The Clash of Slogans in The Lebanese October 17 Uprising

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Research Objective

This study explores the radical character of certain slogans of Lebanon's October 17, 2019 uprising. By analyzing a selection of these slogans, the study examines how they signaled shifts in both content and perception - offering cultural, ideological, intellectual, political, and artistic alternatives to the status quo, in contrast to slogans that were primarily focused on direct protest and political demands.

Has everyday experience become the starting point? And does the radicalism in these slogans lie in the intellectual, political, and purposeful weight they carry?

Rather than merely investigating the nature of protest itself, this study attempts to reflect on the transformations that protest movements have undergone. This is particularly significant given that the slogans expressed, in a profoundly radical manner, internal struggles within the uprising - some of which were not merely reformist or locally oriented, but rather transformative and, at times, universalist. The uprising had, in many ways, engaged with pressing human, political, and social issues - at times implicitly, at times explicitly. An observer might find it worthwhile to examine this issue, shifting the question from the movement's context to the transformation of protest itself, raising the following questions:

Was the uprising a singular movement, or was it composed of multiple, intersecting uprisings unfolding simultaneously?

And is the Lebanese uprising a single uprising, or have the forms that define the act of protest evolved to the extent that it is no longer possible to speak of a single uprising in conventional terms, nor to affirm or deny its occurrence in one act or another?

It is important to clarify from the outset that this study does not focus on general protest slogans, except in cases where they transcend their immediate context to propose alternative visions imbued with ideological and cultural currents - visions that could evolve into broader change projects influenced by both local and global dynamics. Additionally, some slogans offered radical interpretations of possible alternatives, addressing Lebanon's collective predicament or the struggles of specific groups within the population.

This distinction is crucial, as the study is not merely an attempt to document, list, or linguistically analyze protest slogans and their verbal mechanisms. Instead, it seeks to investigate the deeper alternative dimensions of change expressed in these slogans - how they reflected the aspirations of individuals and popular groups, even when leading to internal contradictions and clashes. This raises a fundamental question:

Was the uprising a unified movement, or was it in fact a collection of distinct, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting protest movements?

Research Problem

The internal conflicts within the protest movement - revealed through the diverse slogans that, at that moment, became a field for exposing their underlying meanings and visions of struggle, and sought to develop radical solutions to Lebanon's deep-rooted crises. These crises extend beyond the political sphere into the ideological and cultural fabric of society.

At the core of this study lies a fundamental question:

Was the uprising a singular movement, or an uprising against the very concept of a singular model - rejecting the cultural and normative frameworks that have shaped contemporary protest movements since the 1970s and 1980s, especially under the dominance of the unipolar world order and the liberal paradigm?

Was it one unified uprising, or a collection of multiple uprisings within a broader movement?

This line of questioning is justified by the connection between contemporary local protest movements and postmodern methodologies, spanning from structuralism to post-structuralism and deconstruction. A key distinction here lies in the dual nature of the Lebanese uprising: on one hand, it was deeply connected to global movements and discourses, while on the other, it remained uniquely shaped by local specificities that set it apart from other protest experiences. This dynamic unfolded within broader debates on transnationalism, national borders, globalization, and human rights.

The **hypothesis** is as follows:

The post-uprising Lebanese reality is best understood as a state of divergent multiplicity - at times reaching the level of contradiction, conflict, and fragmentation. This has resulted in the paralysis of change, a condition that persists today, particularly following the failure of efforts to enact change through parliamentary elections. The "changers" who sought to challenge the system ultimately entered the game of power, forced to navigate it on the political elite's own 'home turf' and within its established rules.

Research Parameters

Keywords: October 17, slogan, postmodernism, modernity, modernization, state, model, uprising, revolution, class, feminism, patriarchy, queer, sectarianism, decentralization, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), unity, pluralism, social movements, culture, everydayness.

I. **Conceptual scope:** It is impossible to confine the study of protest movements to fixed research parameters or unified analytical frameworks. This challenge becomes even more pronounced when examining slogans, which span multiple domains - ranging from politics to society, culture, and art; from the public to the private and the everyday; and from philosophical and ideological considerations to psychological and linguistic dimensions. Consequently, this research extends across multiple levels, acknowledging that no protest movement can be reduced to a single perspective, especially given the fragmentation of both the local and global landscapes. This complexity is further heightened by the fact that the uprising itself emerged in opposition to the very notions of unity and centralization - concepts deeply embedded in modernist thought and staunchly upheld by repressive political and security institutions.

II. **Geographical scope:** The study focuses on key public squares in the Lebanese capital, Beirut - particularly Riad al-Solh, Martyrs' Square (Al-Shuhada), and Lazarieh - as well as protest sites in other Lebanese regions where noteworthy slogans emerged. These include

Tripoli, Nabatieh, Sidon, Tyre, Hasbaya, Furn al-Chebbak, Jal al-Dib Bridge, Khaldeh, Mount Lebanon (Al-Jabal), the Bekaa, and Baalbek.

III. **Temporal scope:** The study primarily focuses on the October 17, 2019 uprising and its aftermath, but its historical roots trace back - albeit in various forms - to 2011, particularly with the "Down with the Sectarian Regime" movement, influenced by the Arab Spring.[1] The study also considers significant confrontations and mobilizations in 2013, 2015, and 2017, which served as precursors to the uprising.

IV. **Research sample:** The research examines a selection of slogans, drawings, and chants that represent broader ideological and political orientations. These expressions not only challenged prevailing authoritarian structures but also reflected internal contradictions within the movement itself. Despite their differences, they collectively encapsulated the intellectual, cultural, and political diversity of the protest movement - both during the uprising and in the lead-up to it. These slogans articulated different visions of change: some reflected a reformist discourse focused on economic and political restructuring, while others embodied a radical agenda advocating for a complete systemic transformation. Each perspective was shaped by the group that embraced it and the nature of the specific confrontations it engaged in during the uprising.

Research Premises

This research seeks to challenge prevailing assumptions - particularly those that verge on authoritarian readings - by critically re-evaluating them and uncovering the deeper dimensions of confrontation and its radical impact on the political system. Previous analyses of the uprising have largely been shaped by the assumption that the protest movement functioned as a singular, unified entity primarily characterized by rejectionist opposition to the existing order.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature on the subject has been either descriptive or focused on a single dimension - such as semiotics, linguistic discourse, or everyday demands and concerns - at the expense of engaging with the dialectical and dynamic nature of the movement, especially during its first two months. Other studies have centered their analysis around the slogan "All [of Them] Means All," often reducing it to a surface-level reading or focusing on the recurrent attempts to absolve certain political parties or leaders from the collective indictment expressed by the slogan.

[1] Arab Spring refers to a wave of peaceful popular protests and revolutions that spread across several Arab countries beginning in late 2010, aimed at toppling existing regimes. These movements were unified by a chant that first emerged in Tunisia and later resonated across the region: "The people want to overthrow the regime."

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Additional Note

The slogans cited in this study have been transcribed exactly as they appeared, without any intervention from the researcher. This decision was made to preserve their authenticity, as they encapsulate the energy, spirit, and vernacular of the protest movement - including explicit language, insults, and other expressions that were integral to the discourse of the 2019 uprising.

Preface

If one were to describe the Lebanese protest movement that began on the night of October 17, 2019 - defining it through its slogans, the visions and aspirations it represented, and the evolving interpretations it reflected, oscillating between radicalism and reformism - one could argue that it existed within the space between two dominant slogans: **"All [of Them] Means All"** (*Killon ya'ni killon*) and **"Hela Ho."** These slogans encapsulated the overarching reaction to the trajectory of Lebanon's ruling class and its affiliated militias, whose actions have shaped the country's political and economic landscape since before the official end of the civil war (1975–1990) and into the present.

However, a closer examination reveals a far more complex and expansive field of slogans encompassing a wide range of linguistic uses and expressive frameworks that convey issues and perspectives reflected in varying concepts and interpretations, as well as ideological, cultural, behavioral, artistic, and identity-based differences. These slogans form the seeds of latent, conflicting political projects and represent divergent and contradictory possibilities for envisioning solutions to Lebanon's predicament.

The protest movement, therefore, functioned as both a discursive and an active battleground that unfolded between these two defining slogans:

1 – **"All [of Them] Means All"** (*Killon ya'ni killon*):

This slogan was first used during the 2015 protests over the waste crisis in Lebanon. It targeted the entire ruling class - everyone who has held power in Lebanon, from ministers and parliamentarians to presidents, banks, and business elites, along with their networks of associates and beneficiaries.

This was reflected in other slogans, such as "**King of Scabies, Jihad al-Arab**" ((Malik al-Jarab, Jihad al-Arab)[2] pointing to figures perceived as emblematic of corruption and state failure. These individuals were seen as central to Lebanon's ongoing crisis and the primary architects of its collapse - implicated in widespread corruption, embezzlement, and the plundering of public resources. Their actions, along with the complicity of the political elite, enabled financial crimes, repression, intimidation, and even targeted eliminations, all perpetuated by a lack of accountability and the dominance of militias within state institutions.

2 – **"Hela Ho":**

Initially popularized in football stadiums, this chant took on a new political meaning during the October 17 uprising. It was first directed at Minister **Gebran Bassil** (b. 1970), the son-in-law of President **Michel Aoun** and leader of the **Free Patriotic Movement** since 2015. While its original form can be traced to football fan culture in other countries, in Lebanon it became closely associated with the Al-Najma Football Club before being adopted by protesters. The full slogan - *"Hela Ho, Hela Ho, Gebran Bassil Kiss Emmo"* - was a direct, explicit insult aimed at

[2] Jihad al-Arab is a Lebanese contractor often described as *"the leading contractor in the Lebanese Republic."* His influence grew from securing projects with the Ministry of Public Works, the Council for Development and Reconstruction, and the Funds for the South and the Displaced to winning tenders with the Ministry of the Interior. See: *Al-Akhbar,* November 19, 2015.

Bassil and, unlike the more generalized *"**All Means All**,"* this slogan took a sharper, more personal tone in its condemnation of specific political figures.

What is striking about these two slogans is their ability to break free from any fixed context. Their broad and fluid nature allows them to be deployed in different fields and circumstances, while still targeting a specific entity that remains irreplaceable.

"All [of Them] Means All" (*Killon ya'ni killon*) was particularly powerful due to its expansive reach. At times, it was an all-encompassing indictment of the entire ruling class, while in other instances, it was narrowed to target a specific individual - typically a figure from the political elite or their entourage who had become synonymous with corruption. This flexibility allowed for the slogan's adaptation, transforming into more specific variations such as *"All of them means all of them, and [name] is one of them."*

Similarly, **"Hela Ho"** - despite initially being directed at **Gebran Bassil** - quickly evolved beyond its original target. Depending on the context, it could be narrowed to focus on a single individual or expanded to apply to different politicians or groups without hesitation or modification.

These two slogans became defining features of the protest movement, transcending regional and sectarian divisions. Their resonance extended beyond the capital, Beirut, as protesters across **Tripoli, Tyre, Sidon, Zouk, Furn El-Chebbak, Kfar-Reman, and other areas** chanted them. In the early days of the uprising, they were even used to challenge any political leader or party figure with sectarian, political, or militia dominance over a particular region. Their reach was not confined to Lebanon alone - Lebanese expatriates and immigrants also adopted them in protests abroad.

Notably, the slogan **"The people want to overthrow the regime"** - which reemerged in Lebanese protest squares in 2019 - was previously used during the **2011 "Overthrow the Sectarian System"** movement, itself influenced by the **Arab Spring.** This slogan even transcended its Arab origins, later appearing in the **French Yellow Vest movement** during demonstrations against proposed amendments to French retirement law, where it was adapted to **"The people want the regime to retire".**[3]

Breaking With Centrality and Monolithism

Modernity has given us the institutionalization of the **nation-state**, along with **political organization based on equality before the law**. It has also established **secularism** and the **separation of religion from the state**, alongside governance systems that emphasize democracy - particularly in its **modern liberal form**, which defines the people as the source of authority and is built on institutions, legal frameworks, and the separation of powers. This stands in contrast to the **ancient Greek model of democracy**, which was fundamentally based on majority rule, derived from the Greek words *demos* ("people") and *kratos* ("rule").

[3] Siraj, Nader. *The Cry of Anger: A Rhetorical Study of the Speeches of the Lebanese Uprising*. 1st ed. Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2022, p. 311–312.

However, the scope of this research suggests that modernity's impact extends beyond these foundational structures. More than anything, modernity has facilitated the rise of **intellectual currents and methodologies** that have ultimately undermined the notions of **unity, continuity, and homogeneity** in both historical narratives and theoretical frameworks. This is particularly evident in theories that dismantled the notions of origin, unity, and totality. Evolutionary theory, as developed by Charles Darwin, shattered the belief in a single origin of the human race. Historical materialism and dialectics, as developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, exposed the fractures in social unity, revealing the contradictions of class struggle and the power dynamics of ownership over the means of production. Relativity, through the work of Albert Einstein, dismantled the absoluteness of time and space, proving their fluid and interdependent nature. Ethical philosophy, through Friedrich Nietzsche, dismantled the notion of a singular moral order, challenging unitarist views and absolute standards of good and evil. Similarly, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis fractured the unity of human consciousness, dividing it into the conscious and subconscious, exposing internal conflicts and repression at the core of human behavior.

Each of these theories contributed to challenging modernity and laying the groundwork for postmodern thought, with its fundamental redefinitions of the act, the actor, political action, and social change. In the midst of this epistemological shift, it is necessary to examine how transformation unfolds - both within and outside existing structures - across societies, moral frameworks, behaviors, aspirations, political strategies, and forms of confrontation.

Ultimately, every major historical event functions as a site of rupture within the illusion of unity that authoritarian narratives attempt to impose on political and social identities. Beneath this surface-level cohesion lies a constant state of tension, contradiction, and conflict, whose dimensions are difficult to fully capture. Even when a historical event appears unified in the eyes of the ruling class and dominant narratives, the undercurrents of protest and resistance reveal an ever-present stream of divergence and multiplicity - some of which may shape future transformations, while others may be temporarily contained or dismissed as controlled dissent.

From this standpoint, we examine historical events within contemporary societies - particularly within postmodern societies - and the political and social movements that drive change. These movements reveal a vast range of orientations among individuals - orientations that, though systematically excluded and denied by the ruling classes, remain deeply embedded beneath the surface. They resurface in moments of conflict and crisis, manifesting in divergent perceptions of authority, governance, and rights. This latent reserve of possibilities reemerges at times of extreme tension, especially during periods of confrontation and systemic collapse. It is in such moments that Antonio Gramsci's words become particularly relevant, especially in the context of Lebanon's breakdown: *"The old world is dying, and the new world is struggling to be born. Now is the time of monsters"*.[4]

The term "monsters" in this context does not carry a moral judgment, nor does it refer to wild beasts that consume bodies and minds. Rather, it signifies unformed and indeterminate forces - entities that, as human beings conditioned to categorize and generalize, we struggle to fully conceptualize before they take shape. Their meanings, effects, and potentialities remain undefined precisely because their full manifestations and consequences are not yet visible. All

[4] For more: Opral, François. *Facilitated Dictionary of Philosophers*. Translated by Georges Saad. Beirut: Dar Al-Hadatha, 1993, p. 74.

methodological attempts - from structuralism to deconstruction - only reaffirm this very point: the resistance of certain forces to classification, which is evidence of their fluid and evolving nature.

From this perspective, it is useful to analyze political action through the lens of difference and deconstruction - especially when it is carried out by large-scale social movements that carry within them all the contradictions of society, much like the Lebanese protest movement. While rejection may unify these movements on the surface, they diverge in nearly every detail. The moment rejection transitions into acceptance, recognition, and active engagement, internal conflicts become activated, as the translation of slogans and demands into social, political, cultural, and behavioral realities brings contradictions to the forefront. At this stage, the study of the everyday, the micro-level dynamics of dissent, and the nuances of emerging conflicts becomes essential. Understanding these implicit tensions not only clarifies the trajectory of future developments but also sheds light on the build-up of pressures before and as they reach their breaking point.

Acts of Protest

Protest actions emerge from large human collectives, within which various currents express, in all possible forms, fundamental demands and visions for addressing social and political crises, in addition to demanding rights denied to individuals or groups. These demands may be ineffective or lack influence, or they may be individual rather than collective, or they may articulate the impossible at the wrong moment. That is, due to their extreme realism, they demand the impossible,[5] thereby exposing a flaw that arises in the moment of confrontation with tyranny and the crisis of political systems that grind down the individual. They thus reveal an exclusion that extends to everything that should, under just conditions, not be excluded - except by the logic of power.

