

Solidifying identity discourse through the politicized monumentation of struggle

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Abstract

This article investigates contemporary examples of monumentation and the extent to which they solidify and reproduce a politicized discourse on identities. Focusing predominantly on the representation of refugees and migrants, the article is broken down into four sections, the first of which looks into the challenges of monumentation and the discourse it represents. The second part includes three case studies, each representing a different vestige of the struggle with the discourse propagated by certain monuments. The core of the argument concerns the parameters of social representation of the suffering subject, be it the refugee, the asylum seeker, their mother, or the colonial subject. I propose an adaptation of Fairclough's model of language and power to include monuments as replicas of texts which can be analyzed at word, discursive and social levels.

KEYWORDS

migration, monumentation, sectarian discourse

The concept of monumentation is one that can be traced throughout the history of humanity across a range of practices intended to immortalize and glorify a certain event or person. Monuments entail a sense of identification, be it with a god, an animal, or a certain ideological symbol (Oxford Reference, 2021). However, the purpose and the moral of monumentation in

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our contemporary societies have evolved beyond the mere dynamics of representation, aiming to reinforce certain geopolitical discourses and narratives. This article focuses on monumentation of the struggles of contemporary refugee communities with a particular emphasis on three case studies of five monuments. I am particularly interested in the sociopolitical prejudices and sociocultural restrictions of monumentation. The representation brought about by the solidification of certain events and peoples should have a historically valid reasoning, one that is often not as explicit as the those represented during the erection or the unveiling of the monument (Mooney, 2021).

In this article, I attempt to deconstruct and criticize the discourse regarding the perception of five monuments, and the reasons for their construction, through three anthropological case studies.¹ I have chosen these three cases because, with their conflicting narratives and inconsistent agendas, they shed light on the social challenges of monumentation and the problematic stance of their presence, which not only alters the international discourse on the suffering subject but is also used as a means of segregation and stereo typification. The politicizing and publicizing of their pain reduces the subjects to their suffering, with little room for their individual experiences as well as their personalized narratives. Looking at it through the lens of the discourse of the identities being represented through these monuments, there are two main layers of challenges that result from the byproduct of the monumentation of struggles. The first are socioanthropological struggles or prejudices and social inclinations as well as the politicization of the struggle of the suffering subject. The second layer is that of the intrapersonal one which relates to those who are personally being represented, or those who identify with these monuments. Consequently, throughout this article, I observe these challenges through different case studies, each representing a different version of monumentation. The monuments should be considered as statues of representation and compare them to the media discourse surrounding them to deconstruct their sociocultural power. Through this deconstruction, we can understand the power dynamics reinforced by each of the monuments and those whom they represent.

2 | DEBRIEFING MONUMENTATION

The dictionary definition of a monument is any kind of building that reminds people of either a famous event or a person who had a major impact on their culture and traditions (Baldwin, 2017). Yet, our contemporary understanding of monumentation has evolved to include several variations of the traditional definition; we can observe these variations through several examples.

To begin with, there are various practices of monumentation that have found their way into our daily life, be it through the usage of certain smaller versions of composers as symbols of respect and admiration, to the small statues of Julius Caesar that are turned into pencil holders because of the symbolic holes in his back. Therefore, we have evolved monuments not only to encapsulate our beliefs and values but also that of our cultural knowledge and inclinations (Chancellor, 2020). We have moved past the barriers of iconography to recreate certain practices that do not necessarily have to be holy or spiritual. Traditionally speaking, iconography was relatively restricted to a certain religious or ideological interpretation. Contemporary understandings of monumentation are broader; they include various representations of cultures, as well as artistic depictions of certain historical events and peoples. Therefore, the term “monument” is treated as an umbrella concept that includes several subsets, one of which is iconography (Cherry, 2013).

