

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE SPECTER OF 'POLITICS' & ANTIMONIES OF
COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION-
THE DEVELOPMENT OF '*ALTERNATIVE*' ORGANIZATION &
ACTION IN LEBANON (2015-2017):
CASE OF 'AL-HIRAK,' 'BEIRUT MADINATI' & 'SABAA'

by
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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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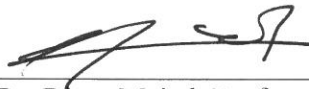
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Major: Sociology

Title: The Specter of ‘Politics’ and Antimonies of Collective Organization: The Development of ‘Alternative’ Collective Organization & Action in Lebanon (2015-2017): Case of ‘al-Hirak,’ ‘Beirut Madinati’ & ‘Saba.’

The Lebanese scene has witnessed important developments over the course of the last two years (2015-2017), particularly in the development of ‘alternative’ realms of collective action and organization. With the onset of the garbage crisis in July 2015, the unbearable odors hanging heavily in the dense summer air, and the mounting heaps of garbage simmering in the heat presented the tipping point for people’s growing anger and resentment against self-serving political elites, debilitating public services and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. The social movement scene witnessed the multiplication of campaigns under various names and ‘hashtags.’ However, the groups’ contending strategic and ideological orientations raised tensions between tendencies hoping to focus ‘singularly’ on the ‘garbage’ crisis to realize ‘a win,’ and others hoping to place it within its larger ‘structural’ context. Although the ‘*Hirak*’ declined, the dynamism it created was propagated in the municipal elections of May 2016. The first and most prominent electoral initiative came from the center to reclaim the city and representative politics under the name ‘*Beirut Madinati*.’ Bringing together a number of urban activists, university professors and professionals, the campaign sought ‘change from within’ through a “participatory” and “positive” campaign and a “harmonious” team of “experts.” While advancing a local municipal developmental plan that addressed the “daily” concerns of “the people” of the city, ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ however, sidelined the contentious political aspects and structural inequalities vested in the city. The most recent development in ‘alternative’ politics and organization has been the creation of a “novel,” “modern” and “non-traditional” political party, ‘*Saba*’, that hopes to ‘revolutionize politics’ and organization. Through their organizational fixes and contending relations to ‘the political,’ novel forms of collective action help reconfigure the nature of political participation, the conception of political citizenry and the conceptualization of ‘the political.’ Taking the three subsequent collective actions as case studies, this research makes use of a thorough content analysis of Facebook campaigning posts and interview data to study movements’ contending relations to ‘the political’ at the conceptual/theoretical, organizational and perceptual levels. The research concludes that rather than reconcile citizens with political participation or advance structural change, new forms of collective action increasingly conform to a global neoliberal logic of action that is increasingly fragmentary, individualizing and commercializing; an ‘NGO-ized’ logic of organization that is unaccountable and unrepresentative; and a post-political perception of ‘the political’ as consensual and techno-moral.

Keywords: ‘*Hirak*,’ ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ ‘*Saba*,’ NGO-ization, post-politics, techno-politics, neoliberalism, civil society, collective action, digital activism, new social movements.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AUB- American University of Beirut

DNA- Digitally Networked Action

LADE- Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections

NGOs- Non-Governmental Organizations

NSMs- New Social Movements

OWS- Occupy Wall Street

SMO- Social Movement Organizations

SNS- Social Networking Sites

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the world has been witness to the massive eruption of protest movements and uprisings, protesting vast inequalities and denigrated living conditions. A global view of these movements reveals their departure from traditional organizational frameworks (e.g. unions, political parties), and increased adoption of new forms of organization and identification. Many of these movements are, indeed, markedly different from the working-class movements that dominated before the 1980s (Harvey, 2005, p.199). These movements' organizational forms tend to be "fragmented, rudderless, and lacking coherent organization" as they avoid "avant-gardism" and refuse to take the form of a political party, preferring instead to engage in "inclusionary politics" and remain embedded in the "nitty-gritty of daily life and struggle" (Harvey, 2005, p.199-200). Confident appraisals and grand gestures to novelty, however, tell us little about the nature and challenges facing these movements or the difficulties of these 'new political times,' argues Bayat (2013, p.47-8). Indeed, as this research seeks to argue, the increased individualization and commodification of social life under neoliberalism has had marked effects upon the mobilization field. More precisely, as the past two years (2015-2017) of collective action and mobilization in Lebanon have revealed, actors' choice of organizational frameworks and relationship to the 'political' has been subject to increasing strain and contention.

Harvey (2005, p.2) defines neoliberalism broadly as, "a theory of political economic practices"—first adopted in the US and the UK in the Reagan and Thatcher years—"that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." The rise of new forms of "oppositional

cultures,” claims Harvey (2005, p.202), has occurred in the above context, and “in decades when working-class institutions were in decline and when many progressives were increasingly persuaded that class was a meaningless or at least long defunct category.” With the global resurgence of protest movements without central leadership, hegemonic organization and party apparatuses, such as ‘the Occupy protests’ in the U.S. or the ‘Indignados’ in Spain, researchers, however, suggest that the world is witnessing totally ‘new’ forms of protests that depart from ‘*traditional*’ material and classist concerns towards new cultural and expressive ‘politics of the first person.’ Social movement theories conceptualize the above shift in the ‘new social movements’ paradigm. However, while the perceptual appeal of structural and classist analysis has increasingly fallen out of repute in social movement analysis, classist and material hardships have been exploding worldwide in anti-capitalist and anti-globalization protests and massive demonstrations holding socio-economic demands across North Africa and the Middle East, Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. These protests hold in common a popular dissatisfaction with the ruling political elite and political economic order that has exacerbated inequalities in wealth and failed to provide ‘dignity, bread and social justice.’ Indeed, the past decades have revealed that the “benefits of revived capital accumulation were highly skewed” and “increasing social inequality...such a persistent feature of neoliberalism as to be regarded as structural to the whole project,” argues Harvey (2005, p.16). Hence, far from being ‘a thing of the past,’ neoliberalism has systemically been disguising its main aims: the restoration of ruling-class power for the elite minority, at the expense of the denigration of living and environmental condition for the majority (Harvey, 2005, p. 39, 203). Given the neoliberal suspicion towards democracy, the rise of neoliberalism has also been accompanied by a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance,’ marked by the proliferation of NGOs, and the belief that opposition within a separate entity called ‘civil society’ “is the powerhouse of oppositional politics and social

transformation” (Harvey, 2005, p.77-8). In parallel, neoliberalism has placed strong limits on democratic governance, relying instead on undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (e.g. IMF or Federal Reserve) for key decisions (ibid.). Situating Lebanon within this global neoliberal order, this research argues that the political, economic and cultural system has increasingly fomented within itself ‘an oppositional culture’ (Harvey, 2005) that finds itself inherently tied to neoliberalism’s commodifying, fragmenting and individualizing discourses and fields of action. Hence, rather than reconcile citizens with political participation following the violence and atrocities of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), and corruption of its leaders, the arena of ‘civil’ participation—while indeed serving as an alternative platform given political closure and deadlock (Karam, 2006)—promulgated neoliberal ideals and values unto the field of mobilization and collective action. This contradictory position has, indeed, often created recurrent frustrations among the so-called ‘civil society’ activists in their perceived ability to affect change in the system through single-battles, compelling several towards reformist agendas through the electoral process and logic of gradual ‘change from within.’

Traboulsi (2014, p.25), in his work on social classes in Lebanon, argues that Lebanon has been globalized since the 1950s. The advancement of the neoliberal project, and exponential increase of national debt was further advanced under the premiership of Rafic el-Hariri’s post-war neoliberal reconstruction policies and projects. The resulting growing gap between the wealthy and dispossessed placed Lebanon at a critical tipping point. The upper class, termed the “oligarchy” by Traboulsi (2014, p.33)—to capture the class’s family nature and high proportion of legal privileges and exemptions—enjoys the largest share of political, monopolistic and dynastic power. As revealed by the Global Wealth Data (2013), at least 48% of private wealth in Lebanon is owned by 0.3% of the adult population, with an annual income of no less than 1 million dollars, while the rest of the population, 99.7%, own less

than 52% of the remaining wealth. Rooted in the banking sector and within large market monopolies, the Lebanese ruling elites have established a strong hold within the economic and political system, one that may not be easily overlooked as it often stood against major reforms and calls for better conditions for the working class, such as recurrent calls for raising the minimum wage for public sector employees (Traboulsi, 2014, p.43).

In the past decade, the Lebanese political landscape has been witnessing increasing strain with political factions' inability to uphold the consociational power-sharing arrangement, and build *consensus* around major decisions, resulting in the two-years' presidential vacuum that ended in October 2016, the ongoing absence of a public budget, and an ongoing eight-years parliamentary extension. Meanwhile, the public political landscape has been far from dormant. Over the past years, Lebanon has been witnessing a chain of popular protests from public employees and unions demanding salary raise, to protests against the recurrent parliamentary extensions of term, in addition to many single-issue campaigns led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activists around women's rights (e.g. KAFA's campaign against domestic violence), electoral reform and the protection of public spaces from ongoing transgressions, to name a few (e.g. Campaign for the protection of the Dalieh of Rawshe, the Horsh of Beirut, and more recently, Ramle el Bayda public shore).

The most recent popular protests erupted during the summer of 2015 in response to the trash crisis that left citizens with the unbearable sight and stench of garbage under their windows, and inundating the streets, riverbanks and valleys. After the well-overdue closure of the Naameh Landfill, on July 17, 2015, six months following the governmental decision and official date for closure, streets were flooded with accumulated trash. Although the problem was foreseen to happen, the government did not find an alternative plan, and the Naameh residents' protests grew against yet another extension for the landfill. The trash

crisis in Lebanon is not unprecedented. Following its privatization post-civil war 1994, trash management has become largely affected by political profiteering, and subject to great contention primarily for the lucrative charges assigned for trash-collection by Sukleen, a company founded and directed by Maysara Sukkar, a previous business partner of Rafiq al-Hariri in Saudi Arabia (Abu-Rish, 2015). In 1997, the Lebanese people faced the same predicament, when having to close the Bourj Hammoud landfill, the government had no alternative and suitable solution for waste management (Boutros, 2015).