Civil protests have become the ideal expression of civil society's struggle "against all forms of coercion, domination, and tyranny exercised by the state over the majority… and against the policies of the ruling regime, seeking instead their displacement and the search for new political elites - especially after the ruling elites betrayed them and the parties failed them in bringing about change, which in turn generated awareness among certain social forces that came to see themselves as a lifeline."[6]

In such dynamic protest movements, it is impossible to speak in absolute terms, for doing so would only reinforce the mechanisms that grind down the individual and suppress their activism, despite the premise that political action fundamentally seeks to empower them. Or so it is supposed to be, particularly after the collapse of grand ideological systems that attempted to impose totalizing and comprehensive social engineering projects - seeking to build paradise on earth, but ultimately turning it into hell.[7] The individual, or groups of individuals, express their aspirations, pains, and hopes through slogans, chants, graffiti, tattoos, articles, and digital activism - manifestations that,

[5] Based on a slogan raised by French students during the May 1968 Revolution: "Be realistic, demand the impossible." Zanaz, Karima Wahmid. "Fifty Winks at the Love of Freedom." In Kikli, Issa, Salem Ben Abdel-Aali, al-Makni al-Khayati, Saleh al-Zaghbani, Badr Kaddour, *Student Revolution: May 1968, Forty Years Later,* 1st ed. Damascus: Petra Publishing and Distribution House, 2009, p. 73.
[6] Siam, Shehata. *The Culture of Protest: From Silence to Disobedience*. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, 2011, p. 10.
[7] Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. One-volume edition. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2002, p. 182.

while often overlooked under broad generalizations, contain the unspoken and implicit dimensions of protest.

We cannot ignore these details as if they do not exist. On the contrary, they must be examined closely, particularly since they signal the emergence of direct popular democracy, imposed by the street at the moment of its eruption. At times, these expressions materialize into a tangible force carried forward by large groups determined to turn these broad slogans into lived reality.

Protest movements are inherently complex and multi-faceted, requiring precision in analysis - especially in societies that are divided, divergent, fragmented, unorganized, not united nor unified, whether due to subjective or objective reasons. This is particularly evident in Lebanese sectarian society, which is fractured to the extreme. In such societies, it is impossible to identify a single discourse that represents all, nor a single set of aspirations that unites them.

This was noted in the book *Lebanon's October 17 Uprising: Squares and Testimonies*, where the authors conclude that:

"Although the October 17 Uprising spread across many Lebanese regions, raising slogans that leaned toward unity and demonstrating cohesion across Lebanon's diverse sects, regions, cultures, classes, and social groups, as well as exhibiting similarities in forms of expression - from demonstrations and sit-ins to the erection of tents and public discussions in various squares - this did not obscure the fact that protesters in different regions faced local opposition from dominant forces or groups affiliated with specific political factions. This reflects certain Lebanese regional specificities."[8]

The plurality of societies, their distinctiveness, and the variations in the authoritarian forces they confront mean that they are not homogeneous groups. Nor do they extend as fields that provide equal opportunities for action and self-fulfillment. Nor are they dominated by a single dominant force with a unified ideology and political orientation, as is evident in Lebanon, where even the mechanisms of state control, political affiliation, and militia influence do not translate into a singular, fixed collective identity or culture under all circumstances. The multiplicity of actors, identities, and narratives, which authorities often attempt to weaponize against itself, is instead leveraged to foster division and internal confrontation - relying on intimidation, fear, and the construction of the "other" as a threat.

It must be said that this attempt positions itself differently from the majority of writings, articles, and studies that have examined the uprising through similar perspectives. Many of these analyses remained superficial, restricted either to direct political, economic, or identity-based demands, or constrained by their decision to limit the scope of research to a singular thematic focus. Such was the case with Lebanese researcher and academic Nader Siraj, who studied the rhetorical discourse of the uprising, stating: "My awareness of the coercions that might deviate the researcher from a linguistic course to a standard evaluative path made me avoid ideological frameworks."[9]

Meanwhile, studies that abandon both approaches tend to rush toward the classical division - placing the people, in all their orientations, on one side, and authority on the other. Such analyses

[8] Ziadeh, Khaled, and Muhammad Abi Samra, eds. *Lebanon's October 17 Uprising: Squares and Testimonies*. 1st ed. Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2022, p. 10–11.
[9] Siraj, Nader. *The Cry of Anger*… op. cit., p. 22.

risk sliding into conspiracy theories, which were central to Hezbollah's discourse and that of its affiliates. Since Hezbollah maintains a dominant political position in Lebanon, it also exercises dominance over the possibility of discourse itself. Rooted in a centralized, unitary, and authoritarian orientation, this perspective failed to engage with existing social dynamics, pluralisms, and internal contradictions. Nor did it acknowledge the confiscation of political and social rights, as its ideological framework inherently rejects them.

Due to its authoritarian nature, this perspective could only see the October 17 Uprising as an attempt to "push the country into a political vacuum, spread disorder, and create 'creative chaos' as a prelude to besieging Lebanon, starving its people, and inciting them against Hezbollah." According to this discourse, the ultimate aim of the protests was to force Hezbollah to surrender its weapons and dismantle its military wing, in service of what was framed as the Israeli-American-Saudi project seeking to liquidate and eliminate the resistance.[10]

Such approaches stereotype and oversimplify the protest movement, reducing it to a singular mass rather than acknowledging its foundational distinctions - both among the protesters themselves and in the diverse nature of their repressed rights and grievances. These distinctions are critical, as they may, under the right conditions, develop into a force capable of seizing power and transforming the political system - whether according to specific demands, utopian ideals, or alternative visions for change.

This reinforces the idea that no foundational research into the Lebanese protest movement can proceed without dismantling authoritarian perspectives or acknowledging the postmodern condition that shapes such movements. That is, the methodology of deconstruction, which unveils the concealed, the repressed, and the divergent, rather than adhering to classical binary frameworks that, in one way or another, reinforce the logic of power - even in academic analysis.

In this context, slogans, as the expressed discourse of the uprising, serve as a vital force that opens pathways to rebellion and resistance. Yet in their pluralism and fluidity, they may even reach a point of rebelling against rebellion itself, ultimately culminating in protest against protest. This is because discourse, regardless of its form, is fundamentally an act that embodies both language and action.[11] As Michel Foucault asserts:[12] "Language is not merely a vehicle for statements, but a force capable of penetrating, transcending, and activating social transformations - an instrument of struggle within social conflict."[13]

Discourse, regardless of its form, is not merely a set of slogans, even when it is expressed through them. Rather, it consists of broad signifiers that encapsulate much more - concepts and visions that are echoed by human groups in various forms, within an open and fluid world, each carrying its own perspective on how that world should be structured and transformed.

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[10] Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 125.
[11] Siam, Shehata. The Culture of Protest: From Silence to Disobedience. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, 2011, p. 67.
[12] Bghoura, Al-Zawawi. *Philosophy and Language: Criticism of the Linguistic Turn in Contemporary Philosophy*. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Tali'ah, 2005, p. 155.
[13] Siam, op. cit., p. 14.

Cosmic Reversal: From Historical Narratives to Individual Narratives

Signs of transformation in the twentieth century emerged across multiple domains - intellectual, technical, artistic, and social - eventually shaping both the nature and form of protest movements. Among these shifts was analytical philosophy, which positioned itself against the authority of metaphysics and the historical dominance of philosophy, much like Pop Art, which opposed art as a whole in favor of real, immediate life. Both movements reflected an emancipatory ideology, as they sought to provide answers to the profound existential questions that stirred within contemporary consciousness - questions shaped by the widespread feeling that individuals wanted to "enjoy their lives now", rather than defer fulfillment to a different realm, another world, or a later stage in history for which the present was merely a preparation. The refusal to wait, to sacrifice the present for the sake of an imagined future, was what made Black and Women's movements in the United States so urgent. It was the same impulse that led Soviet society to cease celebrating distant utopian heroes in favor of immediate concerns. No one wanted to defer gratification for the promise of heaven, nor to seek happiness in the imagined egalitarianism of a future socialist utopia. Pop consciousness introduced a new standard - one in which the good life was no longer an abstract ideal but an immediate and tangible pursuit. Television, with its vivid depiction of others enjoying the comforts of normal life, was instrumental in bringing down the Berlin Wall in 1989, as people realized that the privileges they longed for were already being lived elsewhere.[14]

Thus, the dream of ideologies and historical narratives - of a deferred and more just life - came to an end. People's attention turned to the here and now, rejecting the notion that sacrificing today would bring about a promised tomorrow. The rejection of death itself became a political stance, encapsulated in the idea that "the desire for life is a political position."[15] This shift in consciousness was mirrored in the artistic realm, where the collapse of grand ideological projects - from fascism to Nazism to communism - signaled a new relationship with history. History was no longer a guiding force, shaping and directing human experience; instead, it was stripped of its authority, shattering the standards that once dictated how the world should be perceived. Without hesitation or embarrassment, the idea of a singular historical narrative was discarded,[16] much like the Arab Spring movements, which sought to overthrow regimes without necessarily formulating alternative governing visions. This condition reflected a mix of turbulence and exhilaration, as the contemporary artistic spirit became a museum of all artistic traditions, unrestricted by any overarching standard - a space where contemporaneity itself crystallized into an aesthetic of absolute freedom. In this new framework, everything was permissible, and history no longer imposed limits.[17]

At various levels, the individual spirit became a catalyst for change, much like Pop Art, which turned every person into an artist and every form of artistic expression into a legitimate work of

[14] Danto, Arthur C. After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History. Translated by Hadia Al-Arqi. 1st ed. Manama: Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, 2021, p. 249.
[15] Ben Salamah, Rajaa. "May 68: A Surreal Leftist Movement, a Beautiful Dreamy Exaggeration, a Revival of All Defeated and Betrayed Revolutions." In Kikli, Issa, op. cit., p. 7.
[16] Danto, op. cit., p. 267-272.
[17] Ibid., 54.

art. The movement rejected artistic hierarchies, asserting that "nothing is more valid than anything else. There is no singular direction. In fact, there are no directions at all."[18] Just as the individual in protest movements emerged as a figure who possesses rights, a voice - without needing institutional validation - so too did protest slogans evolve from elements of popular culture into high art, drawing from Pop Art, mass media, and social platforms rather than solely from institutionalized artistic traditions. Today, reverence is no longer reserved for the extraordinary - it now revolves around the ordinary. Pop quickly became a collection of themes and icons of collective experience, shaping the consciousness of the present historical moment. The year 1964, in this sense, marked a turning point - a moment when the legitimacy of civilization was questioned, giving way to a culture of irresponsibility. This shift mirrored broader political transformations in favor of individual autonomy and the pursuit of happiness, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[19]

From this perspective, Pop Art can no longer be seen as a movement that simply replaced another; rather, it must be understood as "an epidemiological moment that signaled deep social and political transformations, achieving profound philosophical shifts." The intellectual frameworks of the nineteenth century had been exhausted, even as many institutions of oppression remained intact. The postmodern response, however, was one of indifference to notions of purity.[20] This extended to painting, which was increasingly viewed as an obsolete form of artistic expression - one that needed to be replaced by photomontage, photography, life art, murals, conceptual art, or anything that disrupted traditional artistic institutions.[21]

These transformations fed directly into the ethos of protest movements, allowing them to surpass traditional structures of authority - whether in discourse, visual representation, language, or demands. What intensified this break was the influence of postmodernist deconstruction, particularly as articulated by Jean-François Lyotard, who argued that theories should not be assessed by their truth or falsehood, but by their power and capacity for suppression. From this standpoint, leftist critics argued that modernism, which assumed that painting and sculpture were the primary means of historical artistic development, was in fact a theory formulated to safeguard privilege by reinforcing the institutions that painting and sculpture upheld. As Lyotard put it, the institutions that upheld these artistic hierarchies - the museum, the gallery, the collector, the critic, the dealer, the exhibition hall - were exclusionary by design. Artists seeking recognition and success were inevitably driven to produce works that legitimized these very institutions.[22]

Since abstraction was the foundation and narrative necessity of modernist art, post-historical and postmodern art assumed the nature of "possibility" - that is, it became "something one can accomplish if one chooses to." Art thus reengaged with its historical context, and all horizons expanded toward a pluralism that called for "pluralistic artistic criticism," one that did not adhere to a historical and exclusionary narrative. As a result, it became capable of embracing every artistic work on its own terms - considering its motivations, references, and meanings - leading to a profound transformation in the structure of art. It turned it into a kind of "unprecedented pluralism, understood precisely in terms of open differentiation across media, which in turn fostered a corresponding differentiation in artistic motivations, eliminating the possibility of a continuous

[18] Ibid., 239-240.
[19] Ibid., 241, 247, 250.
[20] Ibid., 251-257.
[21] Ibid., 260.
[22] Ibid., 272

evolutionary narrative."[23] Art, like protest and everything else, became a series of complex movements based on elements that were "hybrid rather than pure, provocative rather than obvious, ambiguous rather than self-evident, deviant yet compelling."[24]

Analytical philosophy, for its part, rejected traditional philosophy, arguing that the metaphysical problems at its core stem from the very limitations of language itself. As a result, it proposed two approaches - both of which centered on language:

- The first approach advocated for the adoption of an alternative symbolic language that is logically (and mathematically) complete.

- The second approach linked language to everyday speech, asserting that traditional philosophical problems arise primarily from unclear and imprecise uses of language.

Similar to art, which moved toward the principle of the absence of a standard, philosophy underwent a parallel shift, one that struck deeply not only at reality and the ideal, but also in language itself. It began returning to the ordinary and the social, a transformation most profoundly reflected in Ludwig Wittgenstein's move from a logical-analytical approach to language to a social approach in his theory of language games. There, he linked language to life and its images, opening it up to daily events and experiences expressed through what appear to be trivial expressions, seemingly meaningless because they are simple and spontaneous.[25] This shift had a direct impact on subsequent philosophy, particularly in language and discourse studies, influencing speech act theory with J.L. Austin, and later Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and others. While Austin believed that discourse has an authority that stems from the authority of certain words, Bourdieu, in contrast to Habermas – who argued for the self-existent effectiveness of discourse – maintained that the authority of words is "nothing but the authority entrusted to the one to whom the command of speaking, and of speaking in the language of a particular party, has been delegated. Thus, the speaker's words (that is, the content of his speech and the way he speaks at the same time) are only a testimony, among other testimonies, to the guarantee of the mandate entrusted to him. The most that language does is to represent this authority. It shows it and symbolizes it."[26]

As for Foucault, he too saw discourse as possessing its own authority, though inseparable from power and society. For this reason, he began analyzing the procedures to which discourse is subjected, moving from external mechanisms – such as prohibition and exclusion – to internal structures, including the role of the author and the disciplines of knowledge. Ultimately, he turned to the mechanisms of appropriation, whereby discourse is recruited by religious, political, and philosophical groups and sects – a process he termed the *social appropriation of discourse*.

Importantly, Foucault was not in opposition to Bourdieu; rather, he reinforced Bourdieu's emphasis on the social nature of discourse and its ties to institutions and symbolic authority. Discourse, in Foucault's view, cannot be analyzed in isolation, as its meaning cannot be fully grasped without linking it to the social conditions that produced it – namely, the status of the speaker, the audience for whom it was produced, and the interests it serves. The conditional

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[23] Ibid., 276, 280, 281
[24] Ibid., 52
[25] Al-Khuwailidi, Zuhair. "Philosophy of Language between Speech Games and Speech Acts." *Philosophy Club*. Last accessed April 27, 2024. https://www.philoclub.net/فلسفة-اللغة-بين-ألعاب-الكلام-وأفعال-ال/.
[26] Bghoura, op. cit., p. 188.

relationship between the speaker and the audience – in which the speaker's authority to deliver discourse is recognized – reveals the power dynamics embedded within discourse itself. This relationship ultimately reaffirms the reciprocal nature of authority, as recognition always requires two parties: the one who grants authority and the one who receives it – the ruler and the ruled, the speaker and those in whose name the speech is delivered.[27]

Discourse, according to Foucault, is "a group of utterances that belong to a single system of formation and composition." The utterance (and in our study, the slogan) is the final element of discourse that is capable of entering into relations with other utterances. Its references are formed by the site of its emergence, its conditions, its field, and by the possibilities of its appearance and disappearance. Its connotations appear when it enters into a relationship "between the utterance and the spaces of difference, where the utterance itself reveals the differences."[28] Thus, discourse is not merely a linguistic structure but a function – one that privileges history over structure, and transformation over stability.[29] In his analysis, Foucault distinguishes between two mechanisms: the description of discourse and the analysis of language. While the latter focuses on identifying the rules that shape an utterance, the former is concerned with how a particular utterance emerges and why no other utterance appeared in its place. The description of discourse examines its novelty and uniqueness, defines its conditions of emergence, traces its boundaries, and explores its relations with other utterances, particularly those it negates or displaces.[30] From this perspective, Foucault identifies three key results of discourse analysis:

1. Discourse should not be treated as an object of commentary or meaning, but rather as a describable effect.
2. The study of discourse does not seek structural laws (as structuralism does), but rather the conditions that enable its existence.
3. Discourse should not be traced back to thought or the individual self to assign it a birth date, but instead to the field of practice in which it operates.

Thus, the foundation upon which analysis must be built becomes clear: understanding the importance of language and discourse, the significance of the slogan as an utterance, the role of its initiator, and whom it represents. However, a crucial distinction must be made here: the initiator of discourse, whether an individual or a group, has become their own master, deriving authority from themselves rather than from external validation. They no longer require recognition; instead, they impose recognition through every confrontation they engages in.