However, a nationalistic narrative regarding monuments still governs certain urban landscapes. For example, the transportation system in the capital of Austria is constructed in a way that all routes lead to St. Stephan's public monument (Wiener, 2018). Hence, even if there is not necessarily a need for its religious connotation, the monument itself still contributes to the nationalistic framework. Similar interpretations have been made regarding the Statue of Liberty; even though it was a French monument which can easily be a factor which can shape our interpretation of it. However, the Statue of Liberty was internalized and nationalized by the people of the United States to represent their nationalistic discourse and liberal ideologies, devoid of its French origins (Moreno, 2017). The literature regarding monumentation shows a drastic change in the narrative of monumentation from the first World War onward. Before that, monumentation was considered as a commemoration of a certain heroic moment which was embodied by the sculpture at hand (Gneco & Hernandez, 2008). However, with the emergence of postmodernism, the interpretation, as well as perception of the monument, was drastically altered, from one of representation to one of critical misperception. Postmodernism brought about the possibility for a multiplicity of interpretations; thus the statues that were once considered to be representatives of nations were now being questioned about whether their representations were indeed just (Kayman, 2010). Yet, the classical understanding of monuments and their social roles continue to be observed in specifically religious settings. Although the parameters of this appreciation have changed since ancient Greek times, there is some timeline which can be linked back to the need of some solidification of a certain identity, be it that of a deity, a friend, or an enemy. When looking at representation of different figures in ancient Greek and even classical sculptures, we notice the emphasis of the interpreters referred to the material and methods used to create the statue (Spivey, 1997). There is the need for some sense of repetition and traditionalism when sculpting certain figures—it is argued that a maiden and a goddess may not be of the same material (Spivey, 1997). However, contemporary sculptors do not necessarily have to abide by these rules which might now be considered as restricting agents of the creation of a representative monument. Therefore, the history of monumentation does not necessarily inform the purpose of contemporary readings of monumentation. The implications in the change of the discourse regarding monumentation have come far enough to observe the postmodern narrative through the media's perception, as well as interpretation of the contemporary monument. This in turn governs our critical discourse analyses of politicized monuments (Krzyzanowska, 2016).

On another note, the discourse regarding ideological monumentation can be a challenging one if we disregard the traditional space or material-oriented aspects of the sculpting process. Yet there is a particular emphasis on the geopolitical role of certain monuments (Adamu et al., 2019). That is particularly evident when dealing with monuments that represent certain diaspora communities or displaced peoples; the dimensions of the monument's representative aspects dissolve into the geopolitical discourse regarding its location, focusing on second or third generation diaspora members whose identification is predominantly governed by a multitude of social and ideological agendas rather than a nationalistic one. A representative example is that of the Armenian diaspora community in the Levant. The monuments that represent the community are predominantly those which were erected in memory of the Armenian Genocide that led them to move there (Armenian Genocide Memorial in Bikfaya – Lebanon, 2021). Therefore, they have ritualized the existence of these monuments as markers of certain patterns of identification and proof of belongingness as well as struggle. The monument has been celebrated as a meeting point between Armenians of different sectarian and political agendas (Tekkelian Hagopian, n.d.). Thus, the narrative of the monument is

beyond the discourse on nationalism and becomes one of identification. Yet, there still remains a major gap in the literature concerning monumentation and its impact on the establishment of social connections (Skjerven, 2016). The monument is often celebrated as a symbolic, religious, ideological or ethnic representative, but it is rarely observed as an object which has the power to not only tell a story, but also alter people's performative habits of their sectarian belonging. Consequently, the Lebanese Armenian community's yearly ritualistic visits to this monument become a tribute to the memory and the collective loss which does not discriminate between people of different sects (Matiossian, 2019)—similar to the colonial example mentioned in the third case study. It's no longer about what the monument represents, the monument is no longer an object, but a subject of action which serves to create some sense of communal commemoration.

In restricting alternative approaches to the understanding of monumentation, the literature on discourse analysis does not create enough room for monumentation to be discussed as an independent source of discourse propagation. Fairclough's (1995) understanding of the relationship between language and power emphasizes the use of language as a means of attaining and maintaining certain forms of social practice. Yet, this approach to sociolinguistics does not consider the power of monumentation when it comes to social discourse. Recent years have shed light on the importance of monumentation in creating and sustaining a certain representative discourse, particularly considering the efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement to remove or displace certain monuments to redirect a certain politicized social narrative of identification. Therefore, I propose to tweak Fairclough's model with three dimensions to include monuments as replicas of texts which can be analyzed at word, discursive and social levels. This would create enough space to observe monuments through multiple paradigms, be it those of their sculptors or the perception of the people a monument represents. However, there has been no prior research regarding the inclusion of monumentation in the realm of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis has been applied to photographs and monographs, but very little research has been done on certain statues and monuments (Bowman-McElhone et al., 2021; Hook, 2005). An archeological approach is the only representative discourse on monumentation's analysis through a sociolinguistic lens.