Following the closure of Neameh Landfill and accumulation of the trash in the streets, growing frustration and indignation drew a small number of demonstrators (no more than a hundred people) in late July 2015 to a series of protests, that soon afterwards were called for by a group that named itself ‘You Stink,’ in reference to the inapt and corrupt politicians. ‘You Stink,’ as described by several of its organizers, included a few friends and activists that made particular use of their ‘branding’ and ‘campaigning expertise,’ to create an attractive and catchy Facebook campaign, while also carrying creative actions such as depositing trash bags at the doors of ministries and ministers’ homes, raising the momentum for action. ‘al-Hirak’ (the movement) brought people in large numbers to the streets, protesting political corruption and inaction and expressing opposition to the whole political class, ‘all means all’ became the major denomination of the protest. Protests, additionally, brought to the street a large spectrum of social groups and individuals such as queer, feminist, leftist and environmentalists, first-time participants in protests, residents from marginalized neighborhoods of the city, as well as rank-and-file members or affiliates of political parties such as the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, Amal and Hizballah (Harb, 2016, p.8). Yet, the participation of the latter two then receded, following offenses directed to all political parties, and the stigmatization of participants from lower neighborhoods as ‘infiltrators.’

The regime soon became cognizant of the incumbent dangers to their interests, yet security forces' unexpected crack-down on demonstrators on August 19th presented a turning point for the protest movement. Videos of security forces' offenses and violence compelled larger crowds to the streets in the next demonstration on August 22nd. Clashes increased on August 23rd and 24th between the thousands of protestors and the riot police, leaving many injured and one dead. In a move that was perceived to be controversial by some groups, 'You Stink' organizers called for protestors' withdrawal, and cancelled the demonstration on the 25th of August, claiming that 'political thugs' and 'infiltrators' had turned the protest violent and disruptive. This move, as argued by several interviewees, infuriated some groups within the protest, compelling them to create their own campaign, what came to be known as 'Badna Nhasib' (We Want Accountability). 'Badna Nhasib,' according to one of its central members, includes political party affiliates (from 'archaic' political parties, such as Iraq's Baath political party, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (of Aali Haidar), 'Haraket Shaab' (The People's Movement), as well as non-political party affiliates.

On August 29th, tens of thousands of participants took to the streets in central Beirut, in the largest yet demonstration outside political parties' framework, compelled by indignation and disdain for the outright 'corrupt,' dysfunctional and illegitimate political elites, whose self-serving, profiteering and dynastic interests have often come at the expense of advancing better economic, social and environmental living conditions. In the weeks that followed, a number of groups became visible parts of the movement, taking up hashtags and creating Facebook pages to rally people to the streets: *ila al-Share'* (To the Streets), *Al Shaeb Yourid* (The People Want), *Jeye el Teghyeer* (Change is Coming), etc. Several of these groups also included 'archaic' or 'ideological' political party affiliates (e.g. from The Lebanese Communist Party, The People's Movement, Iraq's Baath Party, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party), who, in the words of several interviewees, preferred to keep behind their

‘controversial’ political ‘baggage,’ in favor of appealing to ‘media’s’ sensational and celebratory focus, and the general aura of the protests.

Besides violent attacks and arrests, the government actively engaged in attempted co-optation and the dissemination of rumors about the movement and its leading figures. Participation gradually waned-out and died off following the government’s interim arrangements with ‘Sukleen,’ that removed garbage from the streets to place them at the Beirut River’s banks (Harb, 2016, p.16), before transporting them again to the Naemeh Landfill that was re-opened temporarily, as well as to the older coastal dump of Costa Brava that raised additional concerns.

While the ‘Hirak’ itself subsided, the political dynamism and popular opposition it created soon afterwards found its manifestation in a multitude of organized municipal electoral campaigns across the country, in the first national election after six years of political stalemate. The decline of street protests and their inability to affect political power and enact substantial change has created a perceived need among activists, as several of them have attested, to capture the opportunity presented by the municipal elections to realize change. Indeed, coming only a few months after the decline of the protest movement, the municipal ‘battles’ in May 2016 can be seen, and are seen by many actors, as a logical extension of the protest movements. Across Lebanon, ‘independent’ lists challenged the dominance of long-standing political parties. Being the first region of Lebanon to undergo elections, Beirut’s municipal campaign, ‘Beirut Madinati’ (‘Beirut, My City’), benefitted from the dynamism created by ‘the Hirak’ and its mobilization of popular dissatisfaction against the political elite, to fire back a confrontation and return hope to the people, but also to the activist circles themselves. Harb (2016, p.8, 10), an urban activist, academic, and central member of ‘Beirut Madinati,’ describes the campaign as an “urban social movement,” led by an urge to reclaim

cities and urban space, and crystalized from the growth of critical urban discourse among activists and scholars, the establishment of urban studies programs at universities, and the growth of diverse urban campaigns and coalitions. The ‘independent’ municipal campaign of highly educated individuals, academics, and urban activists formed an oppositional list to the traditional parties that dominated Beirut’s Municipality, advancing a technical reorganization plan for the city with a positive tone and appealing visualizations. Cognizant of the incumbent threat, establishment political parties from both rival blocs (March 8th and 14th)¹ united in one list, the ‘Beirutis List’ (La’ihat al-Bayerteh), under the auspices of the ‘Future Movement’ and its leader Saad el Hariri.

Garnering thirty-two percent of the total votes in Beirut’s municipal elections (Haidar, 2017), ‘Beirut Madinati,’ nevertheless remained unable to overcome the limitations of the majoritarian electoral law set in place. Yet, the exemplar grassroots initiative was followed by similar initiatives in different regions of Lebanon (e.g. Baalbek, Tripoli and Zgharta), and by important achievements in the South by the ‘Lebanese Communist Party’ against the longstanding monopoly of the dual traditional Shi’ite alliance (Amal Party and Hisballah).² The “municipal electoral battles,” as referred to by several activists, marked the beginning of the confrontation and the building of political “alternatives” that signify a break away and disdain of the monopoly of sectarian political parties and leaders. These ‘novel’ campaigns presented themselves as ‘independent,’ ‘serious’ and ‘qualified’ *alternatives* to the ‘ineffective,’ ‘sectarian’ and ‘corrupt’ political parties that dominated and monopolized the political scene. Although ‘Beirut Madinati’s’ municipal campaign proved to be a marked

¹ The two rival blocs were named after two demonstrations in 2005 following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic el Hariri, and represent different national and regional alliances (8th of March is pro-Syrian, Iranian bloc and 14th of March anti-Syrian bloc). The national alliances were reshaped over the years.

² Following the protests and preceding the municipal elections, the Communist Party witnessed important reforms with the election of Hanna Gharib, a popular unionist that led the significant protests of public sector teachers and employees, as secretary general—and also saw the ascent of the protests’ youthful and central figures to leading posts within the Party.

development in the history of collective action in Lebanon, its future remains unclear as internal political and organizational tensions rose following the end of the electoral campaign that initially sidelined political contentions in favor of a local developmental plan.

However, the protest movement's reverberations have not died out yet. Few months after the municipal zeal waned out, violet billboards were raised on the streets marketing a 'new' initiative, and re-spiking people's curiosity with short clues, such as "its time to get serious," "we are organizing," "we want the independence of the people from the 'zai'm' (the political leader), "this (violet) is Lebanon's new color," followed by the name "*Sabaa V*" (seven) underneath. On the 19th of October 2016, '*Sabaa V*' announced itself as a new cross-sectarian political party led by a number of experts, activists and concerned citizens, seeking to "organize the participation of citizens in public affairs" through "the formation of a modern and advanced model for political action, following the latest technologies and latest political concepts" (Laure Ayoub, *Assafir*, 20 October, 2016). The political party claims to "unite and organize the major and various transformative energies, represent the silent majority, and counter the traditional ruling parties" (*Almodon*, 20 October, 2016). '*Sabaa V*', moreover, claims to advance political reform through principles of transparency, non-hierarchical structure and participatory policy-making, against corruption, sectarianism, foreign allegiances and the abuse of public office for personal gain (*Almodon*, 20 October, 2016). Coming out of the need to "organize" politically and "unite" in a "lasting initiative," as stressed by one of its founders, '*Sabaa V*' is one among several other non-announced initiatives, groups and networks of activists deliberating internal strategies and hopes of affecting change through the next parliamentary elections. The 'political platform' launched on the 19th of February 2017 its parliamentary campaign, 'Ibtisamet Watan' (The Nation's Smile) in the presence of media coverage and a large audience at the 'Forum De Beyrouth.'

Yet, while attempting to make politics more “fun,” and less alienating, the political party experiment faces political and organizational challenges.

Alongside the heightened disdain for traditional, sectarian political parties, and politics generally, the fast development of ‘alternative’ fields of collective action has been evident in the past two years (2015-2017), and so has the marked ambivalence and tension between the ‘civil’ and ‘political’ realms. This research seeks to address this ambivalence, in collective actors’ contribution to the reconfiguration/sustenance of the system, and in social movement organizations’ (SMOs) ability to affect change. This is achieved through the analysis of the developments and continuities in collective actions’ choice of organizational frameworks and mobilization strategies, and their resultant relationship to ‘the political.’ Since the central interest guiding this research has been to study activist’s contending relationship to ‘the political,’ allow me first to briefly define the terms ‘politics’ and ‘the political,’ making use of Mouffe’s (2005) elaborate analysis in her book ‘On the Political.’ Mouffe, (2005, p.6) defines ‘politics’ as “the sets of practices and institutions” whose “essence” is “the political.” The contention, however, centers on defining ‘the political,’ that has come to mean almost everything, yet nothing at the same time. Mouffe (2005, p.9) points out that there has been marked disagreement in literature on what constitutes ‘the political.’ While some theorists, such as Hannah Arendt perceive of ‘the political’ as “a space of freedom and public deliberation,” others envisage it as “a space of power, conflict and antagonism” (Mouffe, 2005, p.9). This research adopts the latter’s conceptualization of ‘the political,’ that in line with Mouffe’s (2005, p.1-7) definition, perceives of it as the realm of ‘agonism’ and ‘hegemonic’ conflict between conflicting interests. Contrary to the endemic celebration of the Lebanese consociational power-sharing formula of ‘consensus’ and ‘unity,’ *dis-census* is what truly constitutes democratic politics and ‘the political.’ Authors like Badiou (2005) and Ranciere (1998, 2001), similarly, envisaged ‘the political’ as “disruptive.”