In public spaces, particularly within the context of protest, these factors determine the parameters of discourse: its content, form, and quality, as well as the current reality it articulates or challenges, and the purpose it seeks to achieve. However, this purpose is not necessarily collective; it may express the concerns of a group, or later be adopted by one, but its origin is rooted in the individual as the primary actor. This shift is particularly evident in the rise of pop art, through which the individual asserts activism not only within local civil society but also within global discourse. The conditions shaping this discourse are tied to obstacles to individual freedom in daily life, detached

[27] Ibid., p. 188-190
[28] Ibid., p. 158
[29] Ibid., p. 173
[30] Ibid., p. 165

from grand narratives, rigid standards, or notions of ideological purity. What must be recognized here is that the everyday has become the only narrative.

Within the Lebanese system, which is built upon collective, sectarian, and historical narratives, this shift was starkly evident during the protests. The best expression of this rupture came in the rejection of that sectarian identity-based pluralism represented by the protest movement, and its confrontation with the chant: "Shia, Shia, Shia!" – used by supporters of the "Shia political duo" to attack the demonstrators.[31] Here, the individual was reduced to a number being manipulated in various ways: at times in the name of grand causes, at times through religion and the strategic use of sectarianism, at times through a political message, and at times in the name of resistance.

This focus on artistic and philosophical narratives serves to identify the conditions of activism and define the mechanisms through which individuals express themselves: what they aim to say, what they seek to achieve, and what tools they use to articulate the details of their lived reality. Here, language emerges as the key field of struggle, as it is never neutral. It is always laden with issues, meanings, and ideologies, even when it claims to reject ideology altogether. This rejection of ideology paradoxically reflects an ideology in itself: the ideology of rejecting ideologies. In this framework, individualism and the everyday emerge as alternative ideologies to grand narratives, while civil society becomes the new arena of action. However, the mechanisms of civil society and its organizations remain deeply ideological, transforming the conflict into a political struggle – one from which civil society has historically attempted to differentiate itself, precisely because politics has always been the domain of the state.

Revolution or Uprising?

Research on protest movements requires identifying the overarching framework that defines the nature of the action. Establishing a precise classification is the most effective way to reach an accurate and meaningful understanding. This approach is grounded in terminological clarity, ensuring that the protest action is appropriately categorized – whether as a coup, revolution, uprising, civil disobedience, or another form of political mobilization.

In its initial descriptive form, the characterization of the 2019 Lebanese protest movement oscillated between two dominant terms, each of which carried contrasting implications. The widespread use of these terms – despite the significant difference between them – introduced ambiguity rather than clarity, making them open to multiple interpretations. This lack of precision not only complicated attempts to define the protest itself but also hindered efforts to analyze it as an event. Consequently, the movement became trapped within the constraints of its assumed label, which led many scholarly and journalistic attempts at documentation to produce vague, inconsistent, and often fluid conclusions.

The distinction between the terms "Lebanese Revolution" (*Thawra Lubnaniya*) and the "Lebanese Intifada" (*Intifada Lubnaniya*) is foundational, as the characteristics of a full-scale popular revolution are fundamentally different from those of an uprising. A revolution – with its sharp and radical transformation of social, political, moral, and ideological structures, alongside its

[31] "Shia Duo" is a contemporary Lebanese political term that refers to the two parliamentary blocs: the Amal Movement and its leader, Nabih Berri, and Hezbollah and its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

economic, cultural, and behavioral dimensions – differs greatly from an uprising, whose name in Arabic is derived from the root *nafada*, meaning to shake off dust (from the objects at hand).[32] The uprising, in this sense, reflects an attempt to reject and challenge illegal or illegitimate practices within an already flawed system without necessarily seeking to completely overthrow it. The difference between the two is not merely political, legal, or linguistic; it is also behavioral and analytical, reflecting the multifaceted nature and depth of the action itself.

An uprising is typically a spontaneous, unstructured, and decentralized popular movement, centered on immediate demands and human rights concerns. It tends to be chaotic, less organized, and primarily reactive, aiming to improve current conditions rather than presenting a fully developed alternative. A revolution, by contrast, is the outcome of a deliberate and abrupt transformation, executed by an organized political force with a clear ideological project and an alternative framework for governance. This distinction clarifies much of the debate surrounding the 2019 Lebanese protests, offering insight into both their driving forces and their ultimate limitations.

The core of the Lebanese protest movement – its defining characteristic to this day – has been its rejection of rigid classifications and organizational structures, resisting standardized frameworks of political action. For this reason, the term "uprising" is more appropriate than "revolution," as the movement failed to translate its momentum into a radical, systematic transformation that could restructure the political, economic, constitutional, legal, institutional, and cultural framework of the Lebanese state. The absence of a revolutionary project meant that the protest movement, despite its scope and intensity, did not lead to an overhaul of power structures or a fundamental shift in state authority, governance, or individual behavior.

It is not, however, a smooth or classical process. Social protest is inherently dynamic, shaped by prevailing cultural, political, and economic conditions, as well as by international relations. It is therefore impossible for it to remain static, which compels us to revisit the literature of the Critical Social School, particularly its discussions and analyses of contemporary capitalist society. One of its key thinkers, Herbert Marcuse, sought to rethink the nature of revolution in light of capitalist and technological modernity, especially following the student revolution in France in 1968. He observed:

"I believe that one thing we can say without fear is that the traditional idea of revolution and the traditional strategy of revolution are out of date. Their time has passed: the development of our societies has surpassed them... This is precisely why I emphasize the spontaneous nature of this movement, the spontaneous way in which it spread. And now I say spontaneity, and I insist on this concept – but you know, there is no spontaneity that does not need a little help in order to be truly spontaneous, and this was precisely the case in France... Compared to the traditional organization of the opposition, this was a spontaneous movement that, as much as it could, paid no heed to the existing organization – whether party or union – and simply set out on its way."[33]

Here, Marcuse critiques traditional party structures – particularly the authoritarianism of communist parties – arguing that they view any movement that threatens to escape their control as

[32] Al-Maany Dictionary. "Nafad." Arabic–Arabic Dictionary. Last accessed March 27, 2024. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/نفض.

[33] Woddis, Jack. *New Theories of Revolution: Marcuse and the Western World*. Translated by Muhammad Mustajir Mustafa. Beirut: Al-Farabi Publishing House, 1978, p. 112-113.

something to be swiftly co-opted, assimilated, and thus neutralized.[34] He notes that this tendency does not arise in a vacuum, but rather as a response to the adaptability of the capitalist system, which has subjugated the working class and absorbed alternatives through technological advancement and bureaucratic management. Capitalism, he argues, has transformed domination and surveillance, eliminating the proletariat as a revolutionary contradiction to the existing system.

This shift, Marcuse argues, was reinforced by the emergence of the "white-collar" class – administrators, technicians, and professionals – leading to a fundamental rejection of classical Marxist revolutionary theory. The result was twofold:

1. The displacement of the industrial working class as the primary revolutionary force.
2. The gradual assimilation of the majority of the working class, resulting in the proletariat's transformation into a conservative middle class.[35]

For Marcuse, this protest movement was not merely an uprising against capitalist society in France, but also a rebellion against the Stalinist model of socialism – a revolution against revolution, or more precisely, a protest against the institutionalized act of protest. It was a movement against the co-optation of dissent by existing regimes, as well as a radical critique of the French Communist Party, which, though not yet in government, sought nothing more than to become part of the ruling establishment as quickly as possible.[36]

We cite Marcuse's analysis not only because it describes the conditions for revolution in capitalist societies, but because it fundamentally reshapes the understanding of protest itself. His interpretation applies directly to the Lebanese protest movement, which was not far from this description, but rather one of the clearest manifestations of it. The structural conditions in Lebanon mirrored those that Marcuse identified, as the ruling class had, over decades and through various means, absorbed or dismantled any oppositional movement that aimed to challenge the political system. The most prominent mechanisms by which this was achieved include:

- **The adoption of sectarian ideology** to divide and control social forces;
- **The encroachment on public-sector employment**, turning state institutions into tools serving elite interests;
- **The institutionalization of nepotism**, and the strengthening of clientelism as a primary mode of governance;
- **The co-optation of the General Labor Union and other trade unions**, reducing them to puppets manipulated or suppressed at will'
- **The fragmentation of alternative or reformist parties**, preventing them from forming a cohesive opposition.

These strategies functioned both as barriers to change and as mechanisms of social control. They entrenched division and enabled the fragmentation of all those excluded from the system, positioning them against one another, further reinforcing sectarian and political divisions. At the same time, the ruling elite continued to manufacture a dependent middle class through haphazard

[34] Ibid., 112
[35] Ibid., 157
[36] Ibid., 111

public-sector employment. This perpetuated social fragmentation, making it increasingly difficult for any movement to emerge that could meaningfully challenge the system as a whole.

Social Movements: From Old to New

A decisive point must be established when discussing contemporary protest movements, particularly in light of Marcuse's insights, which provide a foundational framework for understanding the mechanisms behind protest slogans and discourse, their meanings, and their contexts. The key issue revolves around how the nature of confrontation has evolved, adapting to prevailing material conditions, which define the arena of political and social action.

Historically, the struggle on the political level was linked to class-based confrontations, as seen in the social movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which remained dominant until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. However, over time, the nature of social movements themselves changed, leading to what are now called new social movements - movements that became a major source of political and cultural change on a global scale.[37] These new movements emerged as the dominant form of political and social confrontation, particularly in the post-mid-20th century revolutions, and played a critical role in reshaping protest dynamics. This was especially evident in former Soviet states and, later, in the Arab uprisings that began in 2010, culminating in the Lebanese protest movement of 2019.

In many ways, the Arab Spring and the "revolutions" that preceded it represent the peak of these movements' engagement in global change, as they directly confronted laws, the state, and authority. These new social movements, unlike their predecessors, function as "a loose network of opposition and alternative ways of living". However, they have also entered the realm of formal politics, fundamentally reshaping the nature of institutional political engagement. Founded upon new social and cultural perceptions, these movements politicized civil society in ways that redefined institutional politics and reshaped global discourse. They challenged prevailing cultural norms, introduced new forms of identity, and raised non-negotiable demands.[38]

What distinguishes new social movements is their ability to crystallize shared experiences and respond to emerging social challenges. These movements became self-aware, recognizing their ability to produce new meanings and alternative social models. They also strengthened their defensive function, resisting the encroachment on everyday life caused by the systemic mechanisms of economic and political rationalization, which work to suppress communicative processes and limit social autonomy.[39]

From this perspective, new social movements have actively worked to transform civil society. Previously, civil society existed as a space between the family and the state's authority, which dominated both economic structures and the realm of ideas. Within this framework, the individual stood isolated, facing the state as an institution with overwhelming power. However, through these movements, civil society began evolving into a site of interactive, collective political action.

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[37] Fares, Sayed. *The Culture of New Social Movements: An Anthropological Approach*. 1st ed. Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2023, p. 9

[38] Outhwaite, William. *Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*. Translated by the Institute of Iraqi Studies, supervised by Faleh Abdul-Jabbar. 1st ed. Manama: Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, 2022, p. 369.

[39] Ibid., p. 370

Today, it encompasses voluntary associations and activist groups, forming a rich mosaic of social forces. These groups are composed of individuals who defend their rights and interests, while actively engaging in political and social life as citizens.

The goal of civil society has been to limit the interference and political control exercised by the state, as it operates by focusing on individuals and groups within society, positioning itself in opposition to centralized ideologies that mobilize mass movements, suppress individualism and pluralism, and attempt to homogenize voluntary civil associations under its central historical trends.[40] From this perspective, civil society underwent a transformation under globalization, evolving in response to the new world order, which sought to transcend centralized power and national boundaries. This transformation later became linked to the United Nations, and to postmodernist, post-nationalist, and post-imperialist ideas, which described this shift as a redefinition of the state - its structure, function, limitations, and traditional borders - in pursuit of a constitutional framework that "requires overcoming the necessities of the state by establishing and forming a society of global citizens."[41]

In its contemporary form, civil society consists of voluntary, non-profit associations that engage with various social issues, particularly those related to identity. These organizations transcend traditional left-right political divisions and move beyond revolutionary and transformative political models. The increased interconnectivity of the world under globalization, aided by technological advancements, has had a direct impact on comprehensive ideologies, challenging their monolithic discourse and paving the way for pluralistic visions and ideas within civil society itself.[42]

New social movements have become especially active among youth, primarily through social media platforms, where they play a central role in shaping the discourse of change, its culture, and its key themes. These movements have also influenced government policies, particularly after older social movements lost momentum, weakened by declining public trust, shifting social and political landscapes, and advancements in control mechanisms that have restructured political engagement. Unlike previous movements, which were rooted in political structures, these new movements have introduced culture as a fundamental criterion in social and political struggles. As a result, culture has become "an essential component of lifestyles, artistic worlds, and commodity exchanges."[43]

This cultural turn has also influenced the social sciences, pushing scholars to explore "the search for culture within politics," a shift largely driven by the post-structuralist wave led by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

For Alain Touraine, new social movements are a distinctive feature of protest in post-industrial society, in which "transformative conflict occurs on a cultural level." This marks a significant departure from earlier eras, where activists primarily framed conflict through class struggle and political confrontation. According to Touraine, these movements represent "a profound cultural challenge and reflect disillusionment with the Modernity project as a whole."[44]

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[40] Susser, Bernard. *Political Ideology in the Modern World*. 10th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998, p. 271.
[41] Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire: The New Empire of Globalization*. Translated by Fadel Jatkar. 1st ed. Riyadh: Obeikan Bookstore, 2002, p. 29.
[42] Susser, op. cit., p. 274 - 275
[43] Fares, Sayed, op. cit., p. 20
[44] Ibid., p. 10-11

The disappearance of traditional movements, particularly leftist movements, has become a global phenomenon, stemming from the decline of revolutionary theories and their foundational references. These references were largely inspired by revolutionary and socialist experiences around the world, but their collapse was accelerated by key historical events: China's transition to a market economy, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Even before these turning points, the student(***s***) revolution in France in 1968 had already signaled a shift in revolutionary thought by raising slogans that challenged authority itself, including the provocative chant directed at Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser: "What is Althusser good for?" (A quoi sert Althusser?).[45]

Within this context, the ground was laid for the emergence of new liberal and leftist organizations, which, rather than opposing capitalist systems from the outside, sought to critique them from within, on their own economic and ideological terrain - an approach reminiscent of Marcuse and his contemporaries. This transition also opened the door for identity-based, gender, ethnic, and legal movements, whose fragmented demands and slogans came to dominate protest discourse.[46] This shift is unsurprising, as new social movements largely emerged from students movements, the civil rights movement, feminist struggles, environmental activism, peace and anti-nuclear campaigns, and demands for regional independence and cultural specificity. These movements challenged existing structures and institutions, ways of living and thinking, as well as moral standards and societal norms.[47] Their activism was founded on the principle that "the impossibility of comprehensive change necessitates working on partial transformations."

However, the engagement of new social movements in struggle does not mean they exist in absolute opposition to dominant culture, particularly the aspects of it that serve their objectives and reinforce their protest practices. Instead, they draw from that culture, forming subcultures that emphasize solidarity, commitment, group integration, and continuity. These elements, in turn, contribute to the expansion of social movements, shaping their organizational strategies. As scholars note, these movements play a role in "the formation of a collective identity that influences the emergence of the movement, recruitment, affiliation, tactics, and outcomes."[48] Their activism is based on an understanding of contemporary social life as inherently conflictual.

In navigating this struggle, these movements readily embrace technology, strategically seizing control of mechanisms that facilitate societal transformation. Their members act as active, self-affirming agents, positioning new social movements as a contest for control over cultural frameworks, centered on knowledge, investment, and ethics. The struggle is structured around three key pillars:

1. Identity
2. The Opponent
3. The Whole

[45] Bouazza, Shawqi, "More Than a Student Riot and Less Than a Revolution?" in Kikli, Issa, op. cit., p. 30.
[46] Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 31
[47] Outhwaite, op. cit., p. 367
[48] Fares, Sayed, op. cit., p. 11

Social conflict is inseparable from cultural trends, as the visible confrontation between identity and its opponents unfolds within a shared, dominant cultural field, where all ideological and political struggles take place.[49]

However, defining the boundaries of the common cultural field does not imply that new social movements form a single, unified bloc. Rather, these movements operate at different levels, with distinct areas of focus. Some concentrate on economic demands and engage in organizational activism, others address minority issues and act within political spheres, while some challenge cultural patterns and are engaged in historical action. What distinguishes the latter is their emphasis on societies' capacity for self-development, their ability to reshape their orientations, and their role in generating new standards and objectives.[50] These movements draw on popular heroes and symbols to enhance their appeal and mobilization capacity, engaging in ritualistic acts that foster emotional and self-affirmative commitment among their members. Additionally, they adopt a combative cultural stance, using critical discourse to expose and confront injustice.

