

Workers of the Sham
عمال بلاد الشام



بمساعدة شعب ليبيا العربي
تمّ انقاذ موسم البيع الذي
يعتاش منه نصف مليون
انسان في الجنوب الصاقد
.. ان فلاحى الجنوب
قد طسوا من هذا
التعاون ارفع معاني
التكاتف الشعبى
والضامن الوجدوى

الاتحاد الاشتراكي العربي
التنظيم الناصري

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Solidarity Screenings Glasgow Manifesto

This manifesto is a guiding document that outlines Solidarity Screenings Glasgows' objectives, principles and strategy. It is aimed at our audience, team and collaborators.

Solidarity Screenings is a film screening initiative based in Glasgow, Scotland. (Re)building genuine solidarity through the medium of film is our contribution to the cultural front. We hope to further the growing revolutionary movement in Glasgow.

Presentations, booklets, the Solidarity Book Exchange, shared meals and discussions accompany our screenings. The screenings are free of charge to remain accessible to our audience.

Our work is an act of solidarity with liberation struggles internationally. It began in response to Al-Aqsa Flood in October 2023 in support of the Palestinian struggle for national liberation. Initially our primary focus was Arab cinema. We have since broadened our programming, although Palestine always remains our compass. We uphold Al-Thawabet, the fundamental principles of the Palestinian struggle.

The aim of our work is to confront our audience with educational and agitational screenings that move us towards liberation. Glasgow has a rich history of solidarity with movements worldwide. By highlighting under-recognised struggles, we want to build on this history - celebrating with and learning from them. Capitalism instills a pervasive nihilism in every facet of society. We oppose this. We are revolutionary optimists who are guided by anti-imperialist feminist working-class principles.

Solidarity Screenings is rooted amongst its audience. Our programming is oriented around what educates and agitates the people - rather than the curators' subjective ideas of 'taste'. Moreover, we aim to create a space that fosters transformative and revolutionary discussion. Guiding questions inform the free-flowing dialogue post-film. The films are only the first step; we must release them from the confines of the screen. Ultimately, our audience teaches us how to continuously improve each event through active engagement and constructive criticism.

A few things remain pertinent in our practice: Each screening comes with a particular purpose and theme. The presentations are the medium that conveys this most clearly. Accordingly, it is crucial to orient ourselves around liberatory and revolutionary movements. We recognise colonialism as an ongoing reality, rather than an evil of the past. We must expose it and uphold the right to resist by all means necessary. Through this we oppose imperialist narratives and disinformation that attempt to put a wedge in our solidarity.

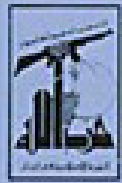
Solidarity Screenings is a collective effort. Collaboration is an essential pillar of the project. We are always keen to have more people involved, whether as a volunteer or guest curator.

If you align with this manifesto and would like to join our efforts or collaborate organisationally, please contact us at solidarityscreeningsglasgow@gmail.com.

Solidarity Screenings upholds the The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of 'Israel' (PACBI). We urge our collaborators to join us in amplifying and publicly endorsing PACBI. For more information please see: <https://tinyurl.com/45ybcnyk>.

القدس قدس المسلمين ويجب ان تعود اليهم

.. الامام الخميني ..



The Sun Rises from the South

Maya Ayoub

October 3, 2024

There is a threshold, a gate — once open, now sealed — along what used to be a simple dirt road separating southern Lebanon from Palestine. Our grandparents and great grandparents used to walk it, from Kafr Kila to Salha, from Salha to Safad, and further, to Haifa, to Jaffa. They call it Bawabet Fatmeh, the Gate of Fatmeh, though no one is certain why. There are rumors: It was named after a young girl who disappeared in a Zionist ambush; It was named after a woman who traveled into the occupied lands to give birth. What matters is that it is now shuttered, this portal to Palestine, connected to a tall metal wall that runs along the artificial border dividing land that used to be one.

The gate was last opened at the turn of the millennium. It was a day of victory, when the Lebanese resistance pushed the Zionist forces and their co-conspirators out of the land they had occupied for eighteen years. They fled hurriedly, leaving behind unused artillery, abandoned villas, and deserted cars along the roadsides, their keys still in the ignition. The images from that day return to us every 25th of May: young boys waving flags atop armored tanks; a father and son, their backs to the camera, running toward the gate of the notorious Khiam prison to greet the liberated captives; a hand-drawn poster held up before a barbed wire fence that reads “Today Lebanon, Tomorrow Palestine.”

Though the occupation ended in 2000, the war did not. In southern Lebanon, war is a pulse that quickens and slows but never dies. We are raised to know our enemy, to carry the Palestinian cause as our own, and to understand that until Zionism is defeated, none of our people can be free.

After Hamas launched operation al-Aqsa Flood last October, the Islamic resistance in Lebanon opened a support front in the North targeting Zionist military infrastructure. Their aim was to drain the occupation army's resources, to limit their capacity to wage war on Gaza. This was enacted through an equation of deterrence: limited strikes on IOF targets across a belt of land that would require (1) the evacuation of northern settlements and (2) the deployment of a large number of troops to the Galilee. Hezbollah clearly stated that its front would stay open until Israel stopped committing genocide in Gaza.

The emptying of the northern settlements presented an existential threat to the Zionist entity. At the dawn of the occupation, the Zionists struggled to Judaize northern Palestine, given its distance from more densely populated urban centers. They finally managed to establish settler outposts in the Galilee after a decades-long campaign of terror against Arabs who remained or returned to their lands after 1948. The same was true for the "Gaza envelope," the seven kilometer buffer zone around the Gaza Strip that Hamas attacked last year. Today, the only settlers left in the North and on the outskirts of the besieged strip are deployed soldiers; the rest are living in hotels in "Tel Aviv."

After a year of failing to achieve any of its military objectives in Gaza, "Israel" found itself backed into a corner, the morale of its fascist masses desiccated and starving for a victory. The Zionists trained their eyes on the North, on lands that have stubbornly resisted settlement and on the Lebanese resistance forces that have refused to break their solidarity with Gaza after a year of genocide. On September 18, 2024, Mossad agents initiated a wider regional war

with a coordinated terrorist attack targeting the pagers and walkie-talkies of Hezbollah members in Lebanon, many of whom serve in the organization's medical and administrative divisions. Within minutes, thousands of men and women were set alight in the streets, in marketplaces, in their homes, in their cars. A second round of explosions the following day killed and maimed Lebanese attending funerals of the martyrs.