Monumentation is often observed as a subset of nationalism, which creates a narrative that is rather stagnant compared to the monument's dynamic modes of representation. Postmodern monuments are often considered to be dynamic because their interpretation is subject to change. Even when dealing with monuments that represent a relatively stagnant image, the perception of that representation is altered through time (Evans, 2021). A monument is either the embodiment of a national hero, or a specific event, but little attention is given to the aftermath of such monumentations and the way in which they have the power to alter the discourse concerning the represented event or person.

Another aspect of discourse analysis which may be used as a gateway to include monumentation would be a Foucauldian approach to discourse. That is, the reproduction of power and its impact on people's ideologies are based on the social and historical circumstances that govern the discourse at hand. As illustrated by Foucault, the discourse regarding a specific object or events can help shape the people's understanding of it (Schmitz, 2007). Yet, although this approach would help to deconstruct the parameters of monumentation, literature fails to look into monumentation as an enabler of discourse. Studies that have come close to reaching monumentation are ones that are based on the representational aspect of identity discourse. That is, theories of identification through certain objects and places have come to play a major role in the discourse propagated regarding those they represent. According to van Dijk (2006), it

is the discourse that has the power to misrepresent and reinforce variations of social inequality. Consequently, the inequality at hand would be one of misrepresentation, similar to that of the misrepresenting monumentation. Going back to the example of the Armenian Genocide memorial, if one were to approach it as a text being read through the lens of Van Dijk, it can easily be argued that the evolution of the discourse regarding the text is one that reinforces the reproduction of stereotypes related to the Armenian diaspora community. While the monument is not necessarily a discourse itself, the narrative they propagate and reinforce is one that can have sociopolitical implications.

2.1 | The challenges of monumentation

There are several challenges regarding monumentation, particularly those representing displaced and resettled peoples. The first issue is the fact that these monuments might evolve to become a collective identity marker which might be counterintuitive in certain cases where the identity of the people it represents is in transformation, be it moving towards certain cases of naturalization, or moving towards historical determinate events. That is, there are two ways in which this evolution might happen; the first is the process of the assimilation and eventual erasure of the represented subject, and the second is through which the monument functions as an archive of a certain historical event. Therefore, the monument which represents a stagnant image might be a misrepresentation of who the group ends up becoming, even if the group itself has remained ideologically the same but has historically evolved. The monument's interpretation is seldom altered, but the social group it represents may drastically change and evolve to meet the requirements and challenges of their contemporary life. That is, the once helpless refugee has become a naturalized citizen, but the statue of the helplessness remains unchanged. It is as if the statue materializes an aspect of life that would otherwise only exist in memory. On the one hand, this is ideal for keeping a historical record that goes beyond geopolitical alterations and focuses on their social perception. Yet there are several drawbacks to this absence of continuity of interpretations. Although fluid in their perception, monuments can reinforce certain patterns that might even become self-destructive to the community when the monument at hand represents differing power structures which the country, or the people, or the community is trying to combat—examples of the latter will be discussed throughout the case studies below.

However, the misrepresentation of power dynamics can easily be traced in situations where either the definition of the monument has to be rewritten, or the people would have to forgo their attachment to it. Neither of the solutions are ideal, or easy, because they entail the re-direction of the collective knowledge of an entire community. However, there are several drawbacks to not fighting these challenges. Going back to the example of the Armenian diaspora community in Lebanon, the statue that they mostly identify with is that of a praying child who is on their knees, with hands intertwined, begging for salvation (Tekkelian Hagopian, n.d). However, this child can be perceived as either the Armenians begging the Lebanese for asylum, or them on their knees praying. Even when the connotation is unknown, there are several layers of misrepresentation in this single monument. First, there is the problematic character of the helpless child which in itself is a stagnant image of the Armenian diaspora community when it first arrived in Lebanon, and its predominantly orphaned and helpless population. The image of the child has a certain disempowering impact on the viewer because it entails the absence of any agency or authority which can enable it to stand on its own

two feet. Consequently, if one is to follow the narrative of the praying child, there is the connotation of Christianity that is emphasized through the statue which might create a sense of disenchantment to Armenians who do not identify with this portrayal of religiosity. However, these are not factors which are specific to the case of this specific monument. Even in “timeless” images, like that of the Statue of Liberty representing the liberation of people through her torch, there are several gaps and limitations regarding the narrative of the monument which might render it more or less accessible to different members of the presumed audience.