Yet, the point of departure of this enquiry is guided by what is perceived, in Mouffe's (2005, p.11) words, as the "current inability to envisage the problems facing our societies in a *political* way. Political questions "are not mere technical issues to be solved by experts. Properly political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives" (Mouffe, 2005, p.11). This inability, argues Mouffe (2005, p.10) is inherently linked to the "uncontested hegemony of liberalism." Building on the above, this research is particularly interested in studying the impact of the neoliberal logic and organizational frameworks upon activists' fields of action.

To best understand the nature and development of collective action in the past two years in Lebanon (2015-2017), I will attempt to bridge the existing literature around three variants of analysis: the *micro* ideational analysis of collective actors' perceptions of politics and collective action (gleaned through thirty semi-structured interviews), understood through the *meso* organizational choices of repertoires or 'fields of action' (Scott, 1999) (also analyzed through a content analysis of around 2,000 Facebook posts), within the overall *macro* hegemonic neoliberal dynamics that underlie organizational and perceptual shifts. Building on the above, this research attempts to clarify the nature of the political and organizational challenges facing the development of 'alternative' political movements and organizations that depart from hegemonic organizations and traditional party apparatuses, and seek to counter the established political order to realize change. The research, therefore, traces the developments in organizational frameworks and actors' relationship to 'the political' in the past two years (2015- 2017) in Lebanon, analyzing three subsequent developments: the '*Hirak*' of summer 2015; the municipal electoral campaign '*Beirut Madinati*,' and most recently the nascent political party '*Sabaa*.'

Towards this end, this research seeks to contribute critically and simultaneously to four bodies of contemporary literature that have emerged in tandem and that often overlap in

social movement and political theory. The literary debates addressed are: (A) ‘*new social movements*’ paradigm and its Marxist critiques (Habermas, 1981; Touraine, 2002); (B) ‘digital activism’ and ‘*connective action*’ (Mejias, 2009; Aouragh, 2016); (C) the ‘NGOization’ of civil society (Jad, 2004); and finally, (D) ‘techno-politics’ and consensual ‘post-politics’ (Kosmatopoulos, 2014b, Swyngedouw, 2009, 2010). The exploration brings together emerging bodies of literature in conversation in an attempt to explicate contemporary debates over collective actors’ organizational choices and contentious relations to the ‘political.’ The conceptual framework and ideas presented above will guide the empirical research and analysis in the following chapters.

The protest mobilizations erupting following the trash crisis in Lebanon have led to the unprecedented surge and development of collective action in the past two years (2015-2017). Besides intended goals and behind the most sincere claims, this research is interested in examining the ‘un-intended,’ yet ‘instrumental effects’ (Ferguson, 1994, p.256, 275) of neoliberalism on the mobilization field and on actors’ resultant relations to ‘the political.’ This research, thus, intends to answer the following question: **How do the collective actions and forms of organization that developed in response to and following the trash crisis perceive and frame themselves in relation to ‘the political?’** The discussion aims to situate this question within the growing literature on the rise of ‘*new social movements*,’ the growing appeal of ‘online activism,’ and ‘technical expertise,’ and the resultant controversial relations to the ‘political.’

The analysis starts by laying out the theoretical foundations and central tenants of ‘*new social movements*’ paradigm guiding actors’ organizational and political choices (Chapter Three). Next, the research analyzes emerging organizational innovations and ‘institutional fixes,’ encouraging networked horizontality and participatory ‘governance,’ in relation to their repositioning of ‘*political citizenship*’ (Chapter Four) (Swyngedouw’s, 2005,

p.1991). The research is particularly interested in tracing the organizational developments in anti-establishment fields of collective action in the past two years (2015-2017) in Lebanon: from ‘social-media mediated’ social movement organizations (SMOs), to the creation of a more organized municipal electoral campaign, ‘Beirut Madinati,’ and finally, the formation of a ‘modern,’ ‘non-traditional’ political party experiment, ‘Sabaa.’ The three subsequent collective actions represent insightful case studies to the fast process of accumulation of struggles that has prompted important developments and debates among activists on the nature of organization and relationship to politics. More precisely, these case studies provide important insights to the challenges and controversies facing nascent ‘oppositional cultures’ in their choices of organizational frameworks. Finally, this research synthesizes the increased ‘NGO-ization’ of fields of action (Chapter Five), and their impacts on actors’ relationship to ‘the political’ (Chapter Six), arguing that the formers’ logic has pre-figured actors’ perception of ‘the political.’

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

“Here the organization does not supply the troops of the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organization” (Luxemburg, R., 1906, p.113).

A. Research Design

The emergence and development of protest movements often follows a bell-shaped evolution that eventually leads to their decline. In their decline, however, movements today often leave behind a vacuum of frustration and hopelessness, as they are increasingly predicated by ephemeral organizations and co-optation (e.g. Egyptian Uprisings). Yet, and as Luxemburg’s (1906) words quoted above attest, struggles, to an ever growing degree, supply the troops for organization, in their creation of unquelled dynamisms and energies in search for strong and lasting outlets from which they could continue their struggles. The fast development and mushrooming of initiatives, following the ‘*Hirak*,’ epitomize such instances and opportunities for building ‘alternative’ political identities and organizations. Yet, as this research additionally hypothesizes, the development of ‘alternative’ political organizations and identities are often predicated with challenges and difficulties of their own. Towards better understanding the challenges facing these ‘new political times,’ this research analyzes the organizational frames and mobilization strategies employed by the three subsequent collective actions that development in the past two years (2015-2017) in Lebanon in relation to their particularly staging of the ‘political.’ To best approach this contention, I make use of a triangulation of three methods: (1) content analysis; (2) semi-structured qualitative interviews; and (3) participant observations.

1. Content Analysis: Coding and Framing Analysis

Content analysis is an unobtrusive method that allows a researcher to make inferences from texts about the “sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message” (Weber, 1990, p.10). The unobservable, argues Hsieh *et al.*, (2005, p.1278), can be made salient and operational through content analysis of text data. This method examines mainly textual data in order to understand “what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does” (Krippendorff, 2013, p.2). Moreover, content analysis is particularly useful in safeguarding against pre-conceptual and theoretical bias since it relies upon grounded “inductive category development” and the emergence of new insights from within the data (Mayring, 2000, in Hsieh *et al.*, 2005, p.1279-1280).

Content analysis is particularly useful to make thorough inferences about the mobilization strategies and interpretive frames used by “social movement entrepreneurs” (Noakes *et al.*, 2005, p.7). According to Snow *et al.* (1986, p.466), “social movement organizations (SMOs) and their activists not only act upon the world, or segments of it...but they also *frame* the world in which they are acting.” Frames, according to Goffman (1981, p.63), become “a central part of culture and are institutionalized in various ways.” Hence, not only do frames function to organize and guide action through interpreting and giving meaning to events and occurrences (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p.464), but they also shape and are shaped by the various institutional and organizational repertoires in which they are forged. Analyzing the frames chosen strategically but also spontaneously and organically by groups and organizers, therefore, provides ample information into the nature of mobilizations and campaigns, their framing strategies and tactics, and perceptions of ‘politics.’ The tensions in the choice of organizational frameworks and the positioning of activism in relations to ‘the

political,' presented pertinent and ever-present internal and external debates among activists trying to fashion for themselves an alternative landscape for realizing substantial change.

Building on the importance of content analysis as a methodological tool of analysis in exploring the above contentions, this research carried out a content analysis of:

- 1) The Facebook posts of the '*Hirak's*' (2015) most active, nascent and media-savvy campaigns: 'You Stink' and '*Badna Nhasib*' (We Want Accountability);
- 2) The Facebook posts of '*Beirut Madinati*' municipal campaign;
- 3) The Website of the emerging political party, '*Sabaa* ♣,' that contains significant amount of information on the emerging party in place of its Facebook page that is relatively of low-posting activity and evident inconsistencies in user engagement (see **Figure 4** below).

Anonymous data was, first, extracted from the respective Facebook pages of the campaigns (You Stink, '*Badna Nhaseb*', '*Beirut Madinati*' and '*Sabaa* '), using 'Netvizz' Facebook application. The data was extracted over the period of one year for each campaign, starting from the launching dates of each page.

During their respective one-year periods (MM/DD/YYYY):

- You Stink page posted a total of 2,064 posts with which 265,272 users engaged (liked and commented) 2,346,387 times (from 07-25-2015 till 07-25-2016);
- '*Badna Nhaseb*' posted a total of 1,389 posts with which 47,369 users engaged (liked and commented) 412,445 times (from 08-28-2015 till 07-25-2016);
- '*Beirut Madinati*' posted a total of 530 posts with which 56,837 users engaged (liked and commented) 322,874 times (from 02/09/2016 till 01/23/2017);
- '*Sabaa*' posted a total of 58 posts with which 93,055 users engaged (liked and commented) 199,221 times (in a period less than a year: from 10-11-2016 till 01-23-2017)

The above data was then graphed (see **Figures 1- 4** below), to represent the distribution of admin's posting activity as well as users' engagement (liking and commenting) activity over the respective one-year span for each of the four mentioned campaigns.