Since the attack, the Zionists have escalated their savagery and psychological warfare, repeating the genocidal tactics they used in Gaza on the people of the South — bombing escape routes and ambulances, targeting journalists, carpet bombing entire neighborhoods in Dahiya, the southern Shiite suburb of Beirut. Just as they razed Gaza's orchards and sewed its soil with salt water and munitions, they are setting fire to our olive groves and sending internationally-banned white phosphorus into our fields. They have assassinated our resistance leaders, one after the other, in indiscriminate bombing raids on densely populated civilian areas. They have murdered over 600 Lebanese in the first week of their expanded war; By the time you read this, that number will likely be much higher.

There is something of revenge in their sadism, a libidinal craving to exact punishment on an undefeated people. Ours is a resistance that will never die, helmed by the memory of the heroes and martyrs that came before us: Sana'a Mehaidli, who at age sixteen blew herself up next to an Israeli convoy in Jezzine, killing two Zionist soldiers and injuring ten others; Souha Bechara, who attempted to assassinate Antoine Lahad, the leader of the Southern Lebanese Army which administered the Israeli occupation of the South; Georges Abdullah, Europe's longest political prisoner, held on charges of assassinating a Zionist official; Sheikh Ragheb Harb, Wajdi Al Sayegh, Hassan Darwish, and the thousands of other martyrs who fought to expel the occupation.

I am part of a group that decided to die in order to liberate our land and people," Mehaidli said in a video she recorded shortly before

her martyrdom in April, 1985. “Because I saw the tragedy of life under occupation—the killing of children, women, and the elderly, the home demolitions. For this reason, we made the decision to be fida’is.

The Lebanese resistance dealt the Zionists a second humiliating defeat during the July War in 2006. Believing that a victory in the town of Bint Jbeil would create a “ripple effect,” leading to the capture of other parts of southern Lebanon, Zionists commanders ordered four brigades totaling 5,000 soldiers to besiege the locale while the Israeli Air Force bombed from above. They were held off by less than 150 resistance fighters, young men defending the streets where they grew up and the homes their families built. Local commander Khalid Bazzi was martyred alongside dozens of other men in the fight, and large swaths of the town were flattened, but their triumph was decisive. Standing before the wreckage in the aftermath, Hezbollah leader and martyr Hassan Nasrallah declared before the thousands who’d come to celebrate: “I tell you: the Israel that owns nuclear weapons and has the strongest air force in the region is weaker than a spider’s web.”

Indeed, all the Israelis have are the thousand-pound bombs and ballistic missiles donated by their patrons in Washington; the capacity to obliterate from afar but the inability to hold — in Gaza, Jenin, Nabatieh, Khiam — the land, which falls like sand through their fingers year after year. In the nearly two decades since the Battle of Bint Jbeil, we rebuilt our homes and schools and hospitals; we erected bridges where other bridges once stood; we harvested our tobacco leaves and pressed our olives to oil and we will do it all over again if we have to, if that is the price we must pay to defend the South, to defend our people in Palestine.

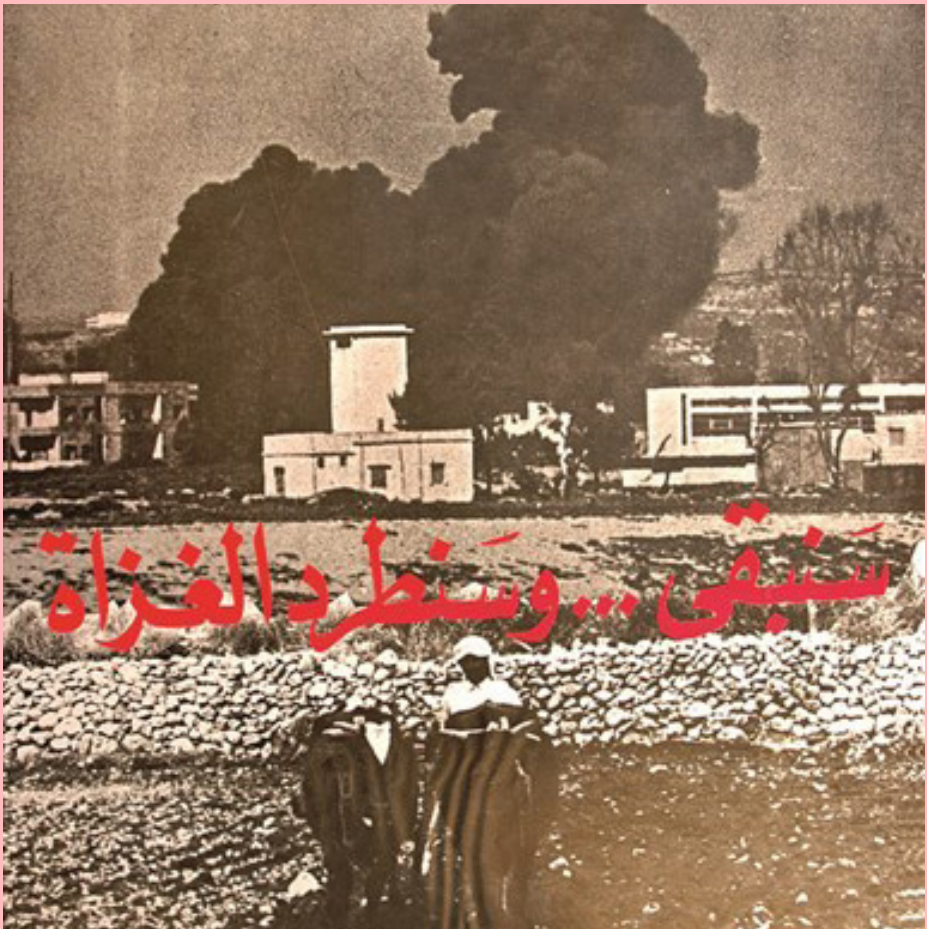
The Zionist attack on Lebanon should be understood as prototypical Zionist expansionism. At the first Zionist conference in Basel in 1919, Theodore Hertzl and his counterparts defined the territorial scope of the Israeli ethnostate as including, in addition to the parts of Palestine occupied today, southern Lebanon, Jordan (on both sides of the

river), Gaza, and southern and south-western Syria. “Even if only the minimum Zionist concept of Palestine is taken to be the real basis of Zionist planning, that will leave the road towards Zionist territorial expansion in the future wide and open,” warned Syrian-Palestinian intellectual Fayez Sayegh in his seminal text *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*, published in 1965.