Another fundamental issue regarding the representation brought about by monumentation is through its perception by others, and not those of the community it represents. Certain monuments create a venue for representation which, as previously discuss, might not align with the actualities of the community it represents. Therefore, in addition to creating a gap in the identification processes of the people it represents, it might also bring about a certain discourse regarding prejudices and expectations regarding that specific community. The statue of the Armenian child can create prejudices regarding Armenians as not only religious but also relatively submissive and helpless. Consequently, this would bring about several layers of challenges of misrepresentation and prejudices that the community members have to combat to reidentify themselves through their own parameters of belongingness. This is particularly important because it might entail hindrances to their identification. Therefore, the only possible way to combat this would be through the statue’s redefinition or its eradication. A collective example of the eradication can be observed when looking at the accomplishments of the Black Lives Matter movement who not only removed half a dozen statues in Europe and the United States, but they also replaced the statues of certain slave traders with those of liberated persons (MacKenzie, 2020). Consequently, although relatively challenging and disruptive of otherwise capitalistic touristic sites, the redefinition or abolishment of certain monuments can serve as a fundamental feature to not only reclaim one’s own identity, but it also functions as a means of eradicating the prejudices linked to a certain group of people.

2.2 | Generalizing monumentation

The first case study involves two identical monuments which were put into place in September 2019, one in Vatican City on St. Peter’s square and its replica in New Orleans. These monuments made history when the pope unveiled the one in Vatican City during a public event. The monument was called “Angels Unawares,” a reference to Hebrews 13:2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (The Sculpture, 2021). The monument itself is not a single person, but rather 140 refugees, merged together. It brings together people wearing different religious attire, people of different features, races, and ideologies. The angels’ wings in the middle of the monument represent the sacredness of the refugee’s suffering; the Pope emphasized this by stating that “Joseph and Mary were refugees once.” The sculptor Timothy Schmalz stated in an interview that he was aiming for this monument to be as diverse as possible (Carl, 2021).

There are two reasons I chose to observe this particular monument through an anthropological lens. First, it represents all of the sculpted refugees standing in a single boat. The symbolic representation of the boat as the meeting and connecting point of refugees is an interesting narrative because it feeds into the discourse of similarities between people who, in theory, ought to share similar destinies and experiences. The second reason is that this

monument appeared far more interesting than those representing a singular person because it not only brings together refugees, but it also represents them as helpless peoples in need of asylum. Bringing together the historical figure of the postwar refugee with those of contemporary ethnic conflict, this monument deconstructs and reinforces the stance of those exposed to it in terms of the parameters of their tolerance of refugee groups and its consequent impact on these groups' integration and assimilation processes.

To focus on the groups' perception of these sculpted peoples I refer to the media response to the events that led to the ceremony of placing the monuments, particularly focusing on the one in Vatican City which was subjected to international media criticism. Even before the monument was replicated and placed in New Orleans, it was receiving very different kinds of media coverage ("Angels Unawares" in America: A clarion call to view migration from a Christian perspective; Bordoni, 2020). While some news sources were commenting on the Pope's openness to including people who were wearing religious attire that did not look Christian (Light the Way, 2021), others were debating about whether or not this is an idealistic approach to the international Refugee Crisis (Miller, 2020). Yet one aspect that was not covered was whether the statue itself actually serves the refugee community, or if it is a mere facade through which host countries can practice their power and reinforce their privilege. The incentive of the monument remains questionable; whether or not it serves the community it represents would be based on different sociopolitical powers between the people represented and the site of the monument (Hook, 2005). That is, even when journalists were explicitly mentioning the Pope's openness, no one pointed out that there were several problematic aspects of the monument. First, the fact that people of all religions and timeframes were combined together tended to generalize the refugee experience, leaving little room for individual experiences. Consequently, the narrative of the young World War two survivor and the Syrian veiled women were reduced and generalized under the umbrella of "struggle." The refugee subject was simply represented as the helpless other—irrespective of their religious, ideological, or cultural differences. While one journalist stated that this generalization entails the absence of discrimination and a welcoming narrative of host countries, they did not look into the negative aspects of this invalidating reductionist approach (Bordoni, 2020).