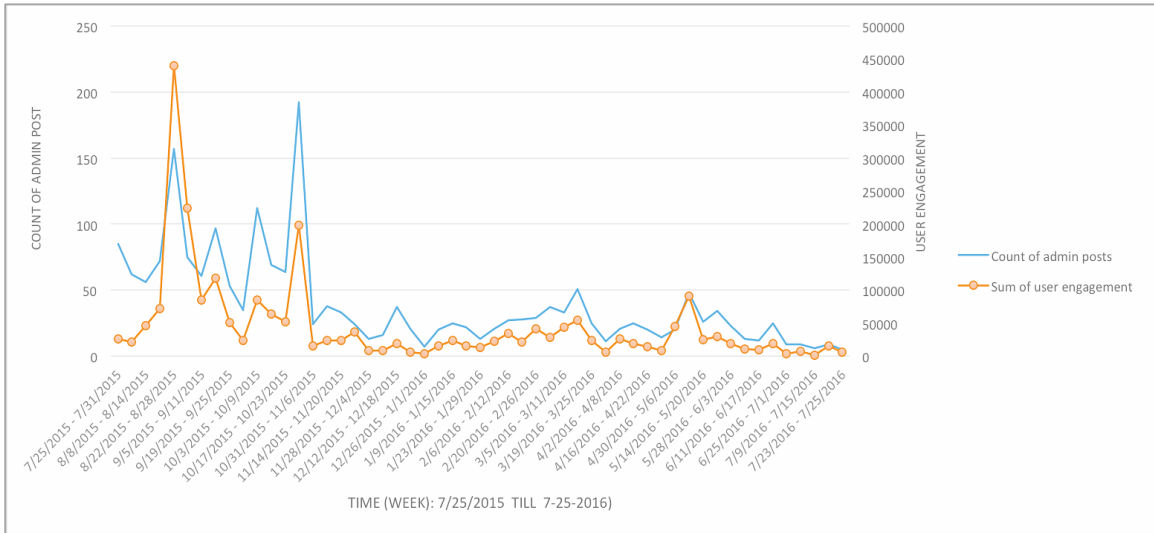


Figure 1- The Variation of 'You Stink's' Admin Post Count & Sum of User Engagement Over Time

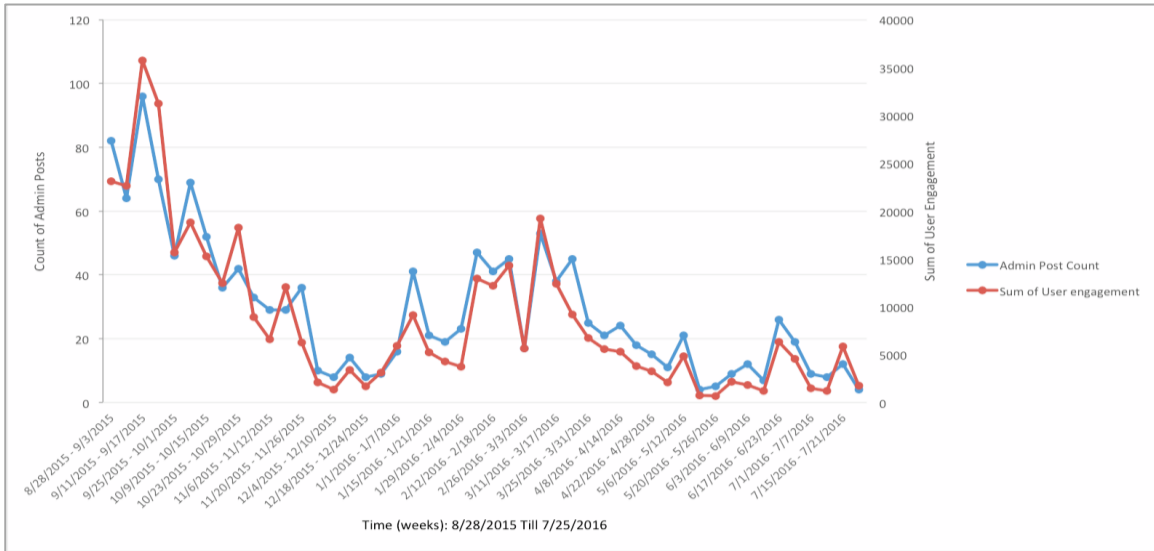


Figure 2- The Variation of 'Badna Nhasib' Admin Post Count & Sum of User Engagement Over Time

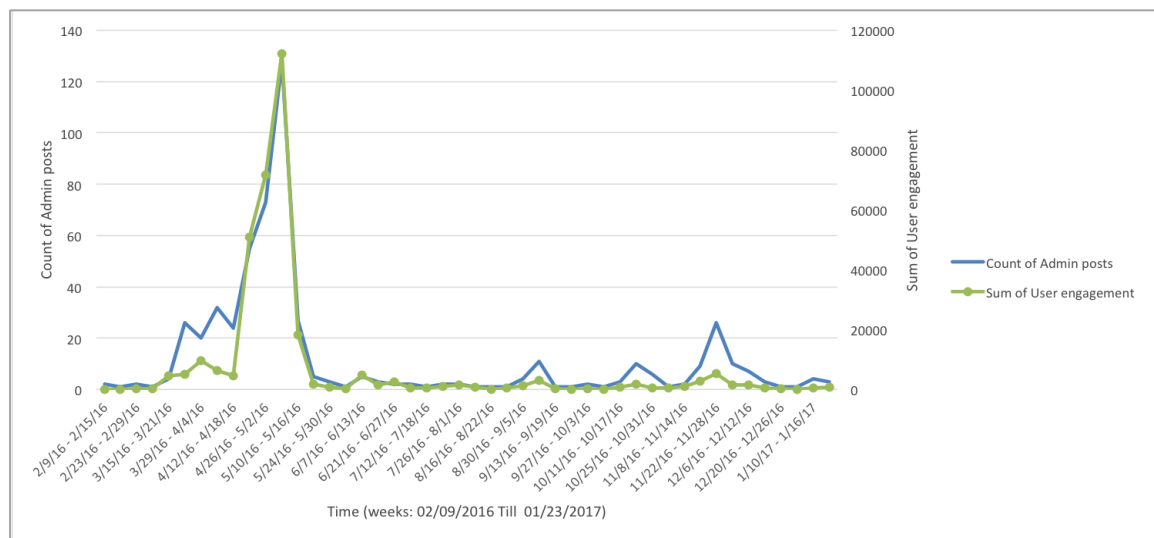


Figure 3- The Variation of 'Beirut Madinati's' Admin Post Count & Sum of User Engagement Over Time

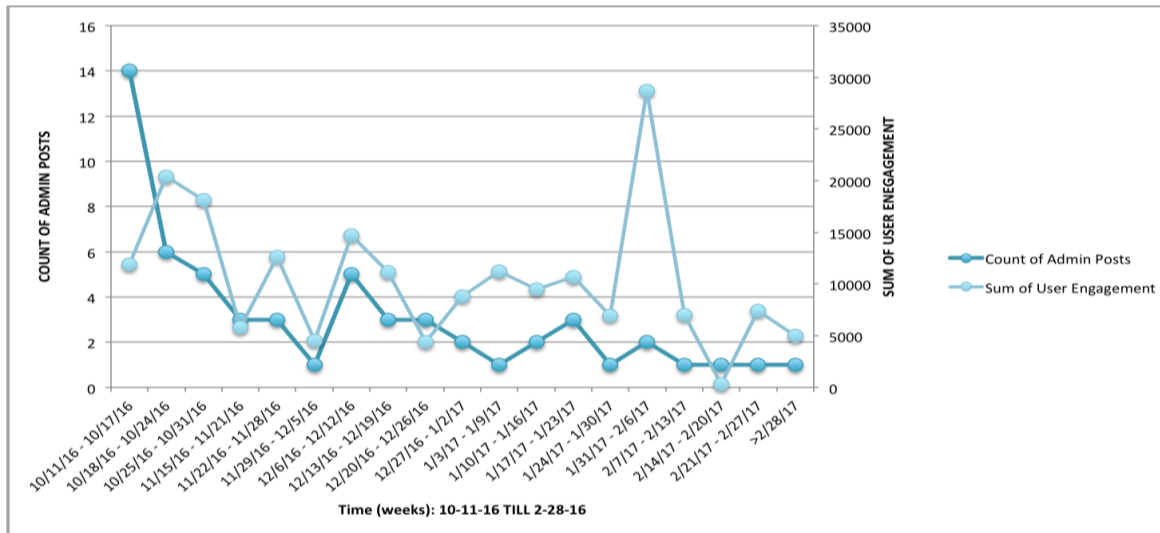


Figure 4- The Variation of 'Saba'a's' Admin Post Count & Sum of User Engagement Over Time

Next, the time frame with the highest admin Facebook activity and user engagement was considered for each of the three campaigns:

- You Stink: 25 Jun. 2015- 6 Nov. 2015, during which the page posted 1,214 times with which user engaged 1,522,695 times;
- 'Badna Nhaseb:' 28 Aug. 2015- 6 Nov. 2015, during which page posted 595 times with which users engaged 203,233 times;
- 'Beirut Madinati:' 15 Mar. 2016- 23 May 2016, during which page posted: 394 with which users engaged 285,170 times.

The time frames chosen based on the above date coincide accurately with the peak campaigning period of each campaign.

The posts extracted for the respectively allotted time frames were then cleaned for repetitive posts or posts without written content. All campaigns, except 'Badna Nhasib,' included a mixture of both Arabic and English posts, sometimes providing both translations simultaneously. The remaining posts were translated to English and read entirely to achieve immersion and a sense of the whole before starting the coding phase (Hsieh et al., 2005, p.1278). Next, dominant codes were derived inductively through content analysis by highlighting the exact words or phrases that capture key thoughts and concepts, taking notes of the initial analysis, and developing the coding scheme using 'Nvivo' software to insure a

systematic and effective approach to textual data analysis. The final coding scheme was then used to re-examine the initial texts. Next, codes were sorted into meaningful clusters or categories based on internal relations and links (Hsieh et al., 2005, p.1278). The data from the respective Facebook campaigns was coded under four major categories: (1) *campaign self-representation*; (2) *demands or issues addressed*; (3) *organizational forms*; (4) *perceptions of politics and 'the political,'* in addition to a number of other variables such as tone, discourse rationality, admin's function, audience addressed (see **Appendix A**). Nvivo software helped visualize and quantify each category, subcategory and code to report the findings.