The persistence of these imperialist ambitions is observable today in the formation of settler groups like “Uri Tzafon,” named after a Biblical phrase that translates to “Arise, O North,” which formed in northern occupied Palestine after October 7 to push for the settlement of southern Lebanon. “Everything between the Litani [River] and Israel must be under the control of the IDF,” said Knesset member MK Avigdor Lieberman in January. What vapid ambition. The Zionists’ hunger for our land exposes the anemic body of their movement. It is a sham that obscures a cold fact: they destroy what they desire; they desire what they can never have. Because we are the rivers, the stones, the trees they seek.

There is an argument promoted by our enemies and detractors, from the Zionists and their imperialist sponsors to the fascist Lebanese bourgeoisie to the supporters of the Saudi, Jordanian, and Egyptian conspirator regimes: that the Lebanese resistance does not fight for Palestine. Different permutations of this cynical framing paint the people of the South as a brainwashed mass purely interested in the Shiitization of the region or as a power hungry body holding up their side of a morally bankrupt resistance axis. To the authors of this polemic and their imitators, to the apologists for the traitorous Jordanian government that shoots down the rockets en route to “Tel Aviv” or the criminal Egyptian regime that blocks the flow of humanitarian aid into Rafah or the Lebanese elites who write off the South as a lower class backwater undeserving of protection: You know nothing of our people. You know nothing of our commitment to struggle for a different world, one in which justice prevails and the fangs of Zionist and imperialist violence are ripped from our land.

Thirty-two years ago, headlines in the settler colony announced that the resistance in Lebanon was over. The Zionists had just assassinated Abbas al-Musawi, the Lebanese Shia cleric and co-founder of Hezbollah, signifying, they thought, the reinforcement of the Northern border and the settlements in the Galilee. The following decades saw the rise of Hezbollah and the martyred leader Hassan Nasrallah, the end of the occupation, and the victory of 2006. We pen these words in a dark month in an even darker year. The path forward is overcast but the destination remains certain: forward to Bawabet Fatmeh, forward through the Galilee, to Jerusalem.



We will stay ... and fight down the invaders
published by Lebanese National Movement

Excerpts from Dear Omar

Nadine Fattaleh

Dear Omar,

The first thing I think we ought to learn from you is the courage both to hold on to and to rethink early works, especially those guided by political convictions that no longer withstand the present's dispensations. Omar, you returned to Syria in the late 60s, armed with an education in militant filmmaking, and your first short, *Film-Essay on the Euphrates Dam* (1970), was commissioned by the state's National Film Organization. This experimental work valorizes the construction of the Euphrates Dam, visually mediating what you called a "hymn to the crane" and celebrating the infrastructural modernity that was supposed to revolutionize the countryside. As you would go on to recount many times, *Film-Essay* is enamored with the aesthetics of the machine at the expense of a critical engagement with the effects that this dawn of modernization had on the life of peasants in the countryside. You do not shy away from acknowledging your misplaced faith in the promise of the state and its deployment of the machine. Many of your subsequent films offer a sharp rejoinder to your past political self, representing what you had left concealed, namely the social and material underpinnings of village life in Syria.

I am interested in how you charted the relationship between cinema and radical politics. In your extended conversation about your body of work with Hala Al Abdalla, you mock and repudiate the naivete of your initial faith in cinema as a tool for ideological expression. You say, "That's how we started in cinema, as left-wing Marxist filmmakers that saw film as a tool for action, a tool to implement change in consciousness and society. There was a utopian view of the act of filmmaking." As you explain the development of your trajectory and the coming of age of your documentary language, you seem to consign the lofty concerns for the ideological deployment of cinema to your long-gone adolescent days.

Documentary, for you, became fundamentally about uncovering the encounter with the real, even as reality emerges enclosed between several brackets, in other words, severed from the immediacy of the lived context and dramatized through editing and montage. I refuse to believe that you completely gave up on filmmaking as a militant vocation. I hear in your words traces of thinkers like Benjamin, Eisenstein, Vertov, Marx, Gramsci, and Fanon among many others, because I have also inherited this theoretical vocabulary and its marked ambivalence toward the democratizing potential of cinema. You talk about the heap of exaggerated theoretical proclamations that caused you, early on, to believe with Walter Benjamin that cinema could burst the prison world asunder by the dynamite of twenty-four frames per second. Of course, you paraphrase Benjamin to question the animating force that particular images can have on the popular consciousness of cinemagoers, who may be moved by seeing their reality relayed to them in a succession of images. But did you really give up on the possibility that film can forge communal experience? Isn't it precisely this possibility of drawing people together that produced anxiety in the state? Was this not what caused your films to be banned in the first place? As you relate to Hala your experience with dramatizing the real in documentary form, the poster for your second film, *Everyday Life in a Syrian Village* (1974), hangs above you and marks this film's towering influence. *Everyday Life*, to me, is a film about accumulation by dispossession in the Syrian countryside. It combines an orthodox Marxist concern for materialist class analysis, a Gramscian affinity for the subaltern voice, and a Fanonian urgency for anticolonial action. The decoupled image of the impoverished and subjugated peasant, the credible bearer of the truth of rural hardship, is the defining idiom of the film. At the end of *Everyday Life*, the peasant turns directly to the camera, ripping off his clothes to offer a naked and raw final address: "We are hungry and we are dying." The film closes with a series of intertitles, which reference the Third Cinema classic *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) as they quote from Fanon: "We must involve ourselves in the struggle for our common salvation. There are no clean hands, no innocents, no

spectators. We must all plunge our hands in the mud of the soil. Every onlooker is a coward, or a traitor.”

I have always been fascinated by this biting indictment of spectatorship, particularly because it presupposes an engaged audience for the film and a political organisation or framework through which cultural practice could inform militant political mobilization, both of which were becoming increasingly impossible in Syria in the early 1970s, on the eve of the film’s completion. You seem to have been interested in screening *Everyday Life* among rural and peasant communities, reflecting to them the image of their own dispossession and igniting a form of political awakening through cinema. The film was banned before its release and has been banned ever since, for nearly half a century. But rather than dwelling on the impossibility of the film’s closing address, I want to hold on to the anticipatory relationship it charts between film and a new collective political consciousness.

