gaps	English
Jadaliyya	18 October 2019	Ongoing post on protests in Beirut/Lebanon (Jadaliyya co-editors in Beirut)	English
Al-Fanar Media, Jana Dhaybi	29 October 2019	Lebanon's universities have emptied out into the streets	English

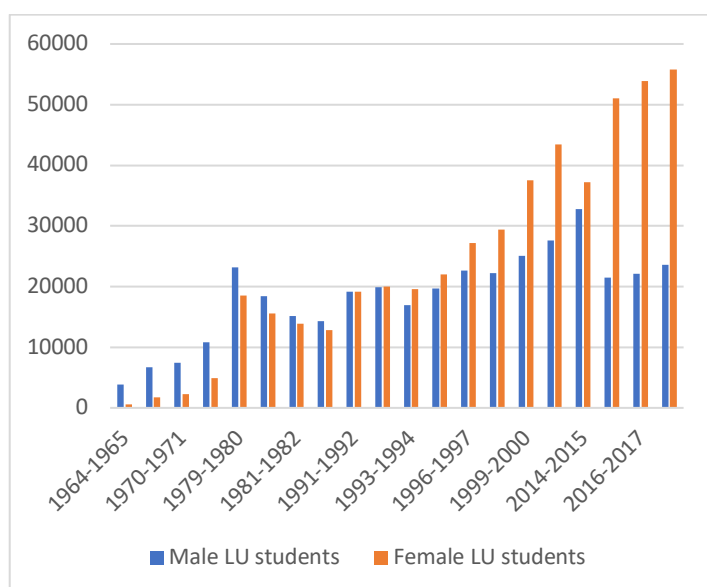
## Appendix 1: Lebanese University enrolment figures

Figure 1: Rising enrolment at the Lebanese University 1964-1980



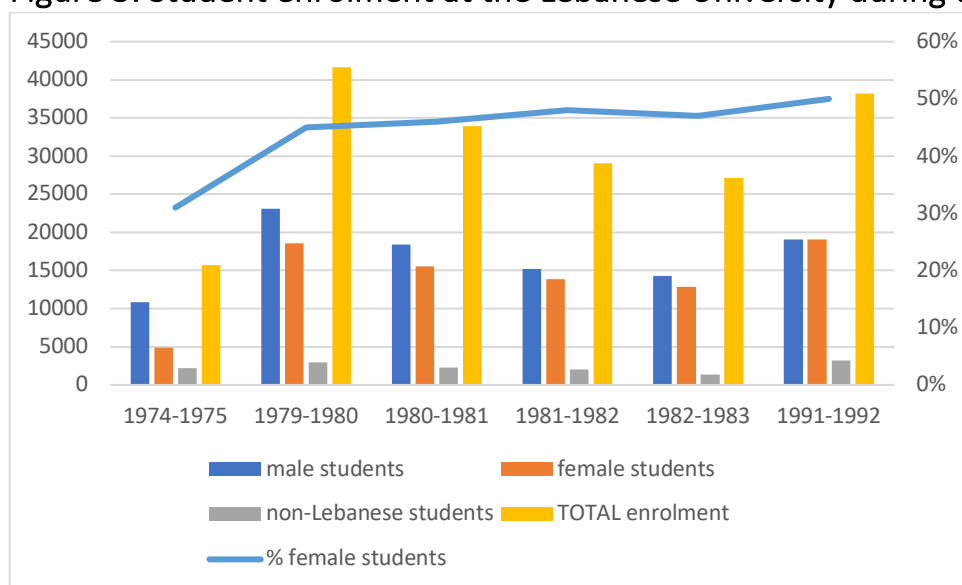
Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD)

Figure 2: Rising female enrolment at the Lebanese University 1964-2018



Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD)

Figure 3: Student enrolment at the Lebanese University during the civil war



Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD)