Adopting content analysis as a methodology has helped me offset the researcher influence in data collected, since it remains the most unobtrusive method for data analysis that approaches substantial amounts of data that are already publically intended and available (Hsieh et al., 2005). Moreover, content analysis allowed me to extract the gist of the respective campaigns' major themes and strategies. Getting thoroughly acquainted with the respective campaigns' tactics, discourse and activities though content analysis helped me approach interviews with participants and organizers with important insights and information that I could explore further.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews with Activists & Organizers

Content analysis was, then, followed by thirty, in-depth and semi-structured qualitative interviews with central organizers and members of the three subsequent collective actions to gain subjective insights into their organizational and strategic choices, and an in-depth understanding of their positionality in relation to 'the political.' Interviews provided me with unique and indispensable insights into subjects' experiences and perspectives. In fact, not only did the interview "journey" (Kvale, 1996, p.4) lead me to new knowledge, but it also helped me challenge, re-shape and develop my previous conceptions in light of the new data. Indeed, as Kvale (1996, p.14) argues, "The qualitative interview is a construction site for

knowledge.” While conducting interviews it becomes evident, as Rorty (1979 in Kvale, 1996, p. 37) argues, that “If we regard knowing not as having an essence but as a right to believe,” we may see “conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is understood.” In other words, “When we understand knowledge as the social justification of belief rather than as accuracy of representation, conversation replaces confrontation with nature” (Kvale, 1996, p.37). In this sense, “The qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects’ everyday world” (Kvale, 1996, p.70).

In order to protect individual contributor’s privacy and insure their safety against any sensitive information that may be disclosed, and upon request from the ‘Institutional Board for Research’ (IRB) at AUB, all interviews were kept anonymous and interview data confidential. Anonymity has, additionally, set many of my interviewees at ease, knowing that they can disclose information and express ‘frustrations,’ as one of them has stated, without reservations.

Thirty, anonymous, qualitative interviews were thus conducted with:

1. Central actors and organizers from the different groups of the protest movement of 2015 that played a central role in shaping the movement (*beyond* the two most prominent media-savvy campaigns: ‘You Stink’ and ‘*Badna Nhasib*’) (25 overlap in this category);
2. Central actors, volunteers and candidates from ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ municipal campaign (16 overlap in this category);
3. Activists and actors from the same, so-called ‘civil society,’ landscape, working on organizing politically for the next parliamentary elections, exploring, particularly, the first such publically announced and formally organized initiative, ‘*Sabaa*’ (Seven) political party (15 overlap in this category).

The research insured a fair distribution of interviewees across the three experiences.³ The majority of the interviewees, as the diagram below reveals (see **Figure 5**) overlapped significantly across at least two of the three collective action arenas. Indeed of the thirty interviewees, only seven were involved solely in the protest movement; while none was involved solely in the municipal elections; only one was involved solely in the parliamentary elections; and six overlapped across all three stages (see **Figure 5**). Interviews proceeded mostly through snow-ball sampling by requesting from each interviewee to put me in contact with other possible interviewees they suggest can be of value to this research. Interview data was then analyzed thematically to grasp major themes as well as subjective interpretations and perceptions.

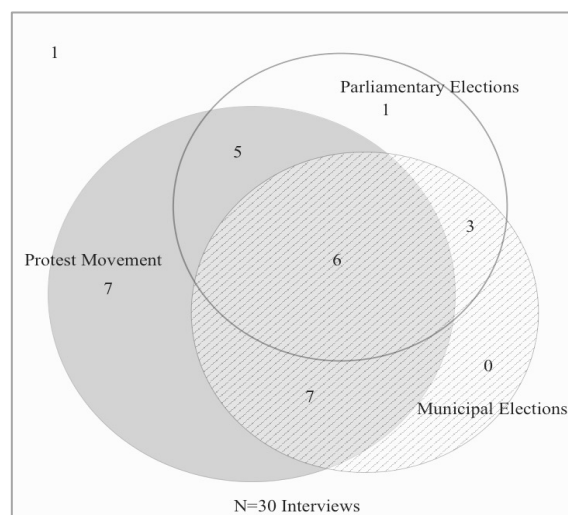


Figure 5- *Distribution of Interviewees*

Finally, data was verified and complimented with first-hand recordings and observations, collected through participating in most of the movement’s major demonstrations and smaller activities. Complimented by having attended most conferences held on the protest movement at the ‘American University of Beirut’ (AUB), in addition to the technical and policy-oriented conferences around the trash crisis held at the ‘Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs’ at AUB (2015-2017).

³ Check **Appendix B** for a detailed distribution of interviewees across groups and initiatives.

B. Limitations

The protest movement included a number of additional coalitions and groups, such as ‘*Ila al-Share*’ (On the Streets), ‘*Al Shaeb Yourid*’ (The People Want), ‘*Min Ajl al Joumhouriya*’ (For the Republic), Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth in addition to other constituents, such as: feminist groups, NGOs, and environmentalists (See **Appendix C** for description of each group). However, given the limited time frame of this study, I chose to focus content analysis of the Facebook campaigning pages to the most media-savvy of the campaigns: ‘You Stink’ and ‘*Badna Nhaseb*.’ This focus, however, may overlook the contribution of other constituents or groups with larger constituency, offline presence and mobilization experiences, but limited new media appeal. Interviews, however, sought to compensate this limitation by covering a wider spectrum of participants, groups and organizers, whose organizational experience and political orientations have had important impacts on the direction of the movement, albeit not a publically visible one.⁴

Although interviews are highly informative, qualitative interviews can be influenced by the interviewer or by the interviewing process. To minimize influences, I allowed the conversation to follow naturally from general questions around the individual’s biography and experience in activism and organization on which I built upon with more specific prompts. Moreover, conceiving of participants as “constructive practitioners” and not as repositories for information who only retain details of their experiences (Gubriumk, 2012, p.33), the research was cognizant of the ‘active subjectivity’ of interviewees in responding retrospectively to questions posed. When narrating past experiences retrospectively, interviewees are constantly affected by recent and future developments, interpretations and critiques (Wengraf, 2001, p.117). Finally, given the sensitivity of transcription to researcher’s

⁴ Check **Appendix B** for a detailed distribution of interviewees across groups and initiatives.

influence and potential bias, I decided to transcribe interviews in full and without translation, retaining the whole conversation in the original language.

Finally, content analysis can also raise concerns about researcher bias in categorization and coding reliability. This was partly offset through a number of procedures. Using computer aids, such as 'Nvivo,' helped me organize data systemically in clusters for future analysis and insuring systematic coding. Moreover, knowing that texts inevitably have multiple meanings and 'never speak for themselves,' reading texts with 'alternative voices/readings' in mind helped me widen the reliability of the coding process beyond individual bias (Krippendorff, 2013, p.357).

CHAPTER III

‘NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS’: SHIFTING OR *FRAGMENTING* CONTENTION?

“Political questions become ‘insoluble’ when ‘disguised as cultural ones’” (Gramsci, 1971, p.149 in Harvey, 2005, p.39).

A. Introduction

The trash crisis demonstrations of summer 2015 introduced to the Lebanese landscape new dynamics, discourses, means and forms of organization than those previously characterizing large-scale protests throughout the country’s history. The public landscape witnessed for the first time on such a large scale the mushrooming of ‘campaigns’ that represented either few people behind their newly created ‘brand,’ or ‘archaic’ political parties refurbished to fit the demands of the moment. The ideological and strategic differences of the ‘Hirak’s’ heterogeneous components epitomized the ongoing debate between a reformist tendency aiming to focus and realize a single win in the garbage file, and a revolutionary tendency hoping to further politicize the conflict and place it within its broader structural context. Yet, the self-interested political class remained unyielding to popular demands, as the garbage crisis takes on an even worse trajectory. This perceived inability to affect change was added to some activists’ long experience in advocacy and single-issue campaigning that had revealed to them the *structural* impediments and political *unwillingness* to accede to public demands. This perception compelled, as several of ‘*Beirut Madinati’s*’ members attest, the necessity for pursuing ‘change from *within*’ and ‘carrying it out ourselves’ by becoming players within the political system. Yet, assuming that winning elections automatically implies winning power or realizing ‘change,’ may be a misguided assumption. In pursuing elections as an end, ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ similarly advanced the need to realize ‘a single *win.*’

To this end, the electoral campaign advanced a consensual developmental discourse and inclusive ‘branding’ that sidelined, albeit often strategically, the larger socio-economical and political contentions vested in the city, in favor of a particular focus on the nitty-gritty of daily-life. ‘*Sabaa*,’ similarly, epitomizes and explicitly expresses its departure from ideologies and classist struggles ‘of the past,’ as expressed on its website (www.sabaa.org), celebrating, instead, individual self-realization and development and ‘pragmatic’ political choices.

Considering the ‘*Hirak*,’ ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ and ‘*Sabaa*’ as revealing case studies in the building of ‘alternative’ action, this chapter, first, examines the *theoretical* foundations that underpin the, so-called, ‘*new social movements*’ paradigm that increasingly informs contemporary social movements and campaigning. The chapter examines the literary debate surrounding the paradigm’s central tenants, and its critique by Marxian theorists, who argue against collective action fragmentation, and refute the paradigm’s central argument—that there has been a *shift* in contention away from material concerns—by arguing that structural and classist power dynamics remain persistently salient. Second, the chapter argues in line with the structural theorists of social movements, on the preeminence of classist concerns and struggles in Lebanon, away from the exceptionalism that often characterizes literature and popular perceptions of the country as endowed/cursed with a sectarian particularism. The chapter explores data collected on the case studies that reveals the close adherence of their strategic and tactical choices to the ‘*new social movements*’ logic.