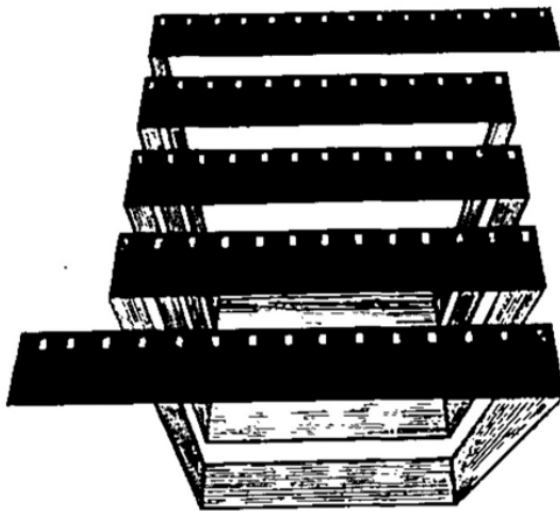
Elsewhere, Omar, I read about the weeklong event called Cinema and Politics that you convened in Damascus in 1978 in the seven-hundred-seat Al-Kindi theater. I found a poster of the event online, but I searched in vain for photographs substantiating that you were really there at this legendary event that brought together Syrian filmmakers with figures like Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda, legends of the French New Wave who were also your comrades. You relay that the Syrian censors banned a number of films, so in place of the screenings the film critic Serge Daney sat onstage and performed a verbal recitation, describing in detail the banned films, filling the void of their impossible appearance. About this event, you are quoted in the *New Yorker* saying, “It was a screening without an image—an absolutely beautiful happening.” Daney’s rather mischievous account of the events suggests that the prohibition of some films was not the only controversy, and fiery debates between radical filmmakers here (Damascus) and elsewhere (Paris) established fault lines among the audience, some of whom were invested in the radical aesthetics of cinema and others who were

concerned exclusively with the political importance of the image. Between the completion of *Everyday Life* in 1974 and the Cinema and Politics seminar in 1978, Omar, it seems you were confronted with two inverted cases of the same impossible situation. In the first, a committed film was denied its intended audience; in the second, a committed audience was denied the intended films. Perhaps this is why you gave up on the relational and collective dimension of political cinema.

النادي السينمائي بدمشق ومجلة - كراسات السينما - الفرنسية
بنظامان بندوة شتافية سينمائية حول

السينما والسياسة

٢٣-٢٩ نيسان ١٩٧٨ في صالتي الكندي والنادي السينمائي - طلياني



Movement. Images.

Gendered Geographies of Arab Militant Images and Social Movements, Past and Present

Mary Jirmanus Saba

Summer 2024

Below are excerpts pulled from Saba's PhD dissertation.

From Introduction:

The cinema to which we aspire will have to devote itself to expressing the present as well as the past and the future. (Palestine Film Unit 1974).

From Chapter One "Gender, Class and Representation in the Unmaking of a Strike"

The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone" (Gramsci Q1283;1971:5)

Feminism begins with sensation: with a sense of things. I want to explore how feminism is sensible because of the world we are in; feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences. (Ahmed 2017:21)

This chapter explores the 1972 strike at Lebanon's Gandour & Sons Chocolate factory in conjunctural context while reflecting upon my process of documenting and activating the strike for my 2017 film *A Feeling Greater Than Love*. I explore the strike's organization, its aspirations, the circumstances surrounding it and its modes of representation. Much as *The Enemy of Women* affirmed an expansive model for gender relations to the Gandour workers, I argue that the strike itself was a kind of cultural work. It shifted norms, particularly around class, gender and movement hierarchy,

creating political possibility on the ground even as the strike's organizational work inspired more traditional cultural works — such as militant films. Viewing the strike's organization through the lens of social movement housework, I also consider ways gendered labor was critical to the strike's initial success. I argue that both the strike, and related militant cinema created space for a broader area of women and rank and file's decisive political action. At the same time however, I explore ways that gendered organizational norms and movement hierarchy contributed to the strike's ultimate unraveling.

What makes a strike historic?

The November 1972 Gandour strike united around 1500 workers from the factory's two Beirut branches in a seven-day long work stoppage, demanding a 5% raise to match the rising cost of living, equal pay for men and women, an end to humiliating and violating body pat downs for stolen goods for workers leaving the factory, the right to form a legal union separate from management's control, and a reform to the Lebanese Labor Law Article 50 which allowed employers to dismiss workers without justification. Lebanese state security forces violently repressed the strike. Dozens were arrested, injured, and two demonstrators were killed. The martyrs, Yousef Al Attar and Fatima Khaweja, became household names and thousands attended their public funerals. A general strike and mass demonstrations spread across the country supporting the workers' demands and successfully calling for the organizers' reinstatement. The Organization of Communist Action (OCA), a new left party which had been most involved in the strike's organization, was propelled into the national spotlight. A coalition of left and progressive political parties emerged in support of the workers; in August 1975, it would eventually call itself the Lebanese National Movement (LNM). Bolstered by popular support in the weeks following the strike, including the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) which had previously stood on the sidelines, the reinstated striking workers remained firm in their demands.

And yet, in the following months and years, the strike's aftermath became largely catastrophic for many of the participating workers. When the dust settled from the immediate public support, the workers returned to the factory, without achieving their demands. A month later, they renewed the strike. With popular sentiment distracted by escalating military attacks by Israel, and the formation of new political alliances, the strikers did not receive the same outpouring of support. Factory management responded by locking the workers out. When the factory eventually reopened with a nominal raise, and a GCLW push later successfully reformed Labor Law Article 50 permitting "arbitrary dismissal," (Boutros 2015), the strike's ring leaders were fired and blacklisted from Lebanon industry. A few short years later the OCA and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) within the contours of the LNM, aligned directly with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), playing a central military role in the early years of the Lebanese Civil War. Several of the strike's workers, student organizers and party intellectuals, became actively involved in the war's fighting. Labor-specific demands and tactics were subsumed into armed struggle. While the Gandour Factory strike plays a symbolic role in Lebanese leftist history, these details are largely unknown to those who did not experience them. Yet the strike is regularly invoked by Lebanese leftists and progressive historians to demonstrate the power of that secular social movement and as a foil for contemporary struggles (Abu Zaki 2012; Kobeissy 2015). In Lebanon's 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations an individual protester could be spotted regularly wearing a Gandour t-shirt to demonstrations, and in the waste management protests of 2015 and revolution of 2019 the strike was evoked in protest chants. In the highly contested minefield of Lebanese history, the Gandour strike is convincingly presented by Boueiri (1978) Trabousli (2008), Petran (1987), Tufaro (2020) and others as part of a counternarrative to a dominant narration painting the civil war as the result of pre-existing sectarian tensions (Salibi 1988, Khazen 2000). This leftist counternarrative insists that the war came in part as a ruling class response to the growing labor, student, and agrarian movements' push for a fundamental change

to Lebanon's extractive political economy. The counternarrative also sees bullets fired by Lebanese security forces at Gandour workers as among the first shots of the civil war, insisting that state repression demonstrated that the secular and worker movements presented a clear threat to the status quo.