Figure 4: Lebanese University students by gender and nationality 1964-2018

Year	male	female	Lebanese	Non-Lebanese	TOTAL	% female students
1964-1965*	3820	573	4393	814	5207	13%
1969-1970*	6649	1754	8403	1322	9725	21%
1970-1971*	7445	2315	9760	1928	11688	24%
1974-1975	10852	4870	13503	2219	15722	31%
1979-1980	23130	18554	38769	2915	41684	45%
1980-1981	18368	15569	31646	2291	33937	46%
1981-1982	15190	13858	27044	2004	29048	48%
1982-1983	14312	12835	25786	1361	27147	47%
1991-1992	19105	19103	35012	3196	38208	50%
1992-1993	19889	20037	37248	2678	39926	50%
1993-1994	16918	19585	32517	3986	36503	54%
1994-1995	19702	22005	36118	5589	41707	53%
1996-1997	22616	27139	44645	5110	49755	55%
1997-1998	22225	29436	46784	4877	51661	57%
1999-2000	25087	37515	57666	4936	62602	60%
2000-2001	27568	43482	65564	5486	71050	61%
2014-2015	32742	37252	65230	4764	69994	53%
2015-2016	21442	51076	68778	3740	72518	70%
2016-2017	22075	53881	72257	3699	75956	71%
2017-2018	23602	55758	75485	3875	79360	70%

Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD) \*Figures by gender exclude non-Lebanese students.

Figure 5: Enrolment in higher education by type of institution 1991-2018

Type of institution	Students enrolled in 1991-1992	% total enrolment in 1991-92	Students enrolled in 1999-2000	% total enrolment in 1999-00	Students enrolled in 2012-2013	% total enrolment in 2012-13	Students enrolled in 2017-2018	% total enrolment in 2017-18
Lebanese University (LU)	38208	44.7	62602	60.3	71440	37.2	79360	37.7
Lebanese International University (LIU)	not established		not established		17800	9.3	25152	12
Beirut Arab University (BAU)	28617	33.5	9408	9	11053	5.8	9707	4.6
Université Saint-Joseph (USJ)	5398	6.3	7034	6.8	9655	5	9779	4.6
American University of Beirut (AUB)	4885	5.7	4796	4.6	8054	4.2	8733	4.2
Université Saint Esprit De Kaslik (USEK)	less than 4000		less than 4000		7849	4.1	7812	3.7
Lebanese American University (LAU) *formerly Beirut University College	less than 4000		4470	4.3	7521	3.9	8528	4
Notre Dame University (NDU)	less than 4000		less than 4000		7205	3.8	6255	3
Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon (AUL)	not established		not established		6413	3.4	5742	2.7
Balamand University	less than 4000		less than 4000		4950	2.6	4595	2.2
American University for Science and Technology (AUST)	not established		not established		4890	2.5	4053	1.9
Islamic University of Lebanon (IUL)	not established		less than 4000		4859	2.5	5229	2.4
American University of Culture and Education (AUCE)	not established		not established		4297	2.2	less than 4000	
other private institutions enrolling less than 4000 students	8387	9.8	15559	15	25802	13.5	35775	17
<b>TOTAL number of students enrolled in higher education</b>	<b>85495</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>103869</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>191788</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>210720</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *al-Nashra al-Ihsā'yya [Statistical Bulletin]*, for all years listed. Print and online. Beirut: Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD).

## Appendix 2: Selection of images



Source (above left): *The Daily Star*, 12 March 1971. The photo caption reads: 'STUDENTS VS ADMINISTRATION: Security men guard the entrance of Lebanon's Parliament, fearing that students may attempt to occupy it along with the Lebanese University...'.



Source (above right): *The Daily Star*, 17 January 1970. The lower photo caption reads: 'CONFRONTATION: Policemen, all armed with guns and batons, stand face to face with students of the Law school of the Lebanese University Friday during the bloody clashes. The students carried posters calling for educational reform'.