New social movements are composed of "a group of individuals, or dense informal networks, that have a protest nature, and are based on: opinions, beliefs, and visions of the world, ammunition for action, and shared solidarity that achieves mobilization. They aim to bring about socio-political and cultural change, and engage in relations of struggle and conflict with clearly defined opponents, sharing a distinct collective identity." This collective identity embodies cultural traits that define a society's structure in terms of power, authority, and meaning, while also constructing oppositional symbols, rituals, and narratives that challenge dominant structures. The process of legitimizing or contesting power and authority involves the strategic use of language, behavior, and symbolic representation, which serve as defining characteristics of the movement's identity. As such, these movements include "values, methods, behavior, vocabulary, and other forms of defining and distinguishing the group. The culture of the movement includes feelings of belonging to the group, and it deliberately distinguishes itself from the dominant culture of society that it aims to change. However, this culture reflects the dominant culture of society from certain aspects of these cultural dimensions of the movements' identities, discourses, actions, and performances."[51]

Despite their cultural and political impact, these movements remain socially constrained, as most of their membership is drawn from a single social class, usually the new middle class. As a result, they do not adhere to a rigid ideological framework, even though their ideas tend to align closely with liberal and socialist thought. Their objectives are often limited in scope, as they do not attempt to propose an entirely new political system, even if some members aspire to such transformation. Instead, their activism remains restricted within a specific ceiling of change, primarily advocating for "respect for human rights, the advancement of women's rights, consumer protection, or disarmament," without pursuing a radical transformation of the political system as a whole or challenging the foundational economic structures that shape the conditions of life.[52]

From here, new social movements center their activism on daily life and engage directly with the political sphere, as it constitutes the space where hidden, submerged realities shape collective action. Their strategies rely heavily on social media, leveraging published writings, video content,

[49] Outhwaite, op. cit., p. 370
[50] Ibid., p. 370
[51] Fares, op. cit., p. 102
[52] Ibid., p. 171

and documentaries to construct their discourse. Their means of expression include "leaflets, posters, slogans, and chants," which are at the core of this study.[53]

Thus, the central problem begins to take clearer shape. Culture, as a social and political practice, cannot be uniformly reflected in complex and heterogeneous societies like Lebanon. Rather, as Bourdieu emphasizes, it is "divided and dispersed within society." Many fall into a fundamental error when they attempt to search for integration in logic, aesthetics, and symbolism or to identify a singular, unified goal.[54] The power of meaning does not stem from its being true, productive, or beautiful but rather from its ability to function within an ongoing struggle over interpretation. Culture, therefore, is not merely a shared background for political and social conflict; rather, its heterogeneous and discordant nature is at the core of the conflict itself, serving as both an instrument and a battleground for power and resistance.[55]

The Lebanese Uprising: A Battleground of Slogans

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a slogan as “an easily remembered phrase, especially one used to advertise an idea or product.”[56] It can also be understood as a "brief and impactful media expression"[57] that consolidates an idea and seeks to communicate it to its audience in the simplest way possible. A slogan is often "a self-contained linguistic code, a self-sufficient message, and an expression or sign with eloquent content, condensed form, and quick delivery." When effectively crafted with good metonymy, it becomes "an integrated and focused means of public expression.”[58]

Politically, groups formualte slogans and place them at the disposal of the mobilized public, drawing their legitimacy from their political relevance. In this sense, slogans serve as "a common linguistic anchor, a widespread and easy-to-recall reference." This function requires slogans to be technically sophisticated, drawing from "a technical culture, where their data emerges from the worlds of cryptography with its speed and brevity.”[59]

Upon closer examination, slogans - both in general and specifically within the Lebanese uprising - became a mechanism for promoting and marketing ideas, representing diverse ideologies that may even express a rejection of ideology itself. Whether spontaneous or structured, slogans in popular movements function as an open forum, allowing anyone to express their concerns, demands, and aspirations. This dynamic was particularly evident during the Lebanese protests, when the walls of downtown Beirut and other areas were transformed into revolutionary pamphlets, where people freely inscribed their grievances and rights. Public squares also became stages for patriotic songs and chants, while tents served as spaces for open discussion circles, allowing for participatory debate. However, over time, these spaces suffered a shift, as discussions morphed into classical, hierarchical, and patriarchal lectures, aiming not to fuel the revolution but

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[53] Ibid., p. 14
[54] Ibid., p. 38
[55]Ibid., p. 38
[56] See: Cambridge University Press & Assessment. “Slogan.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, 2025. Last accessed March 30, 2025. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slogan.
[57] Siraj, Nader. “Manifestations of Public Culture as a Slogan and Political Icon.” *Al-Hadatha Magazine*, no. 95/96 (Spring 2006). Beirut, p. 155
[58] Ibid., p. 155
[59] Ibid., p. 156

to neutralize it, dilute its radical potential, and preserve the status quo,[60] instead of participatory democratic nature that is proportional to the strength of attendance, its density, and its individual and collective ramifications.

Given the sheer volume and variety of slogans, and since the objective is not mere archival documentation, it becomes necessary to selectively analyze some of them. This selectivity is not arbitrary but is rather guided by an effort to highlight the slogans with the greatest potential to challenge the existing system - not merely through rejection, but through a transformative discourse that can evolve into behavioral and cultural action. The revolution, as its slogans proclaim, is fundamentally a "**Cultural Revolution** aimed at dismantling "**fake legacies**", regardless of their origin, scope, or perceived significance. This cultural dimension is crucial, as it carries the potential for global resonance beyond the immediate Lebanese context.

The issue, therefore, is not about erasing slogans or reducing them to isolated demands but rather about recognizing how they emerged as expressions of vast popular grievances - voices finding light through chants and slogans carried by activists and protesters. Notably, slogans in Beirut often spoke of an "**open revolution**," drawing on the ethos of "**open-source**" culture - a metaphor for democratized knowledge, decentralization, and collective ownership of change. The objective here is to critically analyze a selection of slogans, identifying those with the potential to serve as foundational markers for a new political discourse, not only striking deeply at existing power structures but also reshaping the very nature of political engagement

The persistent conflict with the ruling elite in Lebanon - as well as with any other entrenched political power - operates on multiple levels. Political systems, as reflections of ruling class ideologies, do not merely govern through laws and institutions, but permeate everyday life, shaping modes of production, individual lifestyles, thought patterns, behavior, and ethical norms. These structures manifest across various dimensions, including behavioral, political, gender, class, sectarian, regional, and environmental levels. At its core, however, lies the economic level, which classical Marxist and leftist traditions consider the foundation of all other social structures. However, Marxist analysis is not purely mechanical - the economic does not simply dictate culture and politics in a rigid, deterministic way, but rather interacts dynamically with them, shaping and being shaped by the broader cultural landscape.

One of the most entrenched levels of authority, if we follow the model of the modern state, is the level of mentality and the legal system by which the bureaucratic apparatus of the state is managed and reinforced within the public sector and the public sphere. The state actively works to institutionalize this structure through the educational system, embedding its cultural logic at a foundational level. This cultural dimension, therefore, holds a central role, shaping not only political structures but also the mentalities that sustain them. This is particularly evident in the slogans written and sprayed across the walls of Beirut and its center, where protestors sought to challenge dominant narratives and express alternative visions through both form and content.

To fulfill their expressive and transformative function, those who created these slogans had to redefine not only their intellectual and cultural discourse but also the very language they used. This extended to the style of writing, the visual representation, and even the artistic form itself. Moving away from authoritarian and patriarchal language, with its rigid ethics and classical

[60] Siam, op. cit., p. 52

formulations, these slogans embraced "the vocabulary of living discourse, using colloquial language - the language of the people, rather than classical Arabic, which serves as the language of authority and its mouthpiece in the context of unequal political and verbal confrontation."[61] Much like analytical philosophy, this linguistic shift privileges the language of the ordinary person, embedded within a network of relationships that reflect a fluid form and a purpose-driven content. Moreover, it rebels against the ethical structures that govern and reside within institutionalized discourse, often incorporating insults, slang, and provocative expressions that challenge the respectability and discipline of formalized institutional language.

The most striking aspect of this phenomenon is the cross-border nature of the slogans and issues they address. Rarely do Lebanese protest slogans remain confined within the nation-state's borders; instead, they take on broader dimensions, expressing universal values that resonate far beyond Lebanon. These slogans find their echo in struggles across the Arab world and globally, addressing longstanding conflicts over centralization, marginalization, and power. Protesters challenge historical and structural divisions - between East and West, North and South, urban centers and rural peripheries - as well as broader demands for a more just world. These slogans extend to issues of identity and gender, sexual autonomy and rights, and opposition to class hierarchies and the monopolization of wealth by an elite minority. The struggle for bodily autonomy - including the right to self-expression and resistance to imposed norms on desire and identity - is captured in slogans such as "**Sex is good, but have you ever fucked the system?**" These slogans also echoes broader fights against fascism, racism, sectarianism, and subjectivism, advocating instead for the re-empowerment of the individual in opposition to authoritarian structures.

Due to the universal nature of these struggles, Lebanese protest discourse both influences and is influenced by global movements, drawing on the experiences of other uprisings in a world that has been in crisis since the 2008 financial collapse on Wall Street. Given this reality, it becomes essential to focus on slogans that transcend immediate events, rather than those confined to localized demands shaped by the urgency of the moment. These slogans articulate a decentralized, non-authoritarian vision of rights, reflecting the struggles of marginalized and excluded groups across different experiences and life choices. What emerges is a broader conflict, one that embodies society's continuous attempts to assert its right to refuse, to resist, and ultimately to reclaim rights from the grip of authority. In this process, these movements carve out an alternative trajectory, laying the groundwork for a new identity - one that aspires to be more inclusive, more just, and more reflective of a shared human struggle.

What are these slogans, and at what levels do they appear?

A - Slogans at the Intellectual Level

In the early days of the Lebanese uprising, a striking slogan appeared on the wall of the ESCWA building near Riad Solh Square. Although it was later covered with other slogans, it was quickly rewritten nearby, reaffirming its significance:

"**Fuck the [Political] Model!**" (Kess-ekht El Namouzaj)

[61] Siraj, *The Cry of Anger*… op. cit., 307.

This slogan, with its precision and intensity, directly challenges the dominant intellectual and ideological frameworks in Arab culture broadly and Lebanese thought specifically, rejecting a deeply entrenched methodology that reduces the present to a mere reflection of an external model. It confronts a mode of thinking divided into two primary currents, both of which rely on external referents: one rooted in a Salafi framework that idealizes a golden Islamic past, whether through the Caliphate or the broader Islamic civilization at its peak, and another grounded in a positivist, liberal paradigm that looks to the West and its model of modernity. This division has persisted since the Arab Renaissance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues in various forms today, shaping intellectual and political discourse. It is based on an imitationist logic, where the present is interpreted only in relation to these predefined models - either through the lens of an Islamic utopia that sees the past as the ideal guide, or through a Western capitalist framework that measures the present against the achievements and values of European modernity.[62]

In short, typical readings are based on a mentality that does not take into account the context and conditions of time, history, and society, so it floats above them and turns the present into a mere stage on which the past can be replaced, or on which the other present can be replaced. This methodology is a version of Platonic philosophy that extends in a series located within the orbit of the theory of forms. The paradoxical example, which transcends the conditions of time and place, and all cases of corruption and formation, is the model against which the truth of the subject is measured. The subject resembles it and is real and original, or deviates from it and is distorted.

In short, conventional readings operate within a mindset that disregards the specific conditions of time, history, and society, hovering above them and reducing the present to a mere transitional phase - either to be substituted by an idealized past or by an imported external model. This approach mirrors a Platonic philosophical structure rooted in the theory of forms, where a transcendent, unchanging model exists beyond time and space, serving as the ultimate measure of truth. In this framework, reality is either validated through its resemblance to this ideal or dismissed as flawed and distorted when it deviates.

The issue raised by this slogan is not new, nor is it merely rhetorical. Many intellectual discussions have attempted to erase the complexities of modernity from Arab society simply because it does not align with the trajectory of Western capitalist modernity. Some have argued that the state in the Arab world has failed precisely because it does not resemble the Western model, overlooking the fact that the modern Western state emerged from a distinct historical context, shaped by a bourgeois revolutionary movement that had no equivalent in the Arab experience. This flawed logic resurfaced at the onset of the Arab Spring, when comparisons were hastily drawn between these uprisings and the revolutionary movements of early European modernity, without accounting for the cultural and ideological specificities of the present or the structures of dominance that shape contemporary realities. Such analyses failed to recognize that the Arab Spring was not an echo of past revolutions but a phenomenon rooted in the struggles and conditions of today's world. As one slogan inscribed on a column of the Central Building in downtown Beirut declares:

[62] Saleh, Bassel F. "The Problem of the Arab State between Modernity and Tradition: The Concept of the Model and the Crisis of Transforming the Different into the Distorted." In *Tradition, Modernity and Post-modernism in the Arab Field*, prepared by Moushir Basil Aoun. 1st ed. Beirut: Arab Cultural Center, 2018, p. 284-289.

"We are children of spring. Our homes there sit on a valley that has no name. We come from the limitless. From there, from the fig trees, from the rivers. Our anthem is the beat of a drum. Ask us, we tell you: Hope is our sun and the sun is the compass."

The typical mentality operates on imitation, refusing to perceive the present through the lens of its own realities and contemporary concepts. It resists engaging in a deep analytical reading of conflicts, ignoring the social and historical determinants that shape them. This mindset leads to a sense of inferiority toward the West, treating its progress as an inaccessible standard, while simultaneously seeking to replicate a utopian model of the Caliphate, idealized as the embodiment of freedom and justice for Muslims. Both perspectives - whether the nostalgic traditionalism of the Islamic past or the uncritical adoption of Western paradigms - feed into a broader intellectual stagnation, reinforcing traditionalism, dogmatic transmission, and superficial Westernization.

At the political level, the slogan confronts the traditionalism that prevails in protest movements, particularly in societies marked by deep disparities between rural and urban areas, and between different cities themselves. Urban centralization, historically, has undermined rural struggles, imposing slogans and narratives without considering local realities. These disparities stem from structural differences: cities, particularly Beirut, function as hubs of bourgeois social structures, where the middle class exercises greater flexibility, negotiation, and detachment from radical confrontations. In contrast, rural areas remain governed by familial and tribal networks, along with localized civil societies and distinct cultural traditions, necessitating a different nature of struggle. Beirut, as a cosmopolitan center, offers a multiplicity of sects, cultures, and class dynamics, allowing for diverse protest potentials that are not necessarily mirrored in rural confrontations.

Yet, centralization itself is an exemplary model, and this slogan extends its critique to it as well. By rejecting a singular framework of protest, the slogan opens the possibility for each region to articulate its own slogans and modes of confrontation, shaping itself into a self-contained center within the broader struggle against the Lebanese political system, which is distributed across sectarian lines.

This leads to a pivotal question - one that serves as the gateway to all other slogans: Can one protest movement be measured against another, despite differences in time, place, society, and power relations? Do uprisings follow a single model, or are they themselves protests against imposed models?

The slogan - through its blunt rejection, expressed even in insult - provides an answer to both. It categorically rejects the idea of a fixed model, refusing to search for a universal protest blueprint to impose on reality. Instead of following predefined steps or replicating past confrontations, it insists that the starting point must be the present conditions themselves - the nature of hegemony, the composition of power, cultural specificities, and existing tensions. This framework acknowledges that the potential for change is always distinct, shaped by historical contingencies, whether between different Lebanese regions or between Lebanon and other countries.

The act of cursing and rejecting the model is, at its core, an act of dismantling centrality and singularity, pushing for an alternative mode of thinking that moves beyond the binary of center and margin. In Lebanon, this is particularly relevant, as discussions around decentralization have gained momentum - though often disguised in sectarian and regional rhetoric. When the model collapses, the hierarchy between center and periphery dissolves, allowing every position to become

a center in itself, an original reality that must be explored on its own terms rather than through imposed frameworks.

The model, by its nature, seeks to justify itself through an external reference - projecting something beyond the here and now onto the present, measuring all action against historical experiences that emerged under entirely different conditions. As a result, it is incapable of recognizing originality, no matter how genuine or unprecedented the action may be. Instead, it perceives anything that deviates from its logic as a distortion, an anomaly, a monstrous deviation, simply because it does not conform to predefined contexts and established ideological formations. This is why this slogan holds the potential to break open all constraints, to challenge all rigid political foundations and protest methodologies, and to unlock every possibility for rethinking struggle.

Yet, the issue of centralization is not exclusive to Lebanon, even if Lebanon represents one of its most distinctive cases. The country's pluralism, disparities, and power imbalances are condensed into a small geographical space, creating a landscape of contradictions, overlaps, and tensions - a fluid space open to unpredictability and the undefined. In this sense, Lebanon exists as a post-identity oasis, where modernity struggles to take root, and where the only viable path forward is through the rupture of centralized authority, singular narratives, and imposed models.