Still, despite the strike's symbolic importance, surprisingly little has been written on its details, and even less material includes direct perspectives of rank-and-file workers who participated in the strike. Further, at the time I began my research in 2008, no images of the strike, moving or still, were publicly available. The existing written records tell us little about the building of the movement that led to the strike, the experiences of the workers who led it, nor about the challenging and inevitable messiness of labor organizing.

Reframing labor history

My research sought to reframe the story beyond these broad brushstrokes, and to center narratives from factory rank and file. Beginning with a few public figures who regularly spoke about the strike in public settings, primarily historian and public intellectual Fawaz Traboulsi and labor advocate and anthropologist Ahmed Dirani, I gathered a list of initial contacts of strike participants — all men. I read archival accounts of the strike and its aftermath in a range of publications, from the LCP daily *Al-Nida* to the pro-government *Ah-Nahar*, and right-wing *Al-Hayat*. The archival sources emphasized the presence of women in the strike, specifying male and female workers ('ommal w 'ommaliat rather than using the discursively gender inclusive 'ommal), and featured women workers prominently in photojournalist documentation (Jirmanus Saba 2022). My initial interviewees confirmed women's vast participation: the labor force was majority young women who were imagined to be more physically suited to the delicate and repetitive work of confectionary manufacturing (Khater 1996). Yet when I asked my interlocutors to introduce me to women, they drew an apparent blank. This alternated with an occasional crude recollection of one or another of the politically active women workers. Their conclusion

evoked some variation of: “How would we find them? They’ve all moved. They got married,” and most remarkably, from men of the same age as their women counterparts: “They got old.”

Motivated by the mysterious absence of women narrators who were simultaneously abundant in the archive, I reasoned, if the strikes’ participation was so comprehensive, and women were most of the labor force, then women must have been active in the strike. But finding women to speak with me about their militancy was challenging for a range of reasons. First, the civil war’s displacements meant that many workers who had lived near the factory’s two branches, in Chiyah and Choiefat, had moved. The Chiyah location, used by various military groups as an encampment during the war, was replaced with a mall in the late 2000s. Walking around the neighborhood asking about former workers I turned up empty-handed, finding only stories from current residents who remembered the abandoned factory and various nefarious activities which took place there. Newspaper archives provided a lead: names of the women who had been arrested during the strike. When I finally obtained a phone number of an arrested worker, via a fellow filmmaker from her same home village, the woman who I excitedly spoke with, then in her early 60s, affirmed she had worked at the factory. When I asked if she had been arrested, she refused to speak any further — likely a result of my impulsively poor ethnographic method. Still, her refusal indicates a multi-layered reality, certainly involving trauma, shifting norms of what is acceptable political behavior for women, and a tendency, within the context of increased domination of politics by religious sectarianism, for former militants or fellow travelers to distance themselves from communism and other leftist politics — particularly among women.

Ultimately, I met a group of women workers in 2014, after encountering one of their husbands while filming the mall which had replaced the old Chiyah factory. Two sisters who worked at Gandour until the late 1970s who introduced me to several friends, some of whom continued working through the early 2000’s,

including a Palestinian woman from Tel Al Zaatar camp who remained at Gandour until being laid off during another strike in 2005. Their willingness to participate in the film crossed a nuanced spectrum. One of the sisters conferred with her children and determined she would participate so long as I did not show her face. Her sister however, divorced from her husband, was happy to go on the record. Their friend was delighted to talk about the strike and her time at the factory, but needed to keep her participation strictly anonymous, and told her family she had gone shopping while coming to the sisters' home for the film shoot. Ultimately, in the film, I show only their hands and voices, with identifying details edited out. I was careful to show them the scenes in question before releasing the film. While insisting she had never been involved in political parties, the anonymous sister spoke incredibly eloquently about exploitation in the factory using language that deeply resonated with Marxist terminology. All the women insisted their parents had prevented them from going to the demonstrations and marches during the strike, and that they had observed the stoppage by staying home. The plot thickened however after the premiere when anonymous sister messaged me to inquire about a photograph she'd seen in the film: two women and an older man with a suit jacket seated on chairs, a policeman standing near them and a Gandour box in the forefront. She asked: "what are my father and sister doing in that photo?" Although even then neither of the sisters admitted to being detained at the strike, the image complicated their picture of pious participation. Again, a combination of gendered social norms, changing political alliances and likely trauma from the wars of intervening decades certainly played a role.

For the early years of my research then, I relied on the perspectives of Saniya — the charismatic worker organizer who later married Ahmed, the strike committee president — and Nadine — an OCA student organizer from a self-described "bourgeois" background. Despite sharing a similar religious, geographic and class background with the other women workers I spoke with, Saniya was far more forthcoming about her experience, including relating the harrowing experience of being jailed for throwing rocks at

the police during the strike, and the valiant behavior of some of her fellow women workers who fought back with the cops (based on her name, I suspected Saniya was describing the first woman who refused to speak with me). Certainly, Saniya's marriage to a labor leader and continued involvement in politics throughout the early 1970s impacted her relative openness to discussing her past militancy. Still, Saniya, and Nadine's perspectives came with their own limitations — also impacted by gender norms. When interviewed together, Saniya would regularly defer to Ahmed, an incredibly charismatic thorough thinker, when I asked them both to recount details of the strike. Saniya only spoke more directly when interviewed alone. Her interventions became most spirited in a strike committee reunion which I staged for the film. In Nadine's presence, she recalled important details and defended political positions at odds with the men, including her husband. In a critical scene Ahmed criticizes the reaction of a protest "mob" which burned several private vehicles after police killed two protesters. Saniya insists on the demonstration's legitimacy. We hear her vehemently affirming "it wasn't a destructive demonstration, it was reactive," to the violence of the state.