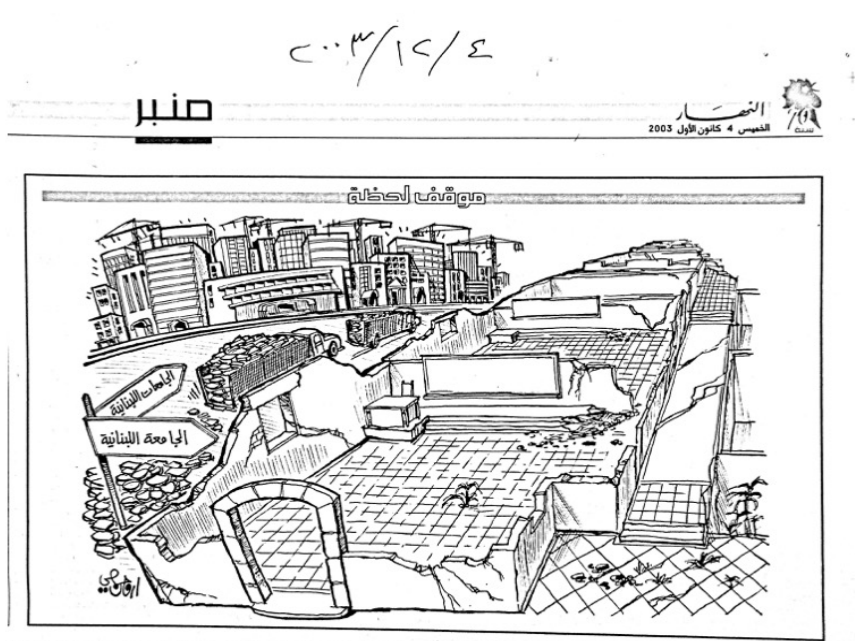
Source (above left): *Al-Nahar*, 26 May 1977. Students hold a banner which reads: 'One national university... for one nation'.

Source (above right): *Al-Nahar*, 14 May 1977, on the division of the Lebanese University. The title reads: 'Students, Charles Malik and Bashir Gemayel inaugurated the "university of freedom, truth and creativity." "Be aware of the dangers...we are not prepared to give up an inch".'





Source and date unknown. A fighter sits in front of the destroyed Faculty of Science building, which was occupied by the Israeli Army in 1982 and later by different militia groups during the civil war.



Source: Al-Nahar, 4 December 2003. The signposts point to the public 'Lebanese University' on the right, showing abject neglect and ruin, and to the proliferation of new private 'Lebanese Universities' straight ahead, picturing major investment and construction.





After some 40 years of student and faculty demands for a campus, Hadath campus was finally opened in the mid-2000s. Located in south Beirut, it is on the same site as the iconic Faculty of Science building, which was opened in 1968, seen in the top left of the picture.



Source: Lebanese University Students Group, 5 February 2020, posted on social media. The post calls for a sit-in front of the Faculty of Science to demand greater transparency, accountability and participation in university decision making.