This struggle is not new. Didn't Adonis read the Syrian revolution through this same analogical framework? Didn't he dismiss it outright simply because it emerged from mosques, refusing to acknowledge that, in a country with a Sunni Muslim majority, this was a natural expression of social mobilization rather than an ideological defect?[63]

Among the most abstract and provocative slogans of the Lebanese uprising was one written on another column of the Markaziya Building in downtown Beirut:

> "**Yes to the Nothing!**" (Na'am lal Wala Chi).

At first glance, this slogan may seem absurd, ironic, or even nihilistic - a detached joke akin to "**Fuck McDonald's, and Fuck Everything!**" or the outright negation found in "**Down with Everything**!" It could be read as a dark, closed nihilism, offering no alternative, no vision, and no way forward. However, embedded within this rejection is a deep revolutionary and anarchist impulse - one that neither the logic of power nor many protest groups have been able to grasp or accept.

A closer examination of this slogan reveals its radical stance on absolute negation, where rejection itself becomes a demand - not just a situational opposition to a regime, but a refusal to replace one authority with another. It is an extension of a foundational position that transcends national borders, rooted in a world stripped of meaning, a world that erects walls between people - whether physical, ideological, or institutional. This sentiment finds expression in another Beirut slogan: "**Every wall has its shame.**"

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[63] See, for example: France 24. *Adonis to France 24: We Were Facing the Problem of the Regime, and Today We Are Facing the Problem of the Revolution*. Interview with Adonis, February 20, 2013. Video. Last accessed March 27, 2024. https://www.france24.com/ar/20130220-أدونيس-فرانس-24-سوريا-الثورات-العربية-الحقيقة-المعارضة-السورية-خطاب-علماني-واضح-إسلاميين-النظام.

This slogan, referencing ‘walls of shame’ from Palestine to the U.S.–Mexico border, to the Berlin Wall, points to a world built on separation and exclusion, one where the only meaningful demand becomes: "**Bring down [all] walls!**"

This logic positions destruction as a mechanism of liberation, rejecting the task of rebuilding within the same oppressive framework. It echoes the stance of Arkady, the young nihilist in Ivan Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons, who declares that his mission "is not to build, but to clear the ground."

This radical negation expresses not only opposition but a deeply existential rebellion, where the individual asserts their existence through exile, burning, rioting, and destruction. This sentiment is perhaps best encapsulated in the Beirut slogan: **"Let’s burn this city down."**[64] Such expressions of rage are not random outbursts, but rather responses to a world perceived as empty, blocked, and devoid of meaning - a world where hatred becomes the only possible answer. To illustrate this point, we can turn to Alain Touraine’s *New Paradigm for Understanding Today’s World*,[65] where he recounts a revealing conversation between a sociologist and a young man trapped in precarious labor conditions, drifting from one training program to another:

> "Which social group do you hate the most?"
>
> The young man answered: "The police, first of all."
>
> The response was so self-evident it required no explanation.
>
> "And then?" the sociologist asked.
>
> "Teachers and social workers," the young man replied.
>
> Perplexed, the sociologist asked: "But why? Aren’t they there to help you rather than exploit you?"
>
> The young man’s answer was blunt: "Because they lie to us, deceive us, and invite us to integrate into a broken society."

Touraine comments that this response reflects a widespread sentiment among people in similar social conditions. For many, the world has become devoid of meaning, and this absence of meaning can only lead to one of two reactions: either pure hatred, directed inward in self-destruction or outward against others, or a disoriented, chaotic movement within a society where mass culture is saturated with images of violence, shaping both perception and action.[66]

In popular culture and common discourse, "Nothing" is often understood as a watershed, a transitional stage, a power vacuum resulting from the collapse of an authoritarian regime - something that must be filled, rather than a condition in itself, a revolutionary state that demolishes power structures without necessarily replacing them. However, the slogan "Yes to the Nothing" rejects this interpretation, refusing to tether rejection to any predetermined outcome or external

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[64] Turgenev, Ivan. Fathers and Sons. Moscow: Dar Al-Taqaddum, 1977, p. 90. (The novel was first published in a Russian magazine in 1862).

[65] Touraine, Alain**.** *New Paradigm for Understanding Today's World*. Translated by George Suleiman. 1st ed. Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation, 2011, p. 127–128.

[66] Ibid., p 127-128.

justification. Instead, it affirms rejection as an act in itself, a necessary condition for dismantling all authority and leaving the process of reconfiguration to the spontaneity of the streets. This logic is echoed in several slogans that emerged from the protests:

- **"Let the law of the street rule."**
- **"There is something for us on the streets that we need to take."**
- **"This street is ours."**

These slogans express a confrontation with power that refuses to negotiate legitimacy through legal or institutional frameworks - which, after all, are shaped and controlled by the ruling class to define what is permissible or prohibited in its favor. Instead, they articulate a rejection that is open to all possibilities, a radical moral imperative that draws its legitimacy not from existing laws, but from the necessity of ousting the corrupt and dismantling oppressive structures.

This rejection does not concern itself with offering an alternative, nor does it feel compelled to do so. It is a zero-sum force - not in the political sense of competing interests, but in the mathematical sense of reducing everything to ground zero, leveling the terrain to clear space for what is yet to come. It does not hesitate in its refusal, does not compromise, and does not entertain half-measures or reconciliations. As one protest slogan bluntly states: **"The people make demands, but do not provide solutions."**

This radical stance resists the fear of emptiness, refusing to retreat into negotiation or submission in the face of uncertainty. It recognizes silence itself as a political position, a form of defiance when words are insufficient, when all available expressions have been exhausted, leaving only the stillness of rejection, charged with the weight of suppressed alternatives and the noise of all that remains unspoken.

Another slogan written on a side wall of an unfinished building in downtown Beirut reads:

"We want to get back the stolen time."

This slogan expresses a demand to reclaim time, to redefine its organization and function in a way that serves the individual as a producer and as a human being. It speaks to the time that has been taken away, whether through bureaucratic inefficiency, economic collapse, or the forced conditions of waiting imposed by the state. The Lebanese authorities have seized years of people's lives - through delays, stagnation, and the slow erosion of futures - forcing people into an existence defined by uncertainty and indefinite postponement.

This demand is both global and local. While technology promised to reduce time, optimize labor, and increase efficiency, it has instead led to a contradiction where tasks are completed faster, yet people have less control over their time. In Lebanon, the state celebrates its diaspora and encourages emigration while failing to provide any opportunity for those who remain. It praises the success of Lebanese abroad while subjecting its own citizens to endless cycles of waiting - for jobs, for basic services, for financial security, and for a system that does not collapse around them. Beyond money and property, what has been stolen is time itself, as banks confiscated depositors' savings with the full backing of a political system that legislated the theft.

This is not limited to financial loss but extends to daily life, where bureaucratic inefficiency, public sector corruption, and infrastructural decay force people into repetitive, unnecessary delays. A simple administrative task requires multiple visits to government offices, long waits at gas stations, bakeries, and pharmacies, and endless lines at banks. The same applies to waiting for electricity, water, and essential services, all of which citizens pay for but rarely receive. This experience is summed up in graffiti found elsewhere: **"I wasn't going [to the protest], but there was no electricity, and I was bored."**

The Lebanese authorities do not resolve crises; they extend them indefinitely, turning delays into a governance strategy. Researcher Kamal Hamdan describes this as a "breadcrumb system[67] where the state offers just enough to prevent total collapse but never enough to create meaningful change. In response, protesters countered with the slogan:

"We want everything and its interests."

Because the culture of waiting and wasted time is deeply embedded in Lebanon, shaping a reality in which people's lives are perpetually on hold, the slogan "We want to get back the stolen time" is more than just a generalized expression of frustration. It becomes an issue in its own right, striking directly at the ideological foundations of an authority that fosters stagnation and non-productivity. In this context, reclaiming time is a form of resistance and self-defense, as articulated in the slogan: **"The political imagination is an act of resistance."**

This rejection of imposed passivity is further emphasized in the language of revenge and defiance, expressed in another slogan: **"Revenge of the Dreamer."**

The demand to reclaim stolen time is not simply about efficiency or productivity; it is tied to broader civilizational questions. Thinkers such as Malek Bennabi have argued that the elements of civilization - human, land, and time - constitute the foundation of social capital. Without control over time, people cannot rise up and seize their own destiny.[68]

Alongside this critique of stagnation and delay, other slogans expressed a rejection of emptiness and meaninglessness, both in Lebanon and globally. Among them, one graffiti simple read: **"Hope."**

Other slogans invited possibility: **"We can, we are."**

Encouraging immediate action, another posed the challenge: **"If not now, when? If not you, who?"**

These slogans became demands in themselves, emerging in parallel with social and economic collapse, a crisis that has deeply affected the psyche and emotional state of the Lebanese. This is reflected in a particularly revealing slogan: **"I am twenty years old and I take the antidepressant #Zoloft."**

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[67] Salameh, Cindy. "Forging Solidarity: Queer Voices in the October 17 Revolution." *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2021). Last accessed April 28, 2024. https://kohljournal.press/ar/node/306.

[68] Bennabi, Malek. *Renaissance Conditions*. Translated by Omar Misqawi and Abdel Sabour Shaheen. Doha Book 6. Doha: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Doha Magazine, p. 111 et seq., 181 et seq., and 188 et seq.

Within the anxiety, resentment, and sense of loss that permeates this crisis, love itself becomes a revolutionary act, as captured in the slogans **"Love revolution"** and **"Love and revolution."**

Beyond survival, the demand for individuality and self-expression emerges, challenging dominant structures of art, culture, and aesthetics. This is seen in a slogan that critiques the commodification and superficiality of contemporary art:

"**Down with contemporary art!**"

This rejection of cultural and political conformity extends to a reimagining of space and aesthetics, as reflected in:

"**We need other shapes, we need other colors**."

The media, as a central mechanism of power and control, also comes under critique. One slogan equates financial and media institutions in their role as enforcers of the system: **"TV and the bank are the same shit!**"

Against the fear-based policies of the ruling class, protesters explicitly rejected intimidation: **"We are not at war, we are not afraid."**

Fear itself was named and dismantled, with slogans declaring:

"Down with our fear!"

"Our fear has fallen!"

"Down with anxiety!"

"Down with pessimism!"

"Fearful people do not create freedom."

Another slogan directly addressed the danger of silence, quoting a well-known phrase: **"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."**

The rejection of state control over speech and protest was also emphasized in the call:

"Let the revolution be like us."

"Prohibition is prohibited."

The latter was imported from the French students revolution of 1968, reflecting a shared opposition to authoritarian governance and police repression, as Lebanese authorities deployed security forces to suppress protests and protect the centers of authority.

At first glance, these slogans may seem like passing expressions, but together they encapsulate the crises and dilemmas facing contemporary society - particularly the Lebanese individual, who, after years of political and economic decay, feels stripped of effectiveness and possibility. Protest became a space to reclaim not just demands, but the capacity to influence and express oneself.

What emerges from these slogans is the need for hope - a hope that does not ignore the depth of collapse, but rather seeks a way beyond it. Hope for a future that does not yet exist. Hope for self-actualization, for dreams, for love, for a world not dominated by fear and control. Hope itself became a political project, no longer dependent on practical timelines or incremental reforms, but on a singular goal - liberation from the existing order, by any means necessary. This is captured in the slogan: **"We will shove the system in the ass of sorrows."**

A hope that refuses to adapt or conform, that asserts: **"Everything is important regardless of the doer, the how, and the timing.**[69]

What the Lebanese experienced in the protests reflects a world grappling with disintegration and meaninglessness, a confrontation with the extended state of alienation and dispossession that existential philosophies at the turn of the twentieth century sought to address. These philosophies intensified their focus on the minutiae of daily life, the overlooked details that once held meaning but have since faded under the weight of survival. In Lebanon, the struggle for existence has reduced life to a relentless preoccupation with securing the most basic conditions for living and continuity, leaving little room for anything beyond immediate necessity.

All protest movements, in Lebanon and elsewhere, find themselves confronting this same state of nothingness, emptiness, and embedded fear - a world shaped by melancholy, stagnation, and the systematic erosion of self-realization. It is a world of models and imitation, where originality is constantly under attack, either co-opted for commercial and marketing purposes or crushed under the weight of imposed narratives. This struggle does not stop at material conditions but extends to broader questions of freedom and social justice, resisting the mechanisms that seek to strip individuals from any possibilities and capabilities, and reduce existence to repetition, conformity, and dispossession.

B - Slogans at the Masses and the Class Struggle Levels

On the first night of the protest, in a building in central Beirut, two Syrian workers who had been staying at their workplace lost their lives in a fire. In response, a slogan was written on a sign adjacent to the building:

"On October 16 [mistakenly written as October 16 instead of October 17, the first night of the uprising], Ibrahim Hussein and Ibrahim Younis were martyred due to negligence and because of state capitalism. They are part of our memory forever."

A few days later, on October 20, a popular gathering was held, where candles were lit in their memory. Another slogan followed:

"Street of Martyrs: Workers Ibrahim Younis and Ibrahim Hussein."

These slogans were not mere acts of remembrance for two individuals who perished in the fire. Rather, they carried a layered significance, reflecting the intersection of class struggle and popular solidarity. Their presence on the walls of Beirut tied the uprising to a broader revolutionary process - one that had been unfolding across the Arab world since the end of 2010, beginning with Tunisia,

[69] Salameh, op. cit.

followed by Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Lebanon, and later extending to Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, and Iraq, all while the Israeli occupation's aggression against Palestinians continued unabated. In parallel, popular uprisings in Iran did not subside during this period but instead recurred in waves, with the most recent major resurgence occurring in 2022.

These two slogans expressed a clear political stance - a position rooted in solidarity across the imposed borders of the post-independence Arab state. The martyrs fell victim not only to the fire but to the broader social and class structures that had pushed them into such precarious conditions. They were casualties of Lebanese state capitalism, which thrives on the exploitation of the poor, the marginalized, and the working class, reducing them to nothing more than tools within a broader system of economic subjugation. The ruling class, which sustains itself at the expense of these populations, not only neglects workers' safety and rights but actively deprives refugees and marginalized groups of even the most basic living conditions.

This was further reflected in the uprising within Palestinian refugee camps in the Tyre region of southern Lebanon, which occurred just before October 17. The political implications of this solidarity extend beyond Lebanon, touching on multiple layers of struggle, both explicit and unspoken. One of the underlying factors is the Syrian regime's long-standing policies, from its occupation of Lebanon to its bargaining over the Golan Heights for its own political gains. Beyond territorial negotiations, the Syrian state under the Assad family entrenched itself through police repression and unchecked authoritarianism, later intensifying its violence against the Syrian revolution. Its class-based repression, fortified by neoliberal and police-state policies, systematically crushed the Syrian people's aspirations for freedom and social justice before they could fully materialize.

For Syrian workers - as for many before and after them - their forced separation from their families and villages, their migration to Lebanon in search of livelihood, and their endurance of exploitative labor conditions became a site of both division and unity. This struggle was not merely personal or national; it was emblematic of a shared class oppression that transcended borders. By declaring solidarity with the oppressed classes, the Beirut uprising reaffirmed its alignment with workers and the poor, regardless of nationality. The slogans written on its walls traced a direct line between the struggles of marginalized communities in this part of the world.

The slogan at this level carries deep and layered implications within the Lebanese context, particularly when examined in relation to right-wing Lebanese ideology and its historical efforts to draw rigid distinctions between the Lebanese people and other Arab peoples, especially Syrians and Palestinians, particularly those from oppressed classes. This ideology has consistently manifested in racist attitudes, elitist readings of Lebanese identity, and a superior, non-solidaristic discourse that distances Lebanon from its regional surroundings.

At the core of this exclusionary worldview is the thought of Michel Chiha (1891–1954), one of the leading theorists of Lebanese right-wing economic and political ideology. Chiha famously argued that Lebanon is the Arabs' gateway to the West, positioning its "back to the Arab interior." This perspective sees Lebanon's connection to the West as organic and dependent, anchoring its economic structure in imperialism, while severing it from its historical, social, and economic depth within the Arab world. This detachment has played out across different historical eras, whether in the Arab liberation movements of the mid-twentieth century or the contemporary struggles against

authoritarian Arab regimes.[70] The consequences of this ideological orientation are not only political but also economic, as they reinforce the ideology of a colonial capitalist mode of production - a system shaped by a commercial elite that values profit over all else. This dominant commercial and banking class has historically perpetuated racism against non-Lebanese populations, especially those from working-class and refugee backgrounds, while simultaneously fostering sectarian divisions among Lebanese communities to maintain economic and political control. The rejection of this exclusionary and divisive logic was explicitly expressed in slogans like:

> **"I love you, Zainab, when you are in the Amal Movement."**
> **"Down with fear of the other!"**

The analysis of slogans does not stop there but rather begins there. Radical groups have always positioned themselves within a critique of the prevailing Lebanese economic model, explaining that the crisis lies fundamentally in the dependent capitalist system and the commercial and banking class that rules the Lebanese state. This extends to a broader stance against the sectarian Lebanese bourgeois ideology that seeks to isolate Lebanon from the struggles of the region, particularly popular struggles, not beginning with the Palestinian cause and not ending with positions on the Arab Spring and successive revolutionary waves. The central ideological pillar of this approach is the concept of "Lebanese uniqueness," which asserts that what applies to other nations does not apply to Lebanon. Through various intellectual frameworks, this perspective has sought to depict Lebanon as if it exists outside the social, economic, and historical laws that govern other societies, resisting approaches that would place Lebanon within the realm of structured analysis. However, Lebanon is subject to the same dynamics of social and historical change as any other country.