For her part, Nadine maintained a sharp feminist critique of many of the political parties' hierarchical structures and politics, mediated by over a decade of marriage to one of the OCA's key politburos (who later withdrew from politics and barely said anything when I interviewed him). Nadine's proximity to the politburo meant that other people who were politburo-adjacent (and more defensive of their approach) reacted strongly to her words and critiques in the film. Their dismissive reactions were mediated through unarticulated long-term disagreements with various prominent members of the Lebanese left and gendered dismissals of her political views. I include this extensive account of my efforts to recuperate women's narratives of the strike here to underscore that their absence was a multi-level erasure, caused by displacement, structural, patriarchal, and family norms as other feminist labor historians have noted in other contexts (Abisaab 2004, Matta 2021).

The range of obstacles to even documenting women's memories of the strike — particularly from working women's varying refusal or unwillingness to discuss their former militancy — adds an important layer of complexity, revealing ways even excavating collective memory is an exercise in gendered exclusions.

Cinema Resembles Life — New Geographies of Struggle

The 1972 strike came to a head on November 11, as busloads of workers from Christian South Lebanon, escorted by Internal Security Forces (ISF), attempted to reach the factory. The strikers resisted by throwing rocks and attempting to blockade the road, and the ISF opened fire on the protest, leading to bloodshed and public outcry. This dramatic finale is where the strike's narration generally lands — and where the OCA stakes its claim to political efficacy. Outraged over blatant government repression and two worker deaths, a massive march in Beirut took off the next day, led by socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt. A similar march took place in Tripoli, and demonstrations were held in Ba'albak, the major city closest to the home of martyred worker Yousef El 'Attar. After extensive postponements, the GCWL finally declared a general strike, which was observed solemnly throughout the country (Khater 2022: 41). The strike committee was ushered into negotiations with the Ministry of Labor and factory management, and the OCA was catapulted onto the national stage.

To avoid this flattening, I locate the movements' importance not in its repression and symbolism, but rather, in the intense period of political invention before and after. Those few days were marked widely by distinct ways of moving throughout the city, and country — generating differential spaces —disruptive of class hierarchies, geographic boundaries, and the growing attempts to spatialize and solidify sectarian divisions.

Young women were at the forefront of this transformative potential although they joined the strike spontaneously. Once news of the strike had spread, many women workers found their families forbade

them from attending — some stayed home, not violating the strike. Others pretended to attend work, joining marches instead. Still others appear to have participated in protests their families wishes. Women are visible in all the limited photographs of the strike, and often at the images' foreground (Jirmanus Saba 2022).

In part through nascent romantic connections formed in the upheaval, a handful of women, like Saniya, participated in strike-committee strategy discussions. As patriarchal norms discouraged men from directly organizing women, the strike committee women-built solidarity with other women workers, drawing upon factory friendships. They organized and joined delegations to workers' homes, defying their usual home-to-work pattern, to urge their coworkers to resist management's bribes. The women leaders modulated an empirical class-consciousness, based on their life experience, into a geographically expansive praxis of slogans, tactics and most importantly, face-to-face interactions with fellow workers — all of which is movement housework.

The unrealized potential of these working women and their cross-regional, cross-sectarian friendships cannot be overestimated. Saniya spoke fondly of her strike-era friendships with Derb-el-Sim based Linda and Milia, who arranged for a strike committee delegation to their village to persuade the Christian workers to honor the strike. She and Ahmed recalled the conversations they had with fellow workers, and the impact their visit and Linda and Milia had in delaying the strike's end. Ultimately however, it appears the buses of workers brought to break the strike in November, were these same Christian workers. It is worth speculating that had the OCA, LCP and strike committee done more to support women's political leadership, and to build upon the relationships women fostered across sect, the strike may have held out for its demands.

Interview with Mary Jirmanus Saba

SSG: What inspired you to make the film?

Mary: My parents were involved in movements and I grew into that. They were definitely not front line people, but they were always political and they would always take us to things. They were studying in graduate school during the time of these strikes, so they weren't there. But they were very involved before and afterwards in Palestine solidarity.

Mary: But these were not stories that I had heard from them. I was in undergraduate. The first day of my undergraduate school was September 11th, 2001, and I studied at Harvard. And I very quickly understood what it meant to be Palestinian, which was not something that I had actively thought about in that particular way, but everyone immediately identified me as Palestinian and, were saying, "oh, those terrorists." We're seeing the actual ramifications of that. The start of the war on terror. I jumped into anti-war and global justice organizing and was connecting the dots. While I had originally begun university thinking I would study chemistry, I quickly realized that I had to study history and politics and anthropology.

I changed my major and started studying these movements because I felt like I had to understand what happened in the past. I think that I was always inclined that way. Because of this movement work that I was engaged [in the United States], I was feeling

like the movements that I was part of - that there was something that was missing. They didn't have a connection. Like there was so much discourse, but so much disconnect with people's experiences. I felt like I needed to learn from an organization that was going to teach me how to be effective. Then, and maybe even still the most effective movements, it felt like were in Latin America.

I found a way to go and work with a farmer union in Ecuador. I stayed there after I finished university. I went back; I had some money from my college that I used. We started this rural television program, which became kind of a part of an organized effort. Neoliberalism impacted everyone. This organization was also in a mess in ways that everyone has been or is. So I was engaged with these young people in doing this grassroots revitalisation project that also involved a television program. We would make videos with people that we were organizing in these really marginal Black Ecuadorian and mixed mestizo communities. To get there you'd have to take a bus four hours from the capital and then walk an hour to get to the village. Really, really marginal.

We would show shorts about other movements primarily in Latin America. My comrades started to say to me, "Well, you know, you're Palestinian and Lebanese where are the films about your movements?" We know about the Palestinian national struggle, but where are the films about the farmer strikes and the labour movement? And I said, "I don't know that we had those." And then I said, "Well, we must have had them. Like, how did I not know about this? Right?" And so then I started doing research. There was very little written at the time, or very little accessible. I

also started saying, "Where are the films?" This was 2006-2008. All of the films that we know now of this militant history, you could only see them if you either had access to the 16 millimeter, or there would be one VHS copy in Beirut.

I said, "Okay, I have to do this." I left Ecuador and I went to Lebanon. I built on the connections that my parents had through the movements they were involved in. I was able to very quickly meet a group of the people who were involved in those movements - or rather the leadership. One of the first things I did was meet Fawwaz Traboulsi, if you know him. Fawwaz gave me a few phone numbers of people who had been involved in the movements. But Fawwaz, because he'd been in the leadership of these organizations, was in contact with very few of the workers.

