



Of Citizens and Ordinary Men. Political Subjectivity and Contestations of
Sectarianism in Reconstruction-era Beirut
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This thesis examines what it means to be a citizen in Lebanon today. People pose and answer that question primarily in relation to the dominant political system and culture of the country: sectarianism. Sectarianism is a political system that divides up the world into a state, religious communities and subjects. These subjects are citizens to a large extent via their membership of said communities and their relations to the state are mediated by political elites on the community level. While dominant, the system is controversial. Many aren't satisfied with how it formulates the responsibilities of the state, frames people's identity in relation to their religious community, or how it deals with social inequality.

While these are 'Lebanese' questions, the story this book tells is in many ways a Beirut one. Not only do people take the city as an object to reflect on these questions, but the city's spaces also influence how people come to talk about them. The book follows two sets of such people. One mostly young, mostly highly educated activists and NGO employees who try to change the future of the country; the other residents of a mostly working-class neighbourhood in the centre of town, who cultivate intimate public relations with neighbours and colleagues in between and after work, on and just off the street. Each set of people entertains different ways of talking about their place in the polity. The book shows where these differences come from and suggests how we might understand them.