B. ‘*New Social Movements*’ Paradigm

‘*New social movements*’ (NSMs) theories are a field of heightened contention within contemporary social movement literature. These theories are premised on the belief that new, cultural, identity-based and expressive movements characterize modern post-industrial societies, and deviate from ‘traditional’ conflicts over class politics and distribution. In other

words, NSMs theories proclaim the end of traditional politics and classist concerns, and a generalized move towards cultural and identitarian concerns (Habermas, 1981; Melucci, 1980; Touraine, 2002). Habermas (1981, p.33, 36-7), for instance, claims that there has been a shift in areas of contention away from institutionalized conflict over distribution and socio-economic interests within formal institutions (e.g. political parties, unions) that seek for themselves ‘formal attainment,’ towards conflict over ‘endangered lifestyles,’ ‘quality of life,’ ‘equality,’ ‘individual self-realization, participation and human rights.’ This takes place through ‘expressive’ and ‘new’ “politics of the first person,” limited to sub-institutional and extra-parliamentary spheres (Habermas, 1981, p.33, 36-7). Claiming a similar shift underway, Touraine (2002, p.89-90, 94) argues that social movement analysis must be “rescued” from “economic determinism” and “objective forces,” to become centrally concerned with ‘actors’ as autonomous agents struggling over “the social use of common cultural values.”

In fact, with the spread of the Arab Uprisings and the emergence of protest movements around the world, such as the Occupy protests in the US, researchers suggested that the world is witnessing totally *new* forms of protests, without hegemonic organizations, central leadership or party apparatuses (Žižek, 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2011; Badiou, 2011; Bayat, 2013). Many of the contemporary movements, like the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, are indeed different from the working-class movements that dominated before the 1980s (Harvey, 2005, p.199). Yet, these movements’ organizational forms tend to be “fragmented, rudderless, and lacking coherent organization” as they avoid ‘avant-gardism’ and refuse to take the form of a political party, preferring instead to engage in “inclusionary politics” and to remain embedded in the “nitty-gritty of daily life and struggle” (Harvey, 2005, p.199-200). However, Bayat (2013, p.47-8) cautions that ‘confident appraisals’ and talks about ‘newness’ tells us little about the actual value and nature of these political upheavals, or the difficulties

and paradoxes of these ‘new political times.’ In fact, while the “omnipresence of class has burst out in resurgent working-class protests on a scale that compels attention,” the concept of ‘class’ has often been “supplanted by linguistically driven theories of identity and grand gestures to multitudes,” epitomized by NSMs theories (McNally, 2013, p.401).

While NSMs claim the end of class struggles and conflict over distribution, the evident persistence and recent resurgence of working-class, anti-globalization and anti-capitalist movements worldwide and the massive demonstrations holding socio-economic demands across North Africa and the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America, and other localities has starkly revealed the *continuing* salience of class struggles and the striking failures of neoliberal policies (McNally, 2013, p.401). The financial crises and failure of the economic and political system to curtail the impact of the market and interfere in advancing the material conditions of the majority resulted in growing crises in a number of countries (Stiglitz, 2012, p.18-20). Stiglitz (2012, p.6) argues that “(i)njustice motivated the Occupy Wall Streeters just as it motivated the young Tunisians of the Arab Spring.” Adherents of structural analysis have directed a host of criticism against NSMs theories, stressing the enduring salience of underlying socio-economic disparities, relations of power and class struggles. Marxian theorists are especially critical of the paradigm’s (1) claim of novelty of cultural action (Calhoun, 1993), (2) belief that class struggles have been displaced by cultural ones, and (3) ‘particularization’/ ‘fragmentation’ of contentious action away from structural realities. Instead, a growing literature (Barker et al., 2013; Harvey, 2005; Calhoun, 1993; McNally, 2013) emphasizes the need, first, to synthesize a holistic approach to contemporary social movement analysis away from the class/culture dichotomy; second, to establish the enduring salience of structural realities underlying cultural struggles; and third, to move beyond the particular towards an encompassing analysis of social realities that is conducive to changing them.

Hence, structural analysis—rather than dichotomize class vs. cultural movements or emphasize the novelty of contemporary movements—explains the rise of distinct forms of ‘oppositional cultures’ within the systemic weakening of working-class institutions (Harvey, 2005, p.202), and “loss of the conceptual purchase of concepts like the ‘left,’ ‘socialism’ and ‘revolution’” (Hanafi and Tabar, 2003, p.211).’ In line with the above criticism, this chapter seeks to situate contemporary actors’ understanding of social struggles and power dynamics that has tended away from addressing structural realities. As Harvey (2005, p.176) argues that the “extensive oppositional culture” that neoliberalism has ‘spawned within itself’ remains tied to many of neoliberalism’s propositions, and seems incapable of escaping the neoliberal focus on the individual that has trumped any ‘democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities. More precisely, this research attempts to explore the role of neoliberalism in reshaping actors’ relationship to politics by promoting a new logic of action that tends to resuscitate neoliberalism’s fragmentary, particularizing and de-politicized logic, away from structural and material redress. Contrary to NSMs’ prevailing logic, the research reveals the enduring salience of material forces and structural realities underlying popular contentions.

C. Shifting or Fragmenting Contentions: Garbage or System?

While NSMs theories claim the end of class politics and a shift to ‘new’ cultural and ‘identity’ politics in contentious action, proponents of structural analysis reveal the *fragmentary* nature of contemporary forms of mobilizations. The contradictions between the ‘traditional’ discourse of systemic and distributional justice and the ‘new’ cultural and *lifestyle* concerns are salient in the Lebanese context at hand, where tensions between the two spirits were persistently present, marking contention in the past two years following the trash crisis.

Sidelining internal *political* and *strategic* diversity, in favor of a picture of activists as young, wired, ‘civil society,’ ‘independents,’ media’s (TV reports and newspaper articles) portrayals of the ‘*Hirak*’ tended to depict it as one monolithic entity. The general public was, thus, perplexed with the oppositional groups’ infights, expecting from them to naturally unite and agree. However, the reality was a far cry from media portrayals and public expectations. The ‘*Hirak*’ was rather an amalgam of the widest possible spectrum of political orientations, stretching from Trotskyian leftists to liberals, in addition to a number of NGOs and environmental experts. Contrary to the prevailing view, interviews with several of the central organizers additionally reveals that most of them have had past experiences within political parties that they later abandoned (e.g. Hizballah, Progressive Socialist Party), or are already members of ideological, non-establishment political parties (e.g. Iraq Baath Party, Lebanese Communist Party, The People’s Movement, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party).

Given this diversity, the protest movement epitomized in its internal contradictions the tension between *structural* approaches to crisis that advocate placing them within their macro-political context, and particular, *single-battle* approaches that focus on achieving incremental wins, yet risk fragmenting struggles away from their macro political and economical underpinnings. In the case of the protest movement, tensions exist between a reformist spirit whose adherents recurrently claim that ‘since we cannot expect the system to collapse all at once, we must instead focus on incremental demands to achieve small wins,’ and a revolutionary spirit, calling for the downfall of the sectarian regime and its political and economic structural underpinnings. These dynamics were evident among protestors in ‘*Isqat al-nizam al Taiifi*’ (downfall of the sectarian regime) protest movement in 2011, and remained strongly present in the protest movement of 2015. These currents, however, tried to reconcile their different ideological and strategic approaches towards building a common discourse and

strategy, yet the tensions led to the eventual collapse of the coordination table that brought the different groups together behind the scenes to organize the protests (Al-Zein, 2015).

The coordination attempts between the different groups within the protest movement remained fraught with the incisive debate of whether to focus solely on the ‘garbage’ to make ‘a win,’ or whether to focus on the root causes of this and other crisis, by placing it within its macro political and economic context. While ‘You Stink’ and other more liberal components were adamant at focusing only on the garbage crisis, other left-leaning groups like ‘*Badna Nhasib*,’ ‘*Al-Shaab Youreed*’ and ‘the Union of Lebanese Democratic Left’ (see **Appendix C** for details on the groups) found it impossible not to place the crisis in its larger political and structural context, also demanding, in the case of ‘*Badna Nhasib*’ accountability for state corruption in other flagrant files (e.g. electricity).

Although the tension between the two tendencies was not only reserved to these two groups, thorough content analysis of the posts of the two most media-savvy and prominent campaigns, ‘You Stink’ and ‘*Badna Nhasib*’ does reveal the predominance of the two respective spirits (see **Figure 9** and **10**). While both campaigns’ posts highlighted and reported on the shocking level of state violence and arbitrary arrests, ‘*Badna Nhasib*’ emphasis went beyond demanding solution for the garbage crisis, to other files and material or classist concerns (e.g. electricity, workers’ rights, privatization), while ‘You Stink’ remained focused on monitoring and reporting on the garbage crisis. ‘*Badna Nhasib*,’ moreover, placed larger emphasis on holding the state and politicians ‘accountable,’ as its name implies, in several files through direct legal action.