Therefore, my inquiry regarding this narrative is whether it would have any social or anthropological impact on the population depicted by the monument. The monument serves the purpose of representation and unification, but I argue that it brings about a heightened sense of othering. The othering comes about when there are certain groups of people whose marginalization is solidified through the discourse surrounding the monument. Since the statue becomes so defining of the culture and the people it depicts, it can soon become a misrepresentation of the community which recreates a cycle of othering, even when the community at hand is attempting to integrate and assimilate. The othering does not necessarily have to be religious, it can merely be ideological or based on a person's value systems; for example, certain Christian religious values brings about a sense of pity for the suffering subject, which is manifested as a gateway to not only othering the subject as a person of different experience who ought to be pitied, but it also creates a sense of distance between the person with the privilege to pity and the one who is being pitied.

Therefore, the discourse surrounding a certain monument, similar to the discourse propagated by a specific monument, unites the figure of the timeless refugee subject. However, there is very little space left for individual and cultural differences and their consequent experiences of displacement. Thus, it creates a barrier between the savior and those in need of asylum, which might even be a rendition of the colonial narrative of the superior west aiding

the inferior east. My argument is not one based on certain national parameters, but rather one that stems from the power dynamics that are created by memorializing such static moments of representation. Comparing the media discourse surrounding the monument of Vatican City and its replica in New Orleans, we notice very different responses from the local community. While the one in Vatican City was observed as a sign of peace and acceptance, the one in New Orleans was considered to be a holy statue of the ideal way to represent refugees (Martyris, 2019). That is, the struggle of the figure of the symbolic suffering refugee was perceived differently based on the geopolitical implications of each of the local communities hosting these refugees and their respective statues. Yet, the one in New Orleans was not amended to include the refugees of the local community who were not necessarily part of the represented population of Vatican City. That is, the template of the refugee was not amended, it was merely solidified through its religious connotations of the suffering subject.

Thus the challenges of monumentation entail misrepresentation and reinforcement of certain agendas that, although they seem to promote acceptance and assimilation, bring about multiple layers of othering which are discriminatory and reductive of individual experiences. The politicized refugee identity and its surrounding discourse are yet again utilized as a means of advertising the narrative of acceptance and superiority of the helping nation, contrary to the persona of the helpless asylum seeker whose culture and background are reduced to that of a single boat upon which their stance is solidified.

2.3 | Struggling with the void

There are several forms of monumentation built to represent either nations, or emotions or events. The statue of the “Emigrant’s Mother” in Spain represents those built to represent emotions of void and incompleteness (A fondo - La Nueva España, 2020). The “Emigrant’s Mother” is very similar to the “Les Voyageurs” statue in France representing the immigrant’s void (Waldmann, 2018). Both of these relatively new monuments represent loss and its resultant void. They are constructed to represent the loss of the “world citizen,” a part of whom is left within the homeland that they might not have access to, or the people that they have lost. The identity that is represented is neither merely helpless nor in pain, but in a state of angst and mourning for a loss that will probably not return. This could be the loss of their children, such as the case of the “Emigrant’s Mother” parting ways with her children, or the loss of a homeland and belongingness as in the case of the “Immigrant’s Void” statue in France. Both statues are covered in holes representing the emptiness, as part of their identities are dissolved into nothingness because of the struggle of misidentification with whatever they have left—be it the absence of the homeland, or the absence of their loved ones. The media discourse regarding the void that is represented through the bodies of these monuments is one that shed light on the impact of migration on both the migrant and those who are left behind (The New Spain (La Nueva España), 2020). Although the symbolic holes do represent a sense of loss, the media never mentioned the host community’s ability to mend these wounds. Taking into consideration the contemporary discourse regarding refugee integration and assimilation, one could argue that the goal is not to nationalize and naturalize citizens into joining the community as those who have been there for generations, but rather to establish integration frameworks, predominantly the ones in Europe, offering the tools which can help these migrants get by in their daily life. The basic language skills coupled with the limited working opportunities hinder migrants’ ultimate integration, granting them the status of an eternal refugee subject with mere asylum, which might even be temporary. Consequently, the discourse of the void is one that contains several layers of political discourse which

aim to treat this void as a potential meeting point of interests of both the suffering subject and the host community.