I should back up and say, while I was not raised myself in Lebanon, we would always go there. As I became older and we started going there, when I was involved in movement work myself, I would try to figure out what was going on and who I should be in contact with. I would go to demonstrations. We were there in 2006, and we fled when 'Israel' bombed. I was struck in this experience by feeling like the organizations that I had encountered during the very short times that I had been there before, and then this to me, was confirmed when I went back to Lebanon in 2009 and started getting involved in movement organizations.

That the work that was happening in Latin America was so much more. I felt that a lot had been lost about organizational practice in Lebanon in a way that had not happened in Latin America. So there's a disconnect. I wanted to make that connection, you know, revisit, why is this knowledge lost? When you

go and you speak to young people, everyone knows about the Gandour and tobacco farmer strikes. But nobody knows anyone. The farmer strike is different because everyone knows someone who was in the demonstration. All of the South went to the demonstration, but with the Gandour strike nobody really knows any of the details.

Even the tobacco farmer uprising, there's no knowledge. How did it happen? Who did it? In what ways? It's just, "Well, it happened and it was amazing." I decided I needed to really answer these questions to be able to create some kind of document that could live and circulate and be useful to people who had similar questions and who were trying to confront this horrific, colonial, neoliberal, patriarchal moment we're in.

Ssg: What you said about the lost organisational practice is very relevant and true in so much of the world. Especially in the Imperial Core or in Britain for our context here, it feels like they had like all the movements happening in the seventies till the late eighties. There's no experiences or lessons learnt until the last 5 or 10 years. I don't know if the situation is similar in Lebanon? People have the feelings of what needs to be done. It's the strategy and the tactics of how to do it that are very lost and muddled.

Mary: I think that's right. I think this is a universal thing. A lot of that strategy and tactics is lost because it's been effectively destroyed in many ways - in different ways - depending on the context and including in the Philippines. If it were continuous, they would've won. We wouldn't be in this mess. I don't know if that's a bit harsh. The other part, which is part of what the film contributes, is that there were really sort of structural

problems with how these organisations functioned.

A lot of it was this disconnect between the people, what Dana Franken and Angela Davis have called the housework of the movement. The work that's happening on the front lines, the real organisational front lines and the leadership. There's always this disconnect. That disconnect is usually gendered. It's definitely imbued with a class difference. I personally think that a big reason those movements were thwarted was that they weren't able to continue linking people's lives to these kind of principles and goals. And that is the key missing piece that is up to us to figure out how to address. This is what the film talks about. This is one of the main subjects of the film.

SSG: This is why it's good to talk to radicals who make art. Because they're very focused, and it's [the art] that has to benefit the movement. It's gotta benefit people, which is very refreshing to hear.

Mary: Yeah. I agree. It's great to talk with you guys as well.

SSG: Thank you! How did you find speaking to people, how they remembered the struggle, and how they reflected on it? In the film, you could see people reflected in different ways. What are the reasons for that?

Mary: It's gender, class, trauma. So much happened since the strikes. A massively displacing and destructive civil war happened in which people who were in the front lines of the worker struggle became order answering cadre in the militarized struggle. That's the wrong thing to do with someone who's a strike leader. I'm saying this because this is a particular context of one of the main characters of the film, who became

disillusioned and felt like, “I don't know what I'm supposed to do because this doesn't feel right.”

There was so much messiness and disconnect between the leadership and the goals of what someone like Yasser Arafat wanted. I don't know if you've seen Hind Shoufani's first feature, but I really recommend this film [Trip Along Exodus]. Her father was a close ally at some point, although he never liked Arafat. Arafat was saying, “Make me president of a state and I'll stop struggling.” This is what this guy wanted. He didn't want the liberation of Palestine, he didn't care if the refugees got their lands back. These kinds of disconnects produce a lot of tension and contradiction.

As for the women in the film, gender and expectations and family expectations of what a woman is supposed to do and not supposed to do, was a big part of why it was hard for me to find women to speak with. When I did, it was tough to have them really tell me what was going on, because they couldn't be on the record. You have the three women workers in the film who you see they're moving cups around. They talk about their experience. These women agreed to be in the film on the condition of anonymity, saying, “My family has said I can be in the film, but just don't show my face.” It turns out that they were actually much more militant than they let on.

SSG: You mentioned Fawwaz Traboulsi - is that the historian as well? He is so good at writing.

Mary: He's a really great writer. Fawwaz hated the film! He went on a whisper campaign to tell people not to go see it. The reason he gave was that I was a feminist

and wasn't really Lebanese. And so people shouldn't listen to me. Actually, it was fine because more people went. Fawwaz is a complicated character. He was in the leadership of the Organization of Communist Action, which is the group that facilitated the workers to go on strike at Gandour. All of the workers in the film are all saying, "The organization sold us out in the end, they abandoned us." This is not the thing that someone who is in the leadership, unless they're very self-critical, wants to hear.

There was a bit of a divide. Waddah Charara is another well-known intellectual. He writes primarily in Arabic and then sometimes in French. He hasn't been translated much. He was in the organization with Fawwaz at the time. He loved the film. We were going to organize some event where I would get the workers, Fawwaz and Waddah, and they would all talk about it in a public forum. And then the revolution happened [2019] and the pandemic happened, so we never did it.

SSG: How was the general reception to the film in Lebanon? In your dissertation, you write that the room was sold out. I was wondering how you look back at that experience?

Mary: The film has taken on a life in a way that I am so delighted by. During the most recent bombing campaign, some young Lebanese people wrote to me and they said, "We're gonna put your film on YouTube. We just thought we should tell you.? I told them just let me know if it gets taken down for copyright, because I don't own any of the rights to the images that are in the film. That experience, which I've just described to you with Fawwaz, and which is in the

introduction of my dissertation, was very stressful. Fawwaz and some others really did instigate this intense campaign that made me feel like I didn't have the right to tell this history.

The thing that made me not feel like that was that the workers, the people in the film and the people not in the film, the really most vulnerable folks - they loved it and they had their own criticisms of it. They said, "Oh, maybe you missed this thing; this should have been there." But [Fawwaz] wasn't like that. I continued to show the film. I did a rural tour and I showed it in the villages; it was always a very positive reaction. The most important thing to me, or the thing that allows me to feel that it was a useful project, is this idea of the young people continuing to contact me and saying, "Can we show this? Can we put it online?" [The film] was shown all over the country during the revolution. People would contact me saying, "We're doing this screening in Zahle," or wherever. I think that it's playing the role I was hoping it would have.