## Appendix 3:

### List of newspaper articles

Newspaper	Date	Original title	Translated title
Al-Fanar Media, Jana Dhaybi	29 October 2019	Lebanon's universities have emptied out into the streets	
Jadaliyya	18 October 2019	Ongoing post on protests in Beirut/Lebanon (Jadaliyya co-editors in Beirut)	
Al-Fanar Media, Olivia Cuthbert	27 June 2019	Professors' strike at Lebanon's only public university reveals social and economic gaps	
Arab News	18 April 2019	It's austerity or catastrophe, Saad Hariri tells Lebanon	
Al-Nahar, George Kallas	1 October 2018	من سينقذ التعليم العالي في لبنان؟ الجامعة اللبنانية هي الحل	Who will save higher education in Lebanon? The Lebanese University is the solution'
Al-Nahar, Adnan El-Amine	22 September 2018	الجامعة اللبنانية والسياسة من فوق ومن تحت	The Lebanese University and the politics from above and below
Al-Nahar	12 June 2018	الجامعة اللبنانية: مزيد من الخلل الطائفي، التنقيعات لانحازية بـ 700 اسم ترعى الاحزاب بالملحاصصة	The Lebanese University: More sectarian imbalance and nepotism. A list of 700 full-time faculty satisfies the parties by quotas'
The Daily Star	28 March 2018	Criticism levelled at "sectarian" Lebanese University	
Al-Nahar, Issam Khalife	19 July 2014	مصارحة حول "شبه مزرعة" الجامعة اللبنانية	An honest look at the 'semi-farm' of the Lebanese University
Al-Safir	9 May 2012	كليات الفرع الثاني لـ "لبنانية" متاهة جغرافية تضيق فيها المطالب	Faculties of the second branch of the Lebanese University: a geographic maze where demands get lost
Al-Safir	18 April 2012	في صيدا... اختصاصات مفقودة وشارع للتشبيح الدوريات غائبة والضوضاء من الشارع التشبيح	In Saida, absent courses and noise from the street
Al-Safir	11 April 2012	في زحلة... مبان "تاريخية" واختصاصات تستكمل في بيروت	In Zahle... 'historical' buildings and courses continue in Beirut
Al-Safir	4 April 2012	في طرابلس... الشارع امتداد لكليات "اللبنانية"	In Tripoli the street is the continuation of the university's faculties
Al-Safir	28 March 2012	في النبطية... كليات "اللبنانية" ومبانيها تروي معاناة لطلاب وعجز الإدارة	In Nabatieh, university faculties and buildings tell the suffering of the students and the inabilities of the administration
Al-Nahar	4 December 2003	Cartoon of Lebanese University and private universities	
Al-Nahar	1 October 2001	سلامة: بوتيكات تسمى نفسها جامعات والجامعة اللبنانية لا تدارب ١٠٠ ألف طالب	Salameh: Boutiques call themselves universities and the Lebanese University cannot train 100,000 students
Al-Nahar	2 June 2001	معوض: السلطة قسمت الجامعة طائفية وأعطت رخص لـ ٣٠ دكانة	Muawad: "The government divided the university in a sectarian way and gave 30 licenses to grocery shops"
Al-Nahar, Samir Kassir	5 January 2001	رصاصه الرحمة	Mercy Bullet
Al-Nahar	21 November 2000	هدف الدولة خنق الجامعة	The aim of the state is to strangle the university
Al-Safir, Zuhair Huwari	6 April 1997	تعبس عمداء اللبنانية تدخل الدولة والتسيب	The appointment of Lebanese University deans: the interference of the state and the degradation of the university
Al-Nahar	5 April 1997	عصام خليفة يقرع ناقوس الخطر: الجامعة اللبنانية في خطر	Issam Khalife raises the alarm: The Lebanese University is in danger
Al-Safir	3 April 1997	طلاب الجامعة اللبنانية: السياسيون يخربونها إذا ستمر الوضع الراهن فنهايتها قريبة	Students of the Lebanese University: the politicians are sabotaging it if the situation continues then the end is near
Al-Safir	29 March 1997	الجامعة اللبنانية: فات الأوان فماذا نفعل؟	The Lebanese University: It's too late, what should we do?