This position does not limit itself to the internal horizontal divisions within Lebanese society but extends to the broader horizontal fractures across the Arab region as a whole. It is based on the understanding that any confrontation with an Arab regime is, in essence, a confrontation with all Arab regimes, and that any gains made by a particular regime serve the interests of all regimes, just as any victory achieved by a popular uprising or revolution in one place is a victory for all peoples. The crisis does not stop at borders; rather, the Arab system operates as an interconnected and organic whole, even if differences in interests appear on the surface.

There is no doubt that such a perspective and these words may seem reductive and hasty, given the differences in positions among regimes and the varying sectarian and factional affiliations of Lebanese groups, including the protesters. There is also a discrepancy in class positioning, which often takes on a sectarian guise within Lebanon's borders. However, the class-driven nature of the Lebanese regime quickly reveals itself at the first major challenge it faces, exposing its alignment with the same Arab regimes that had once opposed the Syrian regime's survival but later reversed course. Many of these regimes not only re-established ties with the Syrian government but even welcomed its return to the League of Arab States in 2023, as if nothing had happened. It was as though the Syrian regime had not, for decades, worked to silence opposition through killing, liquidation, and mass imprisonment, a brutality that escalated further during the revolution,

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[70] Amel, Mahdi. *An Introduction to Debunking Sectarian Thought: The Palestinian Issue According to the Ideology of the Lebanese Bourgeoisie*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, 1989, p. 70

culminating in the indiscriminate bombing of cities and villages with explosive barrels that made no distinction between civilians and combatants.

In this context, it is no secret that the divisions exposed during the 2011 campaign to overthrow Lebanese sectarian regime were deeply shaped by the Syrian revolution. The regime's allies, militias, and operatives in Lebanon repeatedly attacked activists who had expressed solidarity with the Syrian uprising and civilians. This hostility reached a brutal peak on August 2, 2011, when pro-Syrian militias launched a violent attack on demonstrators who had gathered to light candles in front of the Syrian embassy in Beirut in memory of Syrian victims. The severity of the assault left several protesters hospitalized with injuries of varying degrees.

Positions in Lebanon have always been divided on this issue and others like it. The ruling political class, driven solely by self-interest, has repeatedly shifted its stance in response to changing regional and international dynamics. Many of its members collaborated with the Syrian regime during its direct occupation of Lebanon, only to later distance themselves when international pressure following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005, signaled a shift in the balance of power. Similarly, some aligned with or opposed the Syrian regime purely on sectarian grounds, while others exhibited the same opportunistic behavior toward the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during its presence in Lebanon, before its withdrawal in 1982.

None of these shifting allegiances were ever based on the interests of Lebanese or Syrian citizens, nor were they rooted in genuine concern for freedom or justice. Instead, these political actors pursued their own authoritarian and financial interests, leveraging selective solidarity for strategic gain. Their support for the Syrian people was not an expression of genuine concern for their rights and aspirations, but rather a calculated move in a broader game of power and influence. Just as they instrumentalized the Syrian people, they have consistently viewed other peoples, including their own Lebanese citizens, as mere tools to serve their authoritarian ambitions.

Slogans of solidarity were not confined to the Syrian people but extended across the Arab region and beyond, particularly to those subjected to state repression, imprisonment, and enforced disappearances, such as in Egypt. One of the slogans, demanding **"Freedom for Mahienour El-Massry and Alaa Abd El-Fattah"** was prominently displayed on the Azarieh Building in downtown Beirut. Similarly, solidarity with the Palestinian cause was an unmistakable feature of the uprising, despite the ongoing debates and disagreements among protesters over keffiyehs, flags, and expressions of support for Palestine. These tensions, however, did not prevent the proliferation of slogans across the walls of downtown Beirut, such as:

"Gaza is on [our] mind. Iran is on [our] mind. Baghdad is on [our] mind. We are all rising up!"

The reference to Iran was particularly significant given its deep entanglement in Lebanese politics, with Hezbollah - the cornerstone of the Lebanese regime - being directly linked to the Iranian state. This made the Iranian uprising against its own regime an organic extension of the Lebanese uprising against its rulers. At the same time, slogans of solidarity with the Iraqi people reflected their own parallel struggle against oppression, state terrorism, and the brutal liquidation of revolutionaries - a struggle unfolding in direct conjunction with the Lebanese uprising.

Yet, as before, generalizations about the movement's consensus on these issues are difficult to sustain. Protest, by nature, is a rejection of overarching narratives and imposed homogeneity. Thus, Lebanon's mass mobilization was never a movement of one voice, one ideology, or one position. Among its ranks were right-wing nationalists still committed to Lebanese exceptionalism entity, as well as leftists and liberals who engaged in varied and sometimes conflicting analyses. Some adopted a radical stance that aligned them with popular uprisings across the Arab world, while others framed their concerns through a strictly Lebanese lens, evaluating regional revolts based on their implications for Lebanon and their positions toward regimes in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. This divergence was particularly visible in attitudes toward Hezbollah, with some struggling to reconcile their opposition to Lebanon's sectarian regime while still supporting Hezbollah as a so-called resistance movement against Israel - even as Hezbollah itself deployed its political influence and armed militias to suppress the very protests in which they participated.

These tensions, and the foundational contradictions within the uprising itself, manifested in a growing division among protesters, reflected in further slogans that built upon earlier ones. This fracture widened over time, culminating in the Beirut Port explosion on August 4, 2020, and the subsequent attempt by France to reestablish its influence in Lebanon.[71] In the wake of the blast, some opposition groups engaged in meetings with French envoy (Minister) Jean-Yves Le Drian, while others categorically rejected the initiative on two grounds: first, because the French intervention aimed to salvage and reinforce the existing regime; and second, because it threatened to further entrench Lebanon's dependency on foreign powers, effectively reasserting the legacy of French colonialism over the Lebanese state.

This contradiction led to internal divisions within protest groups, sparking disputes that escalated to mass resignations. As expected, these contradictions found their expression in a series of slogans, the most striking of which were:

"Fuck Macron and colonialism! Down with French colonialism!"

"I am not disposable! Down with the French settlement!"

Those who remained in the squares after these divisions sought to preserve the independence of the protest movement, keeping it free from foreign interference and the geopolitical maneuvering of global powers, whose interventions consistently came at the expense of the people. These powers, whether acting directly or indirectly, aimed to restore and reinforce the existing regime and its hegemonic structures. This sentiment was reflected in slogans rejecting foreign influence over Lebanon's affairs, particularly targeting the two dominant external players in the Lebanese landscape: **"Neither Iranian nor American."**

Amid these competing influences, protesters deployed the slogan: **"Corruption is an occupation."**

This phrase drew from the legacy of the Lebanese liberation movement, which viewed national and social struggles as inseparable. It rejected any attempt to address one issue without addressing the other, asserting that fighting colonialism and occupation is inherently tied to fighting

[71] In the wake of the port explosion, French President Emmanuel Macron visited the blast site in Beirut on August 6, 2020. Yet all his efforts during that visit and in subsequent initiatives were aimed not at reinforcing the regime, but at challenging it and the authoritarian forces behind it.

corruption, and vice versa. The subservient ruling class in Lebanon, composed of a commercial and banking elite loyal to external powers, was itself a byproduct of colonialism, even when its members were Lebanese nationals. This system functioned as a domestic occupation, not by foreign soldiers but by the country's own elite, whose primary loyalties lay abroad rather than with the Lebanese people.

This notion of internal occupation - where the ruling class colonizes the people, their future, their lives, their daily realities, their hopes, and their dreams - was powerfully articulated in another slogan: **"A million tons of corruption, a ton or less of patriotism... Thank you and fuck off!"**

C - Slogans at the Sectarian and Regional Levels

Attempting to analyze the Lebanese system requires addressing a fundamental issue: the sectarian structure that forms the ideological backbone of the ruling bourgeoisie. At the heart of this discussion lies a critical distinction that must be carefully observed - the difference between sectarianism as a political system and religion as a belief system. The deliberate conflation of these two concepts is neither new nor accidental; rather, it is a conscious ideological strategy employed by the ruling authorities, designed to suggest that any critique of sectarianism is necessarily an attack on religion itself. This rhetorical maneuver allows sectarian politics to shield itself from scrutiny by portraying any challenge to its authority as an assault on faith.

This distinction is essential because Lebanon's political system is sectarian, the state itself is sectarian, and sectarianism - unlike religion - is not a framework of belief but a model of political behavior and governance. It is a fully integrated system that links citizens to the state through the intermediary of sectarian institutions, thereby undermining the very concept of individual equality before the law. Instead of fostering a direct relationship between citizens and state institutions, sectarianism establishes collective sectarian affiliations as the primary basis of political and legal identity. Religion, by contrast, is an ideological system of belief - one that historically aligned with feudal power structures during the Middle Ages, serving the needs of landowning and feudal elites.[72] Sectarianism, however, is a modern bourgeois ideology, one that thrives within capitalist frameworks, including peripheral economies like Lebanon's. Recognizing this distinction is crucial, as it clarifies the economic and power structures that sustain sectarianism, offering a roadmap for any serious confrontation against the system.

Because Lebanon is divided into sectarian enclaves, and because its civil war entrenched displacement and sectarian-based demographic segregation, each sect consolidated its presence within specific regions, effectively creating sectarian cantons. This process ensured that sectarian parties became the primary governing authorities within their respective territories, further institutionalizing sectarian political power.

This clarification is necessary as a foundation for any further analysis, particularly given how some actors attempt to equate administrative decentralization with sectarian division. Decentralization, properly understood, is a political and administrative mechanism that redistributes governance and

[72] Amel, Mahdi. *The Crisis of Arab Civilization or the Crisis of the Arab Bourgeoisie?* 1st ed. Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, 1989. See also, Amel, Mahdi, An Introduction…op. cit., p. 24-25.

public services, reducing the inefficiencies caused by over-centralization in Beirut. It is also a fundamental pillar in constructing a truly representative system, one in which voters maintain direct accountability over their elected officials. This direct contact between citizen and representative eliminates political ambiguity and rhetorical justifications - either an official delivers and earns the public's confidence, or they fail and lose it.

Some groups within the uprising understood these two intertwined realities: they recognized the distinction between sectarianism and religion, and they knew that differentiating the two was essential for any meaningful proposal for change. This distinction, for them, was the true foundation for secularism - not as an anti-religious stance, but as a transformative framework for a contemporary state built on competence rather than sectarian identity. Some protesters grasped that religion is a spiritual matter, while sectarianism is a political construct, particularly in the bourgeois era, where religious institutions were granted power to reinforce political dominance.[73] From this standpoint, some sought to reclaim religion as a source of liberation rather than submission. This sentiment was boldly expressed in a slogan scrawled on the wall of the church adjacent to Al-Amin Mosque in downtown Beirut:

"Jesus is my comrade. Tribute to Comrade Jesus. Resurrection of the Third Republic."

This slogan invoked Christ as a revolutionary figure, a protester against the Temple and its merchants, against the entrenched authority of the clergy, and against the corrupt religious-political hierarchy of his time. Christianity itself was originally a reform movement, and Christ's message laid the foundation for secularism by establishing a clear separation between spiritual authority and political rule:

> "**Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's.**"[74]
>
> **"My kingdom is not of this world**,"[75]

By these words, Christ liberated religion from the daily mechanics of political governance, confining it to the realm of faith and personal spirituality - a principle later echoed by the Christian Reformation and the rise of secularism.

However, this reading was not uncontested within the protest movement. Others sought to reinterpret the relationship between religion and power through a Marxist lens, which viewed religion as an ideological tool for submission - a narrative that pacifies people by offering them a deferred paradise in the afterlife. This perspective found expression in multiple slogans, some of which directly modified Marx's famous statement **"Religion is the opium of the masses."** These adaptations ranged from **"God is the house of the poor"** to a more ironic twist on Marx's original phrase:

> **"Religion is the candy of the masses – Karl Marx Jr."**

This thread of critique reached back to the global radical movements of 1968, with a student-era slogan resurfacing in Beirut half a century later:

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[73] Amel, Mahdi. *The Crisis…*, op. cit., p. 36.
[74] Mark 12: 17.
[75] John 18: 36.

"No Gods, No Masters."

This slogan rejected all forms of authority, beginning with divine authority, which it framed as the origin of all other hierarchies - a structure that, in turn, legitimized the social division between rulers and the ruled, masters and subjugated classes.

Yet, this was not a universal or absolute stance; rather, it was deeply tied to historical trajectories and social determinants. The crisis is not with religion or clergy per se, but with the position they occupy within the prevailing system of power. The role of religious authority varies dramatically between secular states and sectarian or theocratic regimes. What might be seen as resistance against clerical dominance in one context may not carry the same weight in another. For instance, in Iran, where theocratic rule is directly enforced by the clergy, the turban-flipping protests (where young demonstrators knocked turbans off clerics' heads) were a direct challenge to the political establishment. By contrast, in secular states such as Germany, France, or the United States, religious leaders do not hold the same structural political authority, making such an act less politically significant. This contrast was captured in a slogan that appeared in Beirut: **"Down with the rule of turbans."**

This phrase went beyond a simple rejection of clerical rule; it implied a deeper liberation - not just of society and the state from religious domination, but of God himself from the political occupation imposed by the clergy in his name. This, in essence, represented the pinnacle of abstraction and condensation in revolutionary discourse.

The aim of targeting the sectarian system is to establish secularism, fight corruption, and reassess its feasibility. As previously mentioned, sectarianism serves as both a breeding ground and a sanctuary for corruption, providing the fastest route for the incompetent to ascend to critical positions. This was best expressed in **"I don't want an energy minister from my sect. I want #secular #democratic #socially_just energy."**

The demand in a reimagined state is not for a minister's sectarian identity, but rather for what they can deliver and what they are obligated to secure. The concern is not about personalism and the intensification of sectarian identities, but rather about the essential services that citizens pay for but never receive.

This confrontation, framed at the Arab popular level, was accompanied by another level of struggle - one that targeted the horizontal divisions within Lebanese society and soon expanded to all regions. Protesters, in the early phases of the uprising, demonstrated solidarity in distinct ways. Within the first two days, offices of representatives and officials affiliated with the Shiite political duo (Amal and Hezbollah) in the south were attacked, an event that sparked joy across various protest squares. A sense of mutual recognition was also evident in the exchanges between protesters in Nabatieh (Shiite majority) and those in Tripoli (Sunni majority), as reflected in the slogan: **"Tripoli is Nabatieh."**

Such slogans repositioned the divide along a horizontal, popular dimension rather than a vertical, authoritarian one, particularly after years of entrenched political divisions, led by the March 8 and March 14 blocs following Hariri's assassination - divisions that, in turn, were rooted in the sectarian and regional fault lines of the civil war, which continue to persist today.

Protesters embraced their local identities while also raising general slogans that encapsulated Lebanon as a whole. These slogans expressed an alternative, inclusive national identity, one that reflected solidarity with fellow protesters, integrated their demands, and asserted their reclamation of public space: **"Bye bitch. We own the country."**

At the same time, slogans conveyed shared grievances, such as in Tripoli, where protesters chanted against Prime Minister Najib Mikati: "**Mister, Mister, you are corrupt, as far as I know!**" or another that pointed to the entrenched nature of political corruption "**51% of the revolution is for you**." This last slogan was a reference to Randa Berri, wife of Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, who is widely accused of monopolizing projects and land in the south. Yet, it was not confined to her alone; rather, it carried within it the potential to target all political leaders complicit in the corrupt system - from Berri himself to Walid Jumblatt, from Samir Geagea to Gebran Bassil, from Saad Hariri to Fouad Siniora, all the way up to the figurehead of the establishment's grip on power: Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

For the protesters, corruption was not limited to individual figures but was a collective structure, where each corrupt leader either directly engaged in corruption or shielded and defended others who did. They were, in the eyes of the movement, one and the same - an interconnected network of corruption.

The identification between the protesters and their protest areas became increasingly pronounced, as reflected in slogans such as "**Beirut has spoken**," "**Beirut is ours**," and **"Our Art! Our Spaces! Our Places!"** These slogans aimed to rewrite the history of the place in a way that aligned with the experiences and activities of its residents, redefining its function as a space for people and their daily lives - a space for living, gathering, and creating, rather than a sterile zone of empty commercial and security areas.[76] They accepted the notion of Beirut as merely a place for discussion, not a passive site where problems were debated rather than confronted, and they contested the reality of a capital city stripped of its vibrancy, particularly after the Solidere project severed the connection between downtown Beirut and its people, transforming it into a commercial and financial district rather than a lived-in space filled with residents, memories, and everyday interactions.