Throughout my analysis of these specific cases, I look into the extent to which melancholia and despair govern refugee identification. The representation of the struggle of misintegration and the lack of assimilation reinforces the discourse of disobligingness, implying that the refugee subject is one that does not belong and ought not to feel welcome in whichever host country that can grant them asylum (Müller, 2022). The asylum at hand is depicted as contrary to the romanticized homeland which was the primary site of belongingness. Instead of replacing the homeland, the host community and country are treated as a state of limbo for most people; even after passing through several integration frameworks and their subsets that ought to reinforce a sense of assimilation, the othering at hand is creating a constant discourse of disbelonging and a collective melancholia that is overpowering the sense of asylum and “safety” offered by the host community.

The only representative solidification of the refugee identity within the representative monumentation would be by focusing on either the boat that brought them there, as in the monument at St. Peter's square, or perhaps vanishing through the waters, which is represented through the statue of the Immigrant in France. The fact that the person's bag was the only intact aspect of him that was left behind may also be interpreted to refer to the discourse of the dissolving of the refugee identity. From an anthropological perspective, there can be two implications of this dissolution. First, it can be a symbol of integration. That is, when the identity of the refugee is assimilated into that of the host country, there would no longer be the need to identify with the waters, since they have found a label through which they can be classified on land. However, the second and grimmer analysis would entail dissolving into the sea, since there is no space on land for them. The media response to these two statues reinforced the second discourse of the dissolving refugee identity—the person's identity receded into that of the “sea people,” losing their cultural and personal experiences (Britannica, 2021). My question regarding the media response to the two monuments was to what extent they govern people's perception, be it of those of the host country, or the community being hosted.

In this case, the discourse of identification led to two plausible answers to the question at hand. While the discourse analysis did point that some people welcomed the refugee label because it represented their struggle, although it generalized their experiences, there was another group of people who had to forgo this label and attempt to assimilate into the host community in hopes of combating the anxiety triggered in certain societies when talking about the “the boat people.” Contrary to the statue at St. Peter's Square which brought a sense of pride to people, these two monuments representing the void of the migrant were perceived differently. This difference might be due to geopolitical forces. That is, having in mind the French political scene and its refugee discourse with its restricting parameters, and the more linear integration framework in Spain (Soriano & Cala, 2019), the geopolitical discourse and the dynamics of the host country also governs the perception of the monument, be it international media outlets or local ones.

2.4 | Colonial monumentation

Another version of monumentation is one that solidifies an identity through a historical event. For the third case study, I chose to look into a monument that had a major impact on the colonial history of contemporary Levant; located in the Lebanese Christian coastal city of Jounieh, this statue depicts the coat of the last French soldier with their helmet and an olive wreath (Tahan, 2010). The geopolitical stance of this monument is strategic because it is located

in an area that is inhabited by people who closely identify with the French who colonized them. That is, it is a common narrative for this population to consider themselves an extension of contemporary France (Chadwick, 2020). This is also depicted in their cultural practices and social habits such as the constant reliance on French instead of Arabic (Yassine & Panossian, 2021). The monument symbolizes the last colonial soldier who left Lebanese soil when it became an independent state after the French mandate. While this statue was built by the first generation of independent Lebanese people, it represents a pivotal point in the history of the nation because it marks the establishment of a new era—one free of mandated colonial rule. Similar to the Armenian statue of the praying child, this monument solidifies the discourse of struggle, determining that even the last soldier has gone beyond the borders. However, instead of being treated as a story of success and independence from colonialism, this statue was counter-interpreted during the past few years throughout several social uprisings demanding the resignation of contemporary government officials (Volk, 2010, p. 64).