Al-Nahar	28 March 1997	الذي صرب الجامعة اللبنانية!	The earthquake that struck the Lebanese University!
Al-Safir	11 March 1997	إنهم يقودون الجامعة اللبنانية إلى كارثة	They are leading the Lebanese University to disaster
Al-Hayat	9 January 1997	لبنان الكازينو الموحد والجامعة المتفرعة	Lebanon: the unified casino and the branched university
Al-Nahar	6 September 1996	حالة الطوارئ لطلاب الفروع الثانية، تديم التحرك للبقاء وعدم الإقفال	Emergency council for students of the second branch, position is it remain and not to close'
Al-Safir	1 April 1996	حوار مفتوح مع الحلّى حوال التعليم العالي: معايير لمحطات البيرين والجامعات من دونها	Open dialogue with Halabi about higher education: standards for petrol stations but not for universities
Al-Nahar	14 December 1995	الجامعة اللبنانية تعطلت كلها باصراب الأساتذة وتوصيات بأكبر، حيال التدخلات ووقف الرواتب	Lebanese University disrupted by one-day strike repeating demands on salary cuts
Al-Nahar	12 August 1995	الفروع الثانية في الجامعة اللبنانية لا تهدأ، تذلّ إده وهاجسها البقاء	The second branch is not calming down and is fixated on survival
Al-Nahar	11 August 1995	لئلا "تلى" الفروع الثانية...	So as not to 'cancel' the second branches
Al-Nahar	2 June 1995	الرابطة المارونية معارضة لمبنى جامعي يحسره فيه ويزج مئة ألف طالب	Maronite League opposes university campus where 100,000 students will be cramped and thrown together
Nahar al-Shabab	21 February 1995	الجامعة اللبنانية، قصة الكفاح والمقاومة	The Lebanese University, a story of struggle and resistance
Nahar al-Shabab	21 February 1995	يجب على السياسيين أن يرفعوا أيديهم عن الجامعة وأن يضعوا القوانين أولاً	The politicians must take their hands off the university and put the laws first
Al-Hayat, Zameer Muwari	19 February 1995	الجامعة الرسمية معلقة والخاصة تنبت كالفطر: ما مستقبل "برج بابل" اللبناني؟	The public university is on strike and private ones are growing like mushrooms; what is the future of Lebanon's 'Babel Tower'?
Al-Hayat, Hassan Daoud	12 December 1994	أساتذة الجامعة اللبنانية المقبلون على الإصراب: بناء الصروح هو أكبر السياسات تعجلاً	Professors are heading towards strike; constructing campus buildings is the most rushed of policies
Al-Nahar	12 November 1993	الجامعة اللبنانية ودورها وتسلسلها الهرمي	The Lebanese University, its role and its hierarchy
Al-Nahar	11 November 1992	الجامعة الصلوة والدولة اللامبالية	The necessary university and the indifferent state
Al-Nahar, Hassan Mneimneh	10 November 1992	الوطن والجامعة هما مستقبلنا	The nation and the university are our future
Al-Safir	15 July 1991	سياسة تخفيض المبرانية تؤثر على جودة الجامعة اللبنانية	Policy of decreasing the budget is impacting on the quality of the Lebanese University
Al-Safir	17 May 1991	كلية الإعلام تحتفل بذكرى تأسيسها كلمات تؤكد وحدة "اللبنانية" ودورها	Faculty of Media celebrates the anniversary of its foundation; speeches affirm the unity of the Lebanese University and its role
Al-Safir	1 May 1991	أساتذة يأذن أجسادهم لصرب: هدفنا وقف الانهيار وتحسين أداء الجامعة	The professors authorise their bodies to strike: Our goal is to stop the collapse and improve the performance of the university

Al-Safir	5 November 1988	مرض الإدارة يتسلل إلى الجامعة الوطنية بشاوى وصفقات وتميريات تمهد للتقسيم تحت ستار الفدرالية	Management disease infiltrates the national university; Bribes, deals and corruption pave the way for division under the guise of federalism
Al-Safir	2 April 1986	الجامعة اللبنانية بأساتذتها ومكتباتها مستواها يراها جورج طعمه متحدية مثابرة ومتطورة	The Lebanese University and its professors, library and standards is seen by George Tohme as defiant, persevering and developing
Al-Nahar	26 February 1982	كلية الطب في الجامعة اللبنانية، نايف سعادة: أنها لضرورية "واحدة تتخلى للدولة و سياسى رفض	Faculty of Medicine in the Lebanese University
Al-Nahar	27 October 1977	قرار نتيجة أبحاث ودروس طويلة ودقيقة" ديب: ذهبت الجامعة إلى للمحافظات إلى المكان الأقرب والأسهل على الطالب	Deeb: The university went to the governorates [regions] to be closer to the students
Al-Nahar	26 May 1977	أسبوع الجامعة اللبنانية: "لن ينقسم عقل لبنان بعد قلبه	Lebanese University Week: "Lebanon's soul has split but its mind will not"
Al-Nahar	14 May 1977	اتحاد طلاب زحلة: لنسمها " الجامعة اللبنانية الجديدة" الإمتحانات تحت سلطة الوزارة	Zahle student union: Let's call it the "New Lebanese University"
Al-Nahar	14 May 1977	الطلاب وشارل مالك وبشر الجميل "دشنوها جامعة للحرية والحقيقة الإيداع "انتبهوا للأخطار... مش مستعدين نتنازل عن شبر	Students, Charles Malik and Bashir Gemayel inaugurated the "university of freedom, truth and creativity." "Be aware of the dangers...we are not prepared to give up an inch"
Al-Nahar	13 May 1977	مهرجان يختم أسبوع الجامعة اللبنانية" البستاني: أجدادنا قاموا ببرجمات قبل 4000 سنة فكيف يريدوننا اليوم أن نتعلم لغة واحدة؟	Ceremony to End Lebanese University Week. Al-Boustani: Our ancestors were translating different languages 4000 years ago, how can they want us to learn in just one language?
Al-Nahar	11 May 1977	أسبوع الجامعة اللبنانية" بدأ في بعيدا رباى: جامعة نوعية في الأخلاق والجدارة والشخصية، برنس: أبواب الجحيم لن تقوى عليه	Lebanese University Week Began in Baabda
Al-Nahar	26 April 1977	الى الجامعة اللبنانية تنكسر والاراء; سنة الركبي عليها انها صارت رمز وحدة لبنان	Sadr Younes: Are there no other universities and problems? The benefit of this attention is that it has become the symbol of Lebanon's unity
Al-Safir	16 March 1976	طلاب حزب الأحرار يطالبون بتكريس التقسيم في الجامعة اللبنانية	Students of al-Ahrar Party call for the division of the Lebanese University
Al-Nahar	22 April 1975	نداء عميد كلية الآداب لأساتذة جامعات - دورك هو الإرشاد وقيادة الطريق	Appeal of Dean of Faculty of Letters to University Professors – Your Role is to Guide and Lead the Way
The Daily Star	2 March 1975	Naim: Lebanese U needs LL. 200M to be developed	
The Daily Star	20 February 1975	New clashes reported at Lebanese University	