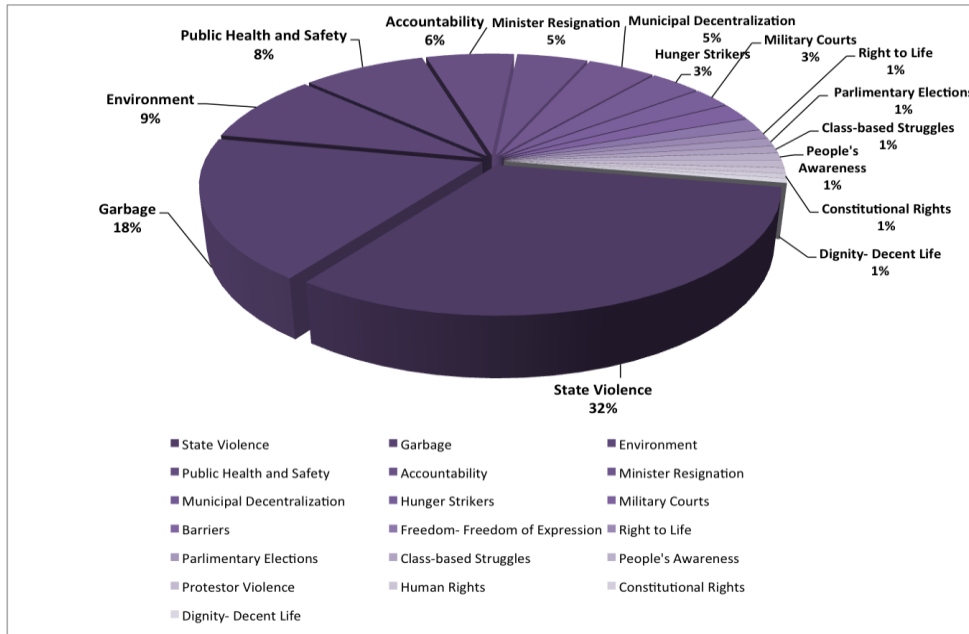


Figure 9- 'You Stink's' Distribution of Demands Coded (from 07-25-2015 till 07-25-2016)

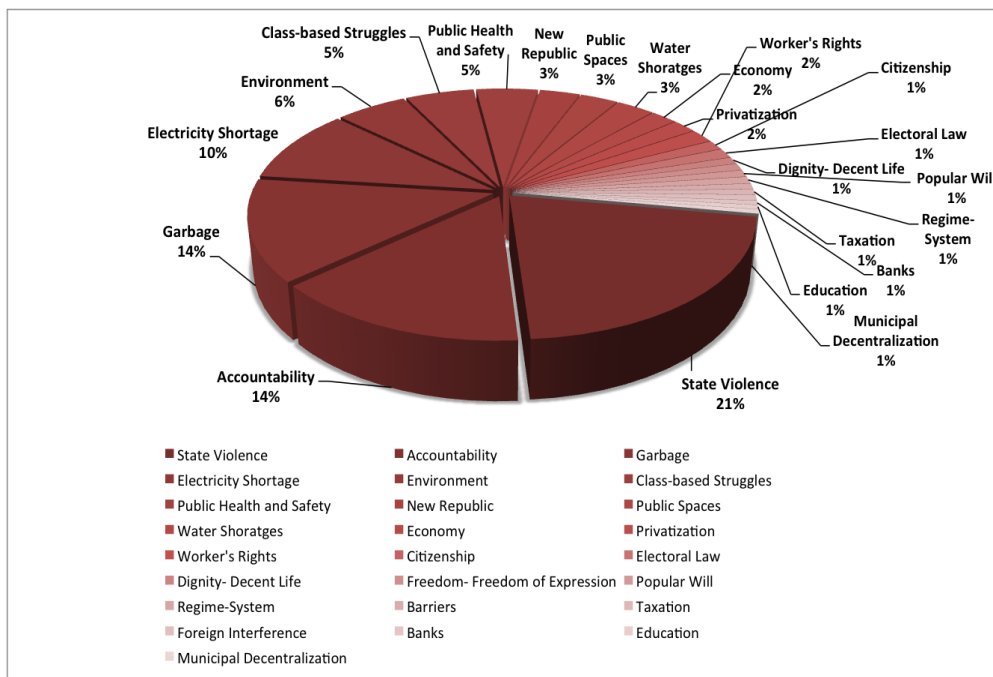


Figure 10- 'Badna Nhasib's' Distribution of Demands Coded (from 08-28-2015 till 07-25-2016)

Moreover, while 'You Stink' interviewees recurrently argued for the need to focus on the 'garbage' as the factor that brought people to the streets, an analysis of TV rushes reveals the plethora of social and economical demands raised by regular protestors interviewed randomly on air while demonstrating (Kreichati, 2017, p.45-8). The socio-economic grievances

addressed included: old tenants' housing rights, indebtedness, unemployment, health security, affordable education, electricity cuts, water-shortage, the disappeared of the war, rights of handicapped, environmental protection (ibid.). Kreichati (2017, p.77) concludes that activists' technical focus on the garbage crisis, was in dissonance with the general aura of the 'Hirak' that brought to the fore people's deep socio-economic and political discontent.

In addition to fragmenting struggles into single-battles divorced from structural or macro-realities, Harvey (2005, p.178, 199) claims that the plethora of conflicts spawned by this system has resulted in the fragmentation of struggles, trying to keep up with the many frontiers of crises and inequalities. While accumulation by the expansion of wage labor in industry and agriculture in the 1950s and 60s had given rise to an oppositional culture embedded in trade unionism and working-class political parties, "accumulation by dispossession," argues Harvey (2005, p.178, 199), "is fragmented and particular—a privatization here, an environmental degradation there, a financial crisis of indebtedness somewhere else," and therefore foments "different lines of social and political struggle." Nowhere was this more evident than in the trash crisis protests that brought to the streets people and groups carrying a whole spectrum of demands. Yet, what remained missing, as an activist from 'al-Shaab Youreed' coalition argues, was a political discourse that would link all these struggles and the multitude of demands together rather than fragment them,

"In terms of speaking about politics, and this was one of the problems, do we pressure on the subject of the garbage to create a win in it that we would build on to change, or do we pressure on the issue of the garbage but place it in its larger context? Especially that the people that came to the streets were, of course, talking about the garbage, it was very symbolic in term of humiliating people...but they, and this was very nice, also brought with them their causes, such as housing, the committee in defense of the old tenants were there, the Trade Union Coordination body were there...there were whole sectors of people who came to the streets, but there wasn't this discourse that tells them that these causes are all related to one another...The approach that we should defend all the affected groups, this discourse appears radical and scary, according to some people...." (Member of 'al-Shaab Youreed').

Instead, several interviewees emphasized the need for uniting behind a ‘single,’ ‘clear’ and ‘achievable’ demand to make a win and gain credibility. Media’s sensational and narrow focus requires this particular, *single* and *clear* framing of demands from protestors, often portraying the multitude of demands as a fundamental weakness of the movement. Even among those who believed that it is impossible to control the streets and people’s demands, the multitude of demands raised by the people, but more so by different organizers themselves was considered problematic and in need of control. Yet, those were in turn accused by other interviewees of trying to prevent people from raising certain slogans deemed irrelevant to the current stake at hand: garbage. Eventually, the trash crisis revealed that in approaching popular contention and discontent, it is impossible to control the streets and people’s grievances, yet alone address the garbage crisis without placing it within its overall political and structural context. Several activists conceded to the inability of abstracting the garbage crisis from its embeddedness in larger political contentions (e.g. electoral law reforms), or delimiting the *multitude* of grievances that exceeded the manifest ‘garbage’ crisis. Yet, while all groups conceded to the above and acknowledged the political, rather than technical, nature of the garbage crisis, their strategies and approaches remained conflicting.

D. Shifting or Fragmenting Contentions: Daily Life-style Concerns

‘*Beirut Madinati’s*’ campaign, as several interviewees have emphasized, prioritized the ‘daily,’ ‘livability’ and ‘everyday’ concerns of the people of the city. The focus on daily well-being was also evident on the campaign’s Facebook page that stated recurrently that the program’s “priority is the prospects for life” or “livability” in our city. This focus dominated discourses around demands (see **Figure 11** below) and was conceded to be a strategic focus by members themselves. Issues such as traffic congestion, public spaces and environmental health were framed as the daily concerns and struggles of the people of the city. Central organizers in a conference on urban social movement at the ‘American University of Beirut’

(AUB) under the name ‘City Debates’ (March, 2017) argued that ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ chose to focus on “politics with a *small ‘p.’*”

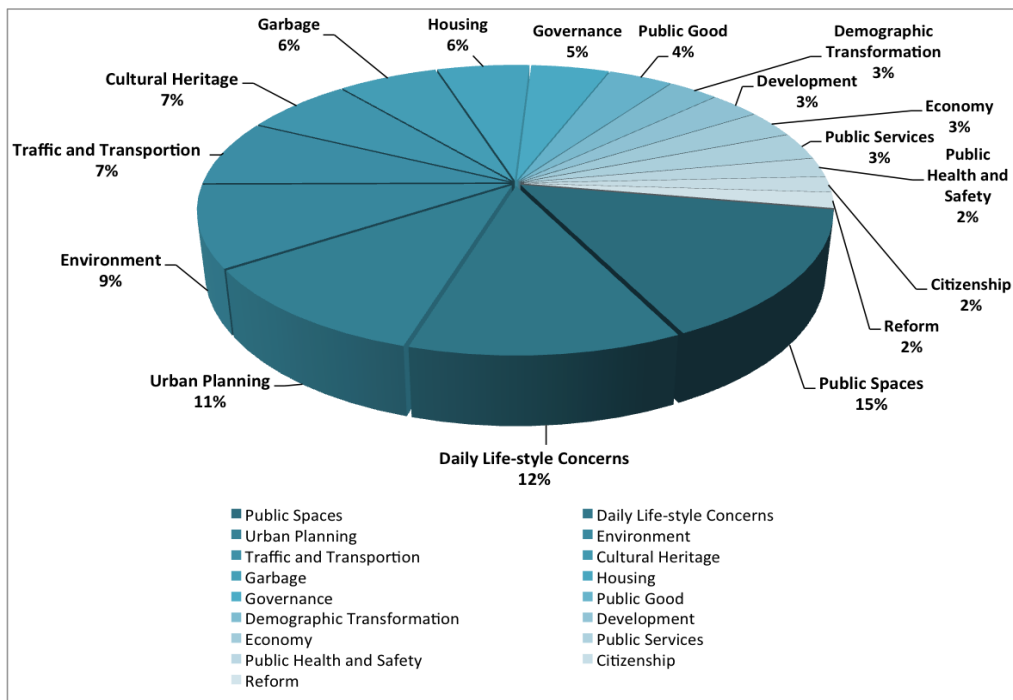


Figure 11- *'Beirut Madinati's' Distribution of Campaigning Program Coded (02/09/2016 till 01/23/2017)*

The campaign’s focus on the micro daily concerns, as well as its framing of other demands (e.g. public spaces, urban planning, environment, housing...etc.) obscured larger political contentions, material concerns and differential interests in the city, in favor of a technical and consensual framing. The announced focus on the daily-lifestyle concerns assumes a move away from classist struggles and ideological differences of the past, a characteristic assumption of ‘new social movements’ paradigm, towards a focus on the nitty-gritty aspects of daily life, presented in a consensual, de-political framing. Moreover, the focus on the micro ‘daily’ concerns framed them as the overarching, universalized priorities of ‘the people’ of the city, perceived of as a monolithic unity, ignoring the differential priorities and interests vested in the city’s reconstruction and organization. This discourse speaks to the ‘lifestyle’ concerns of the middle and upper-middle classes, excluding, for the most part, the dispossessed and vulnerable classes, with everything to lose and little to gain from

abandoning patronage and clientelistic networks that provide them with material services.