In Solidere, life ceased after working hours, as businesses shuttered their doors in the absence of an actual community. Unlike previous phases, when downtown Beirut had still functioned as a bustling tourist hub filled with cafés, entertainment venues, and shops, it had become a space devoid of its original inhabitants, merely a place of transit for workers rather than an organic urban environment. A conversation with a café employee in downtown Beirut captured this reality. When asked about the impact of the uprising on business and sales, he simply responded:

"We used to close our doors at five in the afternoon because people didn't visit downtown Beirut. Most of our customers were employees. Today, with the uprising, we are even busier because sales activity has doubled."

The uprising, then, was not just a political movement - it was a reclamation of public space, a demand to restore life to the city itself. However, the regime quickly moved to counteract this

[76] Solidere, the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut's Central District, was established in 1994 by the Council for Development and Reconstruction. It served as the spearhead of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's reconstruction project.

process, reasserting its control over the narrative and dividing the protesters, ultimately neutralizing the movement through the appointment of a second-, third-, or even fourth-tier government (Hassan Diab's cabinet). This government functioned as a buffer, shielding the actual decision-makers from direct confrontation, while at the same time deepening the crisis and absorbing public anger. Yet, as soon as it had served its purpose, the ruling class abandoned it without hesitation, particularly after the Beirut Port explosion, which destroyed half the capital and displaced what remained of its residents.

With each turning point, and with every crisis, the protest movement became increasingly fragmented, leading not only to disintegration and weakened mobilization, but eventually to complete stagnation. The government's restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced this atrophy, effectively sealing the movement's decline under the guise of public health measures.

D - Slogans at the Civil Society and NGO Level

The most intense confrontations within the protest movement unfolded between civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations on one side, and radical political and intersectional groups on the other. This division reflected a deeper conflict between two fundamentally different approaches. On the one hand, radical groups aimed for a total overthrow of the political system, advocating for revolutionary social transformation akin to the old radical social movements that sought to dismantle existing structures and rebuild them through direct political struggle. On the other hand, NGOs and civil society organizations prioritized modernization, development, and incremental reforms, often focusing on identity-based issues or sectoral improvements rather than systemic change.

This ideological struggle was etched onto the walls of central Beirut and other areas, with slogans reflecting the incompatibility of these two visions. The conflict was further exploited by the ruling authorities, particularly Hezbollah and its allies, who repeatedly accused the protest movement of serving foreign agendas. Their attacks on NGOs, though predictable, fueled internal tensions within the protest movement, reinforcing a narrative of division that would later contribute to its unraveling.

The moment of rupture came when the government set the date for the 2022 parliamentary elections. At this juncture, deep fractures emerged among the protesting groups, escalating into an irreparable split. For some, participation in the elections was a pragmatic necessity, a political obligation that could offer a foothold within the system. Others saw an opportunity for self-advancement, using the protest movement as a springboard to enter the political establishment. Meanwhile, the more radical factions rejected participation outright, deeming it a futile attempt to legitimize a system they sought to overthrow. To them, engaging in elections meant competing with criminals on their own terms, under an electoral law rigged in favor of the ruling elite, in a system where political violence, media manipulation, and vote-buying determined outcomes.

This rejection was especially pronounced in the shadow of the Beirut port explosion, an event for which the ruling class was both the primary suspect and the arbiter of justice. Participating in elections meant trusting the very institutions responsible for that crime - the same institutions that had covered up countless assassinations, financial scandals, and acts of repression in the past.

The slogans reflected the intensity of the conflict between the different groups within the protest movement. The rejection of NGO-driven reforms and identity-based activism was embodied in slogans like: "**Down with Proposals!** (submitted by NGOs to receive approval and funding)," which targeted the bureaucratic and donor-dependent nature of civil society organizations. It escalated further with "**Down with the Monitor**," rejecting the external oversight mechanisms imposed on activism, and culminated in "**Down with the Politically Correct**," which criticized the cautious, sanitized discourse that NGOs and identity-based organizations carefully maintained to secure funding and legitimacy. These slogans did not simply express disagreement but signaled a profound impasse that would, sooner or later, determine the fate of the protest movement.

At the heart of the dispute lay an irreconcilable divide between two visions of change. Radical groups saw revolutionary political and social transformation as the only path forward, rejecting piecemeal legal, procedural, or identity-based reforms that ultimately prolonged the life of the existing regime. For NGOs and civil society organizations, the focus was on gradual, institutional change, working within the system to achieve specific rights, legal amendments, and governance reforms. The radicals saw such efforts as complicit, arguing that the system itself, with its deeply entrenched networks of corruption and clientelism, was beyond reform.

These slogans affirmed the research hypothesis - that what appeared as a single uprising was, in fact, multiple uprisings within an uprising. Protest, in this sense, was not a singular, unified movement(s) but a fragmented and conflicting array of demands and visions, sometimes even amounting to a protest against the protest itself. The divisions were not merely tactical but fundamental, stemming from completely different worldviews. For some, the system could be improved through reforms, better governance, and technocratic solutions. For others, any engagement with the system was futile because the entire structure was designed to reproduce crises, protect the ruling elite, and sustain the mechanisms of exploitation. While some saw the confrontation as being with the government and ruling forces, others viewed the protest movement itself as a vehicle for career advancement, funding, and selective reforms that ultimately stabilized the regime rather than challenging it.

For civil society organizations, the problem was framed as one of personnel and policies - a matter of replacing corrupt politicians and reforming governance structures. Radical factions, however, believed the conflict was far deeper: a social and class struggle that required reshaping the system at its core, targeting the economic structures that sustained elite dominance. The collapse of Lebanese traditional financial and economic pillars - banks, hospitals, schools, universities, tourism, and the port after the explosion - revealed the system's fundamental decay. For the radicals, this moment demanded a complete reimagining of the state and economy, away from a model built on exploitation and wealth accumulation at the expense of the working class. This was captured in slogans like: "**Who will pay the price for the failure of the government and the banks?**" calling for accountability, "**Manoushe Party**," ridiculing the economic disparity between elites and ordinary people, "**Simple dreams are being buried in the grave of poverty,**" mourning lost aspirations, and "**We are all affected, and you are all responsible**," a direct indictment of the ruling class.

However, for the sake of academic integrity, it must be acknowledged that the radical groups themselves lacked a cohesive project or an integrated alternative vision. They did not formulate a concrete economic model distinct from the prevailing free-market system, apart from a few slogans advocating socialism and nationalization. Their discourse largely remained reactive rather than

proactive, expressing rejection of the existing system without articulating a structured economic or political alternative.

At this stage, the internal conflict among protest groups escalated, manifesting in more confrontational slogans, particularly during the "**Night of the Banks**" on January 14, 2020, when bank facades were smashed along Hamra Street. This moment, followed by subsequent demonstrations in front of the Central Bank, intensified the rhetoric of class struggle and economic antagonism. The hostility towards the financial elite and capitalist structures culminated in slogans such as "**Down with the private sector!**", directly challenging the very foundation of Lebanon's bourgeois economy. This call reflected a socialist perspective, which fundamentally rejected the entrenched alliance between political authority and the banking system. It was reinforced by slogans like "**Security Forces protects banks**," which pointed to the complicity between state security forces and financial institutions, suggesting that the repressive apparatus of the state was being deployed to safeguard elite interests rather than serve the people.

Regardless of the feasibility or limitations of such a stance in Lebanon's current context - an issue that lies beyond the scope of this study - this anti-capitalist sentiment, even if held by a relatively small faction of protesters, was part of the deeper ideological struggle within the movement. This struggle, rather than leading to a unified revolutionary front, exacerbated divisions, pushing the protest movement towards a state of fatigue and stagnation. The inability to reconcile radical and reformist factions, or to agree on a common political or economic blueprint, ultimately led to a sense of collective frustration, epitomized by the bleak slogan: "**Down with our powerlessness."**

This is without forgetting the fundamental chants carried by radical groups and echoed throughout the squares and streets, such as "**This is the homeland for the workers, down with the power of capital**", "**Socialism is the solution, abolish capital**", "**Nationalize banks**", "**We want to burn your palaces down**", "**A revolution to topple the rule of banks**", and "**It was not depression, it was capitalism #Chile2019**". Another notable slogan, "**We want to abolish the era of slavery for your sake, Karl Marx**," reinforced the revolutionary ethos that some factions sought to uphold.

However, these slogans raise controversial questions regarding the feasibility of their implementation and the applicability of such ideological frameworks to Lebanon's specific socio-economic structure. This challenge is exacerbated by shifting definitions of the "worker" between the industrial era of the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century and today's reality, where Lebanon lacks a strong industrial base and has seen a state-driven entrenchment of petty-bourgeois mentalities. Unlike traditional working-class struggles centered on factory labor, Lebanon's current economic crisis manifests as a conflict between a small elite controlling the country's wealth and resources, and a collapsing middle class, alongside poorer segments struggling under economic and social precarity. This structural disparity, compounded by sectarianism and co-opted labor unions, further fragments potential class solidarity, making any unified labor-based movement difficult to sustain.

This analysis does not seek to assign blame to any particular faction within the protest movement but rather to contextualize the internal conflicts that shaped it. While some disputes were personal and strategic, many were deeply ideological, stemming from foundational differences in vision regarding the nature of political struggle, economic restructuring, and the pathway to systemic change.

E - Slogans at the Feminist Level

It can be asserted that the feminist bloc was among the most active and visible forces in the October 17 uprising, not only occupying the front lines of protests but also engaging directly in clashes with security forces. They played a pivotal role from the very first night, forming a human chain to protect demonstrators marching from Martyrs' Square toward Hamra Street. The symbolic first kick by activist Malak Alawiye - delivered to the bodyguard of Minister Akram Chehayeb - became a defining image, widely circulated with the phrase "**Go get them!**" (Alayhom) emblazoned across it.

Despite internal differences, feminist movements remained highly organized. Their activism extended beyond calls for gender equality in law to a broader struggle against the mechanisms of patriarchy, understanding how these structures perpetuate social divisions and reinforce various forms of discrimination, not only based on gender, but also race, class, and sexual orientation.[77] This was reflected in the mobilization of feminist groups for key demonstrations: the mothers' march from Ain al-Rummaneh to Chiyah, a historic sectarian frontline of the civil war; protests in Khandaq Al-Ghamiq, a stronghold of the Shiite duo (Amal Movement and Hezbollah) from which attacks on downtown protesters were launched; and major demonstrations under slogans such as "**Our revolution is feminist**" and "**She's bringing down the system**", which originated at the National Museum and proceeded to Riad Solh Square. Feminist-led actions were also prominent in Tyre and Tripoli, in roadblocks, and in confrontations with security forces.

All of the above confirms that Lebanese women were the spearhead, at the forefront of the uprising, engaging in direct confrontation within heavily securitized zones, former civil war frontlines, and politically closed-off regions, just like any other individual suffering under the systemic oppression of the regime.

The legal status of women in Lebanon mirrors that of women across the Arab region, with variations shaped by the specificities of each country's political and social structures. However, these differences exist within the broader framework of bourgeois, patriarchal regimes that claim democratic values while maintaining structural inequalities. The persistent centralization of power is evident in political representation, where women's presence in parliamentary and ministerial councils remains disproportionately small compared to their actual demographic weight in society.

Beyond political underrepresentation, patriarchal personal status laws further institutionalize discrimination. The denial of Lebanese women's right to grant citizenship to their children exemplifies sectarian and demographic anxieties being weaponized against women. The feminist struggle also extends to criminalizing harassment, ending domestic and familial violence, and challenging sectarian courts that dictate custody laws - particularly within the Ja'fari Court and the Supreme Shiite Islamic Council. The battle over custody rights in the Shiite sectarian courts became a rallying cause, especially after the passing of Nadine Jouni, a leading activist in this fight, just days before the uprising erupted. Her struggle was encapsulated in the slogan: "**Corruption, corruption, filling all the turbans!**", directly linking sectarianism, patriarchal authority, and corruption as intertwined mechanisms of oppression.

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[77] Debs, Yara. "Lebanon's Feminist Uprising." *Bidayat Magazine*, no. 26 (2020). Beirut. Last accessed February 25, 2024. https://bidayatmag.com/node/1168.

These realities positioned feminist movements at the heart of the uprising, arguably making them the most organized and militant faction. Their demands were not limited to legal reforms but extended to a fundamental restructuring of power, as they fought against both gendered oppression and the broader neoliberal economic policies that concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, impoverishing the vast majority. This dual struggle meant that women faced oppression not only as part of a crushed people but also as women in a system designed to marginalize them on multiple levels: “While men face the oppression of the security authority, women face, in addition to this oppression, the comments of the clergy and the media. Women are also put to tests regarding their appearance, the way they behave, and the words they say.”[78]

The slogan "**The revolution is a woman**" resonated throughout the protest, alongside demands for **Lebanese women’s right to grant citizenship to their children**, articulated in slogans such as "**I cannot have my mother's nationality, but I can defend her revolution**." These demands extended beyond Lebanon’s borders, converging with the global feminist discourse in the universal assertion: "**The future is feminine**." At the same time, feminist slogans challenged the deeply exploitative kafala system, which subjugates and dehumanizes foreign domestic workers, positioning feminism as an intersectional struggle against both gendered oppression and broader systems of exploitation. Throughout the uprising, feminist movements in Lebanon, much like their counterparts worldwide, reaffirmed a fundamental certainty: the fight for women’s rights is inseparable from the larger struggle against systemic oppression. This fight took on at least two distinct roles within the protest movement:

- The first, though emerging from different ideological standpoints, was focused on securing women’s legal rights, particularly in achieving equality under the law.

- The second, more radical and expansive, pursued comprehensive change by engaging in an open and intersectional confrontation with the regime, aligning itself with broader revolutionary struggles. These movements recognized that the sectarian-militarized patriarchy ruling Lebanon does not merely discriminate against women - it thrives on force, plunder, intimidation, and violence against all who challenge it. The system does not hesitate to legislate repression, defend its use of bullets against free expression, and liquidate opponents, while simultaneously ensuring the continued subjugation of both women and men under its rule.

Women and the feminist movement demanded the enactment of laws that enshrine bodily autonomy, as expressed in slogans such as "**I wish my uterus shot bullets [then] the government would regulate it**," "**Free your pussy: Dirty as your politics**," "**Pussy is not a curse word!**" and "**My clitoris is a crown on your head.**" These slogans directly confronted the patriarchal system’s control over women’s bodies, emphasizing how domination over the body is an essential mechanism of power in hegemonic systems - especially those rooted in masculine, patriarchal structures that enforce distinctions between men and women even at this level.

Intersectional feminist groups recognized that their struggle extended beyond the mere acquisition of legal rights. They understood themselves as an essential force within the broader movement for systemic change, which led them to fully position themselves in direct confrontation with the ruling class at multiple levels, including the class structure of the regime itself. This positioning

[78] Ibid.

found its most provocative and symbolic expression in the slogan: "**Eat my pussy and [eat] the rich**" - a phrase that simultaneously critiques class oppression and reclaims bodily autonomy. Here, "eating the rich" encapsulates the destruction of the entrenched class system, the dismantling of the networks of corruption, and the rejection of consumerist structures that commodify everything, especially women's bodies. By juxtaposing sexual liberation with economic revolt, the slogan challenges both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal dominance, refusing to separate the two struggles.

It is crucial to recognize that the sectarian system in Lebanon inevitably breeds corruption - a corruption that is not merely incidental but rather a deliberate, self-sustaining network of relationships and interests that ensures the regime's survival. The ruling elite perpetuates this system by protecting sectarian and class-based corruption, ensuring that accountability is never truly applied to individuals, but instead filtered through sectarian identity. This dynamic has allowed countless leaders, officials, and employees to evade justice simply by invoking their sectarian affiliation, as each sect reflexively shields its own corrupt figures under the pretext of communal defense. In such a system, corruption is not an aberration; it is the foundational logic of governance, upheld through sectarian consensus that obstructs any legal or constitutional attempts at reform. This was starkly evident in the case of Judge Tarek Bitar, the judicial investigator leading the Beirut port explosion probe, who faced relentless obstruction and targeting precisely because he posed a threat to this entrenched system of impunity.

The intersection between corruption and feminist struggle is not incidental but structurally ingrained. Women are disproportionately targeted by the mechanisms of corruption and patriarchal control, particularly when their names become associated with any form of transgression, whether real or fabricated. In patriarchal societies, accountability is rarely applied equitably; men accused of corruption are often protected by sectarian and class privilege, whereas women are subjected to an added layer of scrutiny and attack, particularly through narratives of "honor" and reputation. This gendered dimension of corruption ensures that women who challenge the system - whether through activism, political engagement, or legal reform - are often discredited not through political arguments but through moral defamation. The politics of honor and reputation function as the most effective tool of exclusion, ensuring that women are eliminated from political life before they can even engage in its arenas. This systemic weaponization of gendered shame is a cornerstone of patriarchal power, reinforcing both sectarian corruption and gender oppression in an unbreakable cycle.