The Daily Star	10 December 1974	Students at universities, schools go on strike today	
The Daily Star	3 April 1971	Students get unexpected encouragement'	
The Daily Star	24 March 1971	Students stage sit-in along Hamra	
The Daily Star	23 March 1971	Lebanese U students spell out full demands	
The Daily Star	16 March 1971	Abu Haidar threatens to close schools should strike continue	
Outlook , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	16 March 1971		
The Daily Star	12 March 1971	Photo of student demonstration outside parliament	
Outlook , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	12 March 1971		
Outlook , Jafet Library Archives, American University of Beirut	12 February 1971		
The Daily Star	17 January 1970	Police battle Lebanese U. students: 42 injured including 12 security force men	
The Daily Star	14 April 1968	Lebanese U students planning to escalate strike next week	
The Daily Star	11 December 1963	Student demands at Lebanese University	
The Daily Star	21 March 1963	Students at Lebanese University go on strike	
Al-Nahar	10 April 1962	إضراب في الجامعة اللبنانية	Strike at Lebanese University
The Daily Star	7 April 1962	Strike at university	

Sources: The majority of articles dated between 1977 and 2019 are drawn from the Munir Bashshur Newspaper Archive, located at the American University of Beirut. Additional articles are drawn from national newspaper archives, covering the years before 1977, and from online. See Chapter 3.5.6, p.66-67, for further explanation.

## Appendix 4:

### Research participant information and consent form



#### Information Sheet

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**Research Project:** Universities, conflict and the public sphere: Trajectories of the public university in Lebanon

**Name of researcher:** Helen Murray

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. This sheet includes a basic summary of the project and ethical questions of confidentiality, anonymity and consent of research participants.

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of higher education in societies affected by conflict, with a focus on the history of the national university in Lebanon as a case study. Tracing the historical trajectory of the Lebanese University from its establishment in the post-independence era in 1951 to the present, the research will examine changing ideas about higher education as a 'public good', its potential to contribute to the 'public sphere', and its role in both challenging and reproducing socio-political divisions within society.

The research is being carried out by Helen Murray as part her PhD research at the School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex. This study has been approved by the Social Sciences Cluster Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) at the University of Sussex.

You have been invited to participate in this study because of your current or former role at the Lebanese University. Your responses will be valuable in contributing to knowledge about the role of higher education in processes of social and political change, and understanding these dynamics in relation to local and global pressures on universities.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will usually last up to one hour in duration. The interview will be in Arabic or English, according to your preference. Helen will contact you to arrange a time and location that are convenient to you for the interview to take place.

## Consent Form

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**Research Project:** Universities, conflict and the public sphere: Trajectories of the public university in Lebanon

**Name of researcher:** Helen Murray

I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of this research and willingly consent to take part in it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being digitally recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can ask for the digital recorder to be switched off at any point during the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can decline to answer any particular questions and may withdraw from the study at any time.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the content of the interview will be kept confidential and my name will not be used without my permission.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the information I give will be used only for the purposes of this research and publications arising from it.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_