With the socioeconomic turmoil in Lebanon and its resultant uprisings, as of 2019, the discourse on colonialism was reoriented to become synonymous with that of salvation (Pollet, 2020). That is, since over 50,000 people signed a petition expressing their desire for French rule in 2020, the belief behind this initiative is that the return of the French mandate and the colonial governance would serve to restructure Lebanon and resurrect it from its state of corruption. Thus, the sociopolitical discourse regarding the monument of the last French soldier began function as one of lament and loss instead of it being a site of pride and independence. It was then that the monument's definition and interpretation was altered due to certain sociocultural events. The sociopolitical power of the discourse that demanded the return of the colonizers altered the cultural interpretation of the statue, with little room to negotiate the implications of such a grand shift in discourse.

Consequently, the statue was neither removed nor tampered with, but its narrative was reconstructed and reoriented to bring about a different sociopolitical response to the monument. The colonial identity and its agendas were resurrected as a means of salvation in times of political turmoil. Therefore, the monument became a symbol of times of proper governance, even if the governance at hand was that of foreign peoples and their foreign soldiers. One might argue against it and explain that there have always been certain factions of Lebanon who believed in the supremacy of the French authorities; it is an ideology that was engraved within the postcolonial mindset of certain Lebanese social groups, predominantly those belonging to a specific sect that was closely associated with the French colonial governance (Kassem, 2020; Pollet, 2020).

3 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, I look into five statues, through three case studies which observe whether the perception of monuments representing struggle can be reinterpreted based on certain sociocultural and sociopolitical restrictions. I focus on the geopolitical discourses surrounding these monuments, and the extent to which they either alter the definition of the monument or bring about a different layer of interpretation. One of my fundamental findings, which was present even when the geopolitical power dynamics were altered, was the othering of the suffering subject. In the case of the two monuments in my first case study, this othering was also accompanied by a sense of superiority and generosity to lead the suffering subject to salvation, it brought about a sense of generalization of struggle while ignoring sociocultural

differences that have a drastic impact on the experiences of refugees with integration frameworks of different host countries. In the second case study, the othering was through another means of alienation brought about by a void portrayed within the people, be it the mother of the emigrant or the immigrant themselves. This void was irreplaceable and represented more than the majority of the refugee person's identity, which was gradually dissolving into the sea. The third and final case study was that of the reinterpretation of a monument, from one of pride regarding the end of colonialism, to the demand of its return. I intentionally chose to conclude with the last case study because it represents the challenges of monumentation and stagnation of a specific historical moment. It exemplifies the parameters of monumentation and its sociocultural power as well as its impact on the collective memory and perception. Consequently, although these three case studies are very geopolitically and sociocultural different, they all address subsets of the monumentation of struggle and its ability to solidify and contribute to the discourse of certain experiences.

Due to the current limitations of Covid-19, I could not carry out any ethnographic fieldwork related to the local community's perceptions of these monuments. However, it would be interesting to observe whether there are any differences in discourse regarding the perception of the suffering subject based on the different sociocultural and geopolitical parameters of the monument. Although two of the three case studies focus on the monumentation of refugee people's struggles, the theme of this article is not strictly oriented toward the discourse on migration, but rather a more general reading of the suffering subject's depiction through monumentation.

Along these lines, future monumentation research might look into similar works such as the journey of the monument of "Little Amal," currently making its way through the world as a symbol of the young refugee child in search of asylum (Little Amal, 2021). Amal means hope in Arabic; the statue is not stagnant but governed like a puppet, symbolizing a little Syrian girl whose walk retraces the different countries through which refugees have crossed (Maycock, 2021). The case of "Little Amal" merits an article on its own because of the media response it received coupled with some countries' lack of acceptance of her presence within their borders. The fact that Greece did not allow her to walk through its streets because she was said to represent an unwelcome refugee community (Gentleman, 2021), while the Pope wanted to meet with her, illustrates that Amal's stance goes beyond that of a mere refugee (Mayaki, 2021)—the monument is both perceived and treated as a Syrian refugee, whose experience ought to exemplify that of the people she represents. Although the case of "Little Amal" is not representative of the international refugee assimilation discourse, such monuments bring to the forefront a dialog between the symbolic aspects of monumentation and their sociocultural implications.

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ENDNOTE

- ¹ Due to the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unable to do fieldwork to gather data from the community members surrounding these monuments and represented through these monuments. Information for the present study was gathered from archival research as well as critical analyses of publications by different media outlets.

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