SSG: In the scene where one of the men goes, "Oh maybe Marx was wrong." There's a very fantastic response. There's a black screen that states this film disagrees with the premise that Marx is wrong. It's very cheeky. It felt very New Wave. Very Godard.

I recently saw your short film Mahdi Amel in Gaza. Is that something that is a through line in your work?

Mary: Marxism?

SSG: Yes.

Mary: Of course!

SSG: That makes sense. It's always good to double check.

Mary: You have to be sure.

I like that ambiguity is there. This film was edited with a huge amount of support of my immediate family. My partner did the sound design. My sister is the co-producer. She helped with so much of the film. We felt that we needed to say something about Ahmed Dirani saying that Marx was wrong. And we kept trying things and then we were like, "Let's make this title card." We thought it was hilarious and thought we'll see if anyone thinks it's funny. We showed it to my dad and my partner, and they laughed. So we were like, "Okay, we can keep this." My sister thought that it should read that the film does not endorse this statement. I ended up leaving it the way it is. She might've been right, but it is what it is now.

SSG: I thought it was funny that you chose to say "the film" as if it's separate from you when really it's you. Why did you chose to say "the film" specifically?

Mary: The film has two different kinds of text in it. One is these small cards, which I imagine is me. And the other is these big title cards. You know Godard, but not just Godard, right? All of the films from the seventies, - this was this thing that militant cinema did. It used this big text on screen title cards. In Arab films, oftentimes they would be bilingual. I love those. I was trying to use it in a slightly lighthearted way, not totally didactic. Though I do believe in Didacticism. As we developed that, it felt like there are two voices. One is these letters, which are sort of letters to a comrade or to the viewer. And then the other one is the film. And the film has the voice of authority, and it is in big black text on the screen and beautiful

calligraphy. I think that's the distinction. They're both me, but in different ways.

SSG: Why did you choose to use archival footage of different films?

Mary: The first answer is what I started with, which was my comrades [in Ecuador] saying, "Where are these films that talk about this?" I wanted to see them. I wanted to see what the struggle looked like. Although, a film never really shows you what something is. It's a particular representation of it. The other reason was that it felt like I was trying to pick up this mission of these militant filmmakers and kind of continue with it because of this big disconnect. This neoliberal version of what it means to make a film about revolution now is very different than that project of what people were doing in the seventies and early eighties.

How can I incorporate knowing that the revolution was always represented and my own attempts at that? The immediate answer is that I had found this film, which is the Golden Leaves. The Leaves of the Poor Are Gold. I wanted to use parts of that. I always imagined I would use parts of that about the farmer strike. When I was editing the film, I edited in Egypt with Lole Saif, this wonderful editor. She had seen the film Beirut el Lika [Beirut The Encounter] by Borhane Alaouié. She'd remembered that Nadina Acoury was the actress in that film.

She was obsessed by this idea. We watched that film, and one day she showed up with a little cut that included Nadine in the seventies and the new footage. Once she had done that, that was it for us. It opened the gates. While we're at it, let's use all of the films that we can find. So we sent to a friend in Beirut and we

said, "Send us all of the films you can get DVD copies of." It's funny that you still had to do this. I don't think we even did online because the internet's so bad you can't do file transfers. So we had someone who was coming from Beirut bring us a bunch of DVDs. We just incorporated all of it. We're just not even gonna worry about copyright. We're just going to use everything.

SSG: It's really cool. I like the switching back and forth between then and now. It feels almost like the characters are in the film which really felt very special. Hopefully you'll make more people discover those films as well.

Mary: Yeah, they're very important. Particularly Christian's film [A Hundred Faces for a Single Day] is really amazing.

SSG: How was women's representation like in trade unions and in other political formations in Southern Lebanon?

Mary: Have you seen Mai Masri and George Chamoun's 1986 *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon*? A very special film. Women have always been and are always in the struggle. They are often written out of the record. Very rarely having leadership and spokesperson positions historically. Speaking of the housework - not just literally doing the housework - has let the movement continue. Mai's film really shows how it connects this anti-colonial liberatory work with that work of the housework, because they're the same. The problem is that movements have not been narrated that way. People think that making political work is to just go out and have a demonstration and that's it. Or to go and carry some weapons, and then

that's it. If you don't have the people with you, if you don't have the relationships and those very strong fabrics that sustain any kind of struggle. Your struggle is lost. The building of those networks, and then the connecting of people's lives to the imagination and practice of what being free actually means. That's the work of revolution. Everything else is the details.

SSG: It's like a revolution in a revolution.

Mary: I think so. But I should even go further to say that I do mean it. The work of making the revolution happen is the work of connecting people's lived experience of oppression to the imagination and the practice of what could be - sustaining that and making it sustainable for people. That's why when the political organisations in the seventies in Lebanon, in my film, were not able to meet the needs of the workers who were doing this kind of work, their struggle had already failed. They were thinking in an instrumental way. They were thinking that these are stops on the road towards freedom, but they weren't thinking that freedom has to really be a daily practice.

SSG: What would you like people to take away from the film?

Mary: How can we understand what it is that we are doing now in relation to this notion of freedom as a daily practice that is really about connecting people's everyday lives to what we need? My partner, when I showed him the first draft of the film, he looked at me and he was like, "Wow, if they had listened to the women, maybe they wouldn't have lost." And I said, "Wow, I knew I had married the right person." Maybe he took that message because he lives with me, but maybe he took it because that's what the film says -

listen to the women.

That's a summary version of it. But it's people who are doing the work who are usually the ones who know what needs to happen. What needs to happen is not the same everywhere. It changes. This doesn't mean that there's not a need for strategy, tactic, Marxism, analysis, history, and all of that. Yes, of course. I don't mean to fetishise lived experience, but there has to be a way to wrap up people's experience of this global fascism and ecological crash and emergence of new pandemics, and the fact that everyone's sick all the time. This is new. These pandemics are a result of the crash of late capitalism. I hope late because I hope it'll end capitalism.

People are still refusing to see it. This is why it's still possible to have someone like Trump elected or the far right in Germany. People are believing these narratives of nationalism and white supremacy and exclusion because we haven't yet connected people's lives and their suffering to each other - and to what we might do like withdrawing our labor and refusing to participate in this project of fascism and ecological collapse.

Thank you for the fantastic work you do and add me to your mailing list.

SSG: We still need a mailing list. Note to be better organised.

Mary: Always.

SSG: The lifelong aspiration.

Mary: Send my love to Scotland.