'*Beirut Madinati*' electoral campaigning posts recurrently expressed this shift away from 'the politics of the past' towards 'cultural spaces' devoid of 'traditional alignment' and centered around consensual, post-political values of 'creation, modernity and freedom,' as the below quotes reveal:

"Spotlight - #BeirutMadinati a cultural space out of traditional alignments and a place for creation, modernity and freedom" (Annahar Newspaper).

"But this time – they were run close by a grassroots organization eschewing the politics of the past" (The Newsmakers).

Finally, the campaign was approached as a 'single battle' to achieve 'a win' in the elections that would restore faith to the people and activists. The battle was lost, however, due to the structural impediments of the majoritarian law set in place. Nevertheless, as Spain's 'Podemos'⁵ experience has previously revealed, and in its leading figure's own words, 'To win an elections is not the same as winning power, far from it' (Iglesias, 2015, p.170). Hence, dichotomizing change as 'inside'/'outside,' or from 'within the state' or from 'without through 'civil society,' risks over-simplifying the complex and far-reaching relationship of state and citizens. Moreover, pursuing elections as an end in itself, risks undermining the building of coherent political projects. Hence, while focusing on the daily and local needs of the people of the city may as well be the legitimate function of municipalities, this section is particularly critical of the post-political, cultural and micro-framing of these demands that divorces them from structural impediments and power-dynamics vested in the city.

E. Particularizing Contention: Lebanese 'Sectarianism:' Disguised Classist Divisions?

The prevalent assertion and most "powerful and undeniable cliché" has been that the central divisions of Lebanese society are *sectarian* in nature (Traboulsi, 2014, p.25). This

⁵ "A party built on the political space created by the indignados" in Spain in which "millions of Spaniards...protested against the old political order from 2011 onwards" (Jones, 2016, p.8).

assertion has often been accompanied by a denial or oversight of the enduring significance of the *classist* dimension overlapping with and often prefiguring sectarian realities. Traboulsi (2014, p.25), in his work on social classes in Lebanon, reveals the strong classist divides and struggles that predicate Lebanon, arguing that changing socio-economic and structural neoliberal forces have guided the Lebanese post-war political and economical realities, promoting the rise of a ruling ‘oligarchy,’ the concomitant weakening of working class organizations and unions, and the limbo of the middle classes entrenched in cultures of consumption and indebtedness. Within such political-economic relations, sects, according to Traboulsi (2014, p.22), “act as conduits to modify the class structure,” first, through generating new economic interests or defending existing ones through their positions of political power, and second, through providing services outside the institutions of the state (e.g. charity, education, social and health services... etc.). Cammett (2014) in her book on welfare and sectarianism in Lebanon, analyzes the non-state benefits provided by sectarian political groups as part of their efforts to garner political support and loyalty. Guazzone and Pioppi (2009, p.14) argue that the neoliberal restructuring of state power has “increasingly fragmented states and society in the Arab world,” through facilitating and encouraging the permanence of sub-state confessional identities and the “privatization and/or communitarization of provisions of public goods, including security.” Studies on Arab countries have effectively demonstrated that “neo-liberal political and economical reforms do not necessarily result in the loosening of the state’s control over society” (Guazzone and Pioppi, 2009, p.5). On the contrary, in countries like Egypt and Morocco, but also Lebanon, “privatization processes have represented a chance for ruling elites to reorganize or, better, shift patronage networks towards the private sector without undermining the power of the state as the ultimate source of rent” (Guazzone and Pioppi, 2009, p.5). Guazzone and Pioppi (2009, p.8) speak of the “privatization of the state” in the Arab World, premised on “a new

model of authoritarian political regime, in which the state increasingly represents the sum of the private interests of the members of the regime and is less and less accountable to its own citizens.” Hence, rather than consider sects as pre-capitalist formations and “residues of underdevelopment,” there exists no contradiction at all between the two, since neoliberalism, with its insistence on the retreat of the state from welfare and service provisions, “happily coexists with ideologies of belonging, which foreground identities, emphasize the “right to be different” and give that right precedence over the masses’ right to equality” (Corm, 2003, in Traboulsi, p.17). The conceptualization of classes in Lebanon, however, has been largely conflated with politics as discussions over ‘who rules Lebanon’ turned away from socio-economic hardships to political and sectarian conflicts (Traboulsi, 2014, p.7). The ‘denial of the existence of class’ comes as no surprise, and can best be seen as a concealment of manifestations of privilege, inequality and exploitation by the members of a social system. The ill-defined conceptions and understandings of classes in Lebanon are, moreover, reinforced by the neoliberal, market-centered paradigm employed to study class divisions and inequality, argues Traboulsi (2014).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that class-based analysis does not strictly assume an industrial-capitalist mode of production, nor does it assume to be the single explanatory framework for hierarchical inequalities. Social orders (i.e. groups tied by blood, gender, religion, sect or ethnicity) *intersect* with class relations, yet remain governed by the class structure since this structure is the base that controls access to social resources and the social surplus (Wallerstein, 2012/2013, in Traboulsi, 2014, p.14;). Building on the above, my assumption is that, far from representing an ‘exceptional,’ or ‘atypical’ case of resilience derived from its sectarian power-sharing ‘consociational democracy’ or democracy of consensus (Lijphart, 1998), the challenges facing Lebanon are fully in line with global trends engendered by neoliberal globalization.

While an analysis of the Lebanese political economy and sectarian system reveals its accordance with the hegemonic, global neoliberal order, there exists ongoing tensions in describing, accounting for and addressing Lebanon's societal divides. Several activists approaching change in Lebanon adopt a particularistic analysis of the Lebanese society that perceives it as predicated with deep sectarian sensitivities and divides. The municipal electoral campaign, 'Beirut Madinati,' as revealed by its Facebook campaigning page and as attested by several of its members, strategically sidelined thorny scandals that involve certain political leaders and may invoke 'sectarian sensitivities' and 'fears.' Several of the activists interviewed from the 'Hirak,' similarly, argued for the need to cater or take special care of people's sectarian fears that presumably remain especially strong. According to one activist from 'al-Shaab Youred' (The People Want), a radical leftist group that has participated in the protests, in reference to electoral campaigning,

"One needs to deal in a relative manner with the context of the country, that is different from region to region, and cater to certain regions' particularities to be able to actually carry forward a radical social, political and cultural battle during elections" (Member of 'al-Shaab Youred')

The regime in Lebanon, according to another activist from 'Badna Nhasib' is sectarian in nature and composed of 'multiple heads,' and hence one cannot call for the over-throw of the regime all at once,

"The regime in Lebanon is not composed of one head but of multiple heads, because it is a sectarian regime. Unlike Tunis for example which had one head, in Lebanon it's not clear, you have multiples heads: Nabih Berri behind the political Shiia, Hariri the head behind the political Sunnis...." (Central Member of 'Badna Nhasib').

This conceptualization, however, overlooks the unitary nature of the regime as a whole system of security apparatuses, authority, economy and culture (Traboulsi, 2014). Sidelining thorny scandals and infringements that are associated with political leaders (e.g. Hariri's policies or interests in the city; Hizballah's illegal arms) was seen as a necessary step to avoid alienating political party constituents, who remain, assumedly, tied to their sectarian

leader. According to an activist from ‘Beirut Madinati,’ although the program could have been more explicit, yet, the strategies chosen by the campaign were good since,

“it is actually difficult for people to distance themselves from what they are already used to, and the same fears are still there: that we are going down to elections against Hariri....”
(Volunteer Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

However, rather than openly challenging the effects of Hariri’s policies—whose impacts were largely detrimental, especially for Sunni Beirutis who suffered forced displacement and the loss of their homes and businesses in the city center following its privatization and management by ‘Solidere’ (al-Shoufi, 2015), the campaign, instead, gave in to the sectarian reality rather than openly challenge its interests.

In catering for sectarian sensitivities, these approaches risk resuscitating the interests of what appears to be a sectarian system, but is in fact a cartel of business/political *men* with preferential interests in the established political and economical system. A member of ‘*Mouwatinoun Mouwatinat fi dawla*’ (Citizens Within a State)—a left-leaning group founded by the previous labor minister and economic specialist Charbel Nahas that also ran for Beirut’s municipal elections as an alternative list to political parties’ coalition list—impersonates ‘Beirut Madinati’s’ contradictory position,

“We are not coming to fight with political leaders, we don’t mention their names....not only do we not mention their names, we don’t mention anything that may point to them. For instance, they haven’t heard of anything called ‘Solidere’....We want to show that we are ‘proper’ to pick up some of those who are disgusted, and not upset the stupid followers of the political leaders” (Member of ‘*Mouwatinoun Mouwatinat fi dawla*’).

This approach reflects an elitist perception of sectarian political allegiances as primordial or backward ties, with followers popularly described (by media or activists) as ‘sheep’ following blindly behind their sectarian leader (Mahmoud, 2016). This popular perception overlooks the rationality, agency and calculative capabilities of followers tied to the benefit and material provisions provided through clientelistic and patronage networks.

Moreover, while members of the campaign defend the approach ‘of not naming’ or even mentioning thorny infringements tied to political leaders as ‘successful,’ an analysis of

electoral results does not necessarily affirm this view. Haidar’s (2017, p.66) study of official electoral results reveals that ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ was only able to garner 19% of Sunni votes, compared to the establishment ‘Beirutis List’—a coalition of all the establishment parties—that received 53% of the votes (see **Figure 6** below).