Leftist and humanist literature argues that the extent of civilization in societies is measured by the social and political status of women. From this perspective, the depth of the Lebanese regime's failure becomes clear, and the same can be generalized to other Arab regimes. However, just as contradictions within the protest movement can be observed, contradictions within feminist groups themselves are also apparent. Not all share the same vision. Some recognize that reform is impossible within a patriarchal system, viewing the state itself as an authoritarian, patriarchal structure. For them, women's liberation is inseparable from liberation from the state.

In contrast, other feminist groups believe in the possibility of partial reforms, advocating for gradual legal changes as an avenue for progress. Within this camp, divisions also emerge: some focus on limited legal reforms, such as securing custody rights or achieving equal political representation, without challenging the core of the system. Their work mirrors that of non-governmental organizations in seeking improvements rather than systemic transformation. On the

other hand, some feminist groups see their struggle as inherently tied to dismantling the patriarchal sectarian state, pushing for binding civil laws on personal status. These laws would simultaneously strike at patriarchal structures and challenge religious authority over women and their bodies, which entrenches male dominance. This struggle logically aligns with a broader movement for secularization - both of society and the state - creating a path toward complete equality, protecting women's rights, ensuring freedom of choice, and eradicating legal discrimination at its root.

This trajectory extends into the realm of sexual and gender rights, as intersectional groups push these issues to the forefront, insisting that they be recognized as fundamental rights. Such recognition is impossible under a system governed by religious and sectarian laws and can only be achieved through full secularization. These intersectional groups align with radical critiques of patriarchy in all its legal, ideological, and religious manifestations, opposing its claims over what is "natural" or "abnormal" and rejecting its violent enforcement of these norms. Like other revolutionary movements, they argue that genuine change must confront not just the economic foundations of the system but its ideological core as well.

F - Slogans at the Sexual Freedoms and Rights Level

From what has been previously discussed, it becomes evident that securing full and comprehensive rights for groups advocating for sexual freedoms and the rights of the LGBTQ+[79] community requires a confrontation at the ideological level of the regime itself. Like other demands, this struggle is inseparable from a broader fight against the sectarian and patriarchal structure and its legislation. It necessitates carrying the banner of full secularization - positioning the state as a neutral entity, equidistant from all individuals and groups, and recognizing rights, beliefs, orientations, and freedoms without contradiction, suppression, or selective enforcement. This secular vision does not impose any specific lifestyle, as sectarian parties and reactionary forces claim in their efforts to discredit it. Instead, secularism is a system and a culture that acknowledges and protects individual choices, ensuring that no authority arbitrarily dictates what is permissible or prohibited. While Lebanon is often considered relatively more open than other Arab states regarding LGBTQ+ rights, reality paints a different picture. Discriminatory practices remain widespread against gay, lesbian, trans, and queer individuals, with degrees of tolerance fluctuating depending on the region, culture, and the dominant local powers. Some studies indicate

[79] LGBTQIA+ (or Meem Ain in Arabic) refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other non-cisheteronormative identities.
Queer: A broad term that includes individuals whose gender identity or sexual orientation does not conform to normative or binary frameworks.
Trans man: A person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as male.
Trans woman: A person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as female.
Asexual: A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others.
Gay and lesbian: Terms describing men and women, respectively, who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to individuals of the same gender.
Intersex: Refers to individuals born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex people may have any sexual orientation, including attraction to more than one gender.
See: Slim, Ali. "Assessing the Political Participation of Members of the LGBT Community in Lebanon." Edited by Youmna Makhlouf. *Helm Organization*. Last accessed May 7, 2020. https://www.helem.net/publications-ar/assessing-lgbtq-political-participation-in-lebanon-2022-2023, p. 3.

that Mount Lebanon exhibits higher levels of acceptance than other areas, while within Beirut itself, attitudes vary between different neighborhoods.[80]

This distortion of secularism - framing it as an imposition rather than a framework for rights and protections - stems from deeply entrenched authoritarian tendencies. The dismantling of sectarianism and its network of power relations does not only challenge corruption, as previously discussed, but also threatens the mechanisms through which the ruling bourgeoisie maintains its dominance. This includes so-called "moral" authority, the regulation of what is considered natural or unnatural, and the policing of social behavior. If employment in public institutions were based purely on competence rather than sectarian affiliation or sexual identity, the very foundations of the current patronage system would collapse. The reality, however, is that state jobs are distributed based on sectarian quotas rather than qualifications, just as LGBTQ+ individuals are routinely denied employment solely due to their sexual orientation. Beyond employment discrimination, the LGBTQ+ community faces heightened psychological distress, barriers to accessing healthcare, food, and essential services, and a pervasive lack of physical safety. Many are forced into the shadows, unable to openly exist in public spaces or lead their lives freely.[81]

Rebuilding the regime on secular foundations would fundamentally reshape the state, disrupting entrenched power structures and redistributing authority across society. This is precisely why the dominant sectarian and religious factions - along with many protest groups that remain aligned with masculinist and patriarchal ideologies - resist this transformation. Some justify their hesitation by appealing to the "priorities" of the struggle, while others argue that such demands could alienate potential supporters. This internal conflict manifests most visibly in moralistic debates over what is "natural" versus "unnatural," what is deemed "normal" versus "abnormal" - a framework weaponized to ostracize those who do not conform to pre-established molds for social existence and behaviour.

The protest arenas provided a space for these groups to assert their right to exist and to voice their demands, rights, and aspirations. Their discourse, long relegated to the margins, moved to the core of public discourse.[82] With the uprising, Beirut transformed from a city where caution and fear dictated the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals to a space that, at least temporarily, felt safer due to the proliferation of protest squares and the collective rejection of state control over bodies and identities.[83]

From this standpoint, the slogan "**Tebet koun bil closet. LGBT rights**" (Tired to be in the closet. We want gay rights) stands out as a powerful articulation of the systemic oppression and exclusion practiced by the regime. It directly points to the criminalization of non-normative sexualities under Lebanese law - most notably Article 534, which penalizes "unnatural" sexual relations with up to a year in prison. The slogan, however, extends beyond Lebanon's borders; it carries a universal

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[80] Hassoun, Alma. "The LGBT Community in Lebanon: A New Report Shows the Extent of Its Damage after Three Crises Whose Impact Has Not Ended." *BBC News Arabic*, June 24, 2021. Last accessed April 27, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-57482130.

[81] Anonymous source called M. N.

[82] Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon's LGBT People Reclaim Their Power," *Human Rights Watch*, May 7, 2020, accessed February 25, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/07/lebanons-lgbt-people-reclaim-their-power.

[83] Younes, Rasha. "If Not Now, When? Queer and Trans People Reclaim their Power in Lebanon's Revolution." *Human Rights Watch*. Last accessed February 24, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2020/05/07/if-not-now-when-queer-and-trans-people-reclaim-their-power.

message about the struggle for the right to freely express and practice one's sexuality without fear of persecution.

Despite Lebanon's partial recognition of LGBTQ+ issues - such as acknowledging the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in 2005 - state policies and societal attitudes continue to enforce exclusion, marginalization, and oppression. Religious authorities and dominant cultural narratives remain key enforcers of this exclusion, casting queerness as a deviation, a threat, or even an act of treason.

Thus, the resistance to LGBTQ+ rights is not merely about sexuality; it is about power. The modern state, as many radical readings suggest, is itself a patriarchal institution - one built on male dominance, structured through patriarchal religious and legal traditions, and fundamentally invested in controlling bodies, desire, and expressions of identity. In this view, dismantling patriarchal structures requires nothing less than a direct confrontation with the state as a political, legal, and ideological system.

Therefore, these groups align with radical feminist and queer movements that reject neoliberal frameworks and oppose the limited, single-issue approaches often adopted by liberal-leaning NGOs. Instead, they strive to build a broader political space of solidarity, one that links LGBTQ+ struggles with those of other marginalized groups - across gender, race, class, economic status, and even religious identity.[84] Because the rule upon which you fight is the same, which is confronting the oppression and social war that the regime is waging against them, and because changing this rule will liberate everyone equally, and the person will liberate himself as a result.

From this standpoint, these groups were compelled to fight on two simultaneous fronts:

- First, against the state, its legal framework, and its oppressive institutions;
- Second, against propaganda that targets LGBTQ+ individuals through demonization, misinformation, and social exclusion.

Public spaces of resistance and shared struggles created an opportunity to foster trust between LGBTQ+ activists and other movements for change. Through direct engagement in protests, clashes, and acts of defiance, they formed emotional solidarity with fellow protesters, breaking down barriers of prejudice. This solidarity also countered the dominant narrative that portrays LGBTQ+ activism as a foreign cultural import - a rhetoric weaponized by ruling powers to justify discrimination and attacks on them.[85]

Most of the change-oriented groups present in the streets did not engage with such proposals, even among the most radical factions. Many refrained from challenging the patriarchal system and instead confined their demands to economic transformation, as if social justice were solely a matter of class disparity, without addressing the ideological foundations that perpetuate discrimination. This mirrored the predicament of revolutionary, independence, and socialist movements in Lebanon and other Arab countries, which championed socialist and freedom-oriented rhetoric without pushing for comprehensive secularization in theory or practice. They remained tied to the mindset of monarchical and sultanate-era structures dominated by religious

[84] Salameh, op. cit.
[85] Anonymous source called M. N.

ideologies, failing to recognize that justice for marginalized communities requires dismantling not just economic inequalities but also cultural and systemic oppression.

This contradiction surfaced in the discourse of the protests, where accusations against corrupt politicians often took the form of homophobic insults, as in "**Flan Loti**" (so-and-so is gay). However, this rhetoric was met with direct counter-responses within the protest squares themselves, with slogans and chants rejecting the use of homosexuality as an insult: "**Homosexual is not an insult**" and "**For the sake of gay people, we will not remain silent; for the sake of passersby, we will stay in the squares**." The confrontation extended further with slogans targeting Hezbollah, the dominant force within the sectarian system and a key defender of the status quo. Though all ruling political forces opposed such transformations, Hezbollah played the role of the vanguard in rejecting them outright, as its Secretary-General made explicit during his speeches at the height of the uprising when he declared the three "**no's**": "**There will be no fall of the President of the Republic, no fall of the system, and no fall of the government**."[86]

It was within this atmosphere that the slogan "**Lesbollah**" emerged - a sharp, symbolic retort that encapsulated the direct confrontation with the party's authority, without ambiguity or room for reinterpretation.

Not to mention that these movements waged an internal battle with other leftist factions that refrained from embracing the struggle for social and sexual liberation with the same radical intensity. In response to this hesitation, they raised the slogan: "**Queers for Marx**" - a pointed jab meant to embarrass those who dismissed or downplayed their cause, forcing them to reckon with the contradictions in their own ideological stance. By invoking Marxism itself, they called out the selective commitment of some leftist factions, reminding them that Marxism and radical leftist change are meant to be projects of total human liberation, not just economic restructuring. True liberation, they insisted, must extend to personal freedoms, choices, and identities - not remain confined to the rigid, authoritarian frameworks, that had dominated much of the socialist and liberationist movements of the twentieth century, particularly those aligned with the Soviet Union, which often crushed individuality and personal choices under the weight of its systemic structures.

These groups expressed their demands through multifaceted slogans, disrupting not only political discourse but also the very structure of language. They actively opposed the traditional authoritarian lexicon and its moralistic underpinnings, using transgressive language as a form of resistance. Insults, which are typically rejected within bourgeois and patriarchal moral codes, were reappropriated as tools of political, social, and ethical transformation. The act of reclaiming profanity became a mechanism for challenging societal norms at their most ingrained levels, particularly concerning the body, desire, and the frameworks that regulate them. In this context, slogans emerged such as "**At least give us an orgasm**," "**Suck my dick, not my money**," "**Sex is good, but have you ever fucked the system**," and "**I'm a slut, but I don't want taxes to fuck me**" - each a perfectly unfiltered expression not only of defiance against the system, but the moralistic constraints that seek to repress it.

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[86] See Hassan Nasrallah's second speech after the outbreak of the uprising. Al Jazeera. *Nasrallah: The Fall of the Regime Means Chaos and Collapse*. Video, October 25, 2019. Last accessed March 27, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2019/10/25/Nasrallah-Lebanon-Protests-Hezbollah.

Back to the start

On this basis, a new question arises in the study of the Lebanese uprising of October 17, 2019. Given the pluralism of Lebanese society and the diversity within its protest movements - spanning a wide range of opinions, social and class backgrounds, regional affiliations, and varying degrees of sectarian, militia, and ideological control - should the movement be perceived as a coherent whole, or does its very nature reject such unity? The contradictions and disparities that surfaced in slogans and discourse suggest the latter, pointing toward an uprising fragmented into multiple uprisings rather than a single unified movement. If one were to probe this issue further, they would encounter an even deeper dilemma: the protest movement itself is a challenge to classical models of protest, rendering any attempt to assess it through traditional frameworks inadequate. This leads to a more abstract question: can contemporary protest movements, like the one in Lebanon, be judged using classical criteria, or is this movement, in its essence, a protest against those very models?

Thus, the problem emerges in its sharpest form, shifting the discussion to a conceptual and practical terrain different from that of traditional analyses, which often frame old social movements - whether political or class-based - as the standard for confrontation. The tendency to analyze contemporary social movements through outdated frameworks stems from a belief that Arab societies exist in a pre-modern state, preceding the formation of the nation-state and its subsequent ideological and structural developments in Western Europe. However, applying historical analogies without accounting for contextual differences - spatial, cultural, political, and economic - fails to grasp the specificity of the Lebanese uprising. Such approaches overlook the realities of global hegemony and the transformations in protest movements, particularly in the post-globalization era.

Is it possible, for instance, to compare protest movements before globalization to those that emerged after it? Can we measure the nature of domination and the networks of power that exist today against those that prevailed before the world was thrown wide open and bound together in a single web? Consequently, can we still hold onto a contextual approach that seeks a singular narrative, while the contemporary world has dismantled all grand narratives and frameworks, fragmenting the model itself to the point where every action and every actor becomes a model in its own right, each context standing alone, incomparable to anything else?

The process of questions unfolding from one another does not cease, leaving us in a continuous cycle of recurring inquiries that shape the entire context, resisting any attempt to frame them in absolute terms. Looking at the world today through postmodern concepts and methodologies renders many of the previous frameworks obsolete, as the rupture that struck modernity has dismantled protest movements in their traditional sense, making it impossible to interpret today's events through yesterday's lenses. This is especially true after the entry of the international, supra-international, and sub-international actors into various spheres of society and culture, even within societies most removed from the mechanisms of their formation and production, penetrating them through non-governmental organizations and the supra-societal values they promote. The protest movement has also fallen under the influence of civil society and NGOs that manage the scene both beneath and above the state, shaping a cultural, social, and individual openness that extends across different parts of the world. Beyond that, these forces mold a global landscape that

increasingly resembles a single NGO, governed by funding streams from various sources, each carrying its own distinct project and agenda.

For this reason, even the most fundamental concepts can't be used in a fixed methodology, especially that the very terms and ideas are themselves in flux, shifting with the evolving landscape of human and social sciences? Can we, in the midst of this ceaseless flow, still conceive of protest as a singular act with a unified goal, knowing that it constantly produces diverging outcomes? If we adopt a normative lens, examining the values it embodies and the structures it operates within, the most conventional judgment on the Lebanese case would be that it falls somewhere between failure and success - a movement whose echoes faded without achieving tangible results. Yet, such a conclusion oversimplifies and flattens the issue, for it is difficult to assess an action in isolation from its broader context. The protest itself is layered and multifaceted, resembling embers beneath the ashes, forming beyond the immediate spectacle, perhaps awaiting the conditions to resurface once more, in a new form, with a new appearance, and new ramifications.

The conflict that crystallized in the October 17 uprising was not limited to the confrontation between popular protesters - who filled the streets for days and nights - and the ruling authorities that had entrenched a system of plunder, mafias, and the confiscation of rights, allowing the ruling class to monopolize influence, wealth, and public property. It also reflected another, equally fierce and dangerous struggle: the conflict within the protest groups themselves, rooted in competing intellectual traditions, identity frameworks, and ideological references. It became evident that this was not only a confrontation against the regime but also a contest over the nature of protest itself - its goals, methods, meanings, and concepts. It was a protest against the protesters, among the protesters, and against the very model of protest, revealing deeper fractures over the initial visions and foundations of what could emerge from an attempt to dismantle the existing order.

This conclusion gains further credibility when considering what became of the protest movement, especially as Lebanon returned to its pre-uprising status quo - or worse, as those who had benefited from the old regime found themselves in an even stronger position today. The country has been fractured into pieces, the majority of its population has fallen below the poverty line, the public sector has been hollowed out, and the middle class has undergone devastating collapse.

Despite its scale and intensity, the protest movement failed to produce any coherent, consensus-driven alternative at even the most basic level. This was not solely due to the regime’s ability to fragment and suppress it but also because the movement’s own radicalism became a kind of prison - one it could not break free from.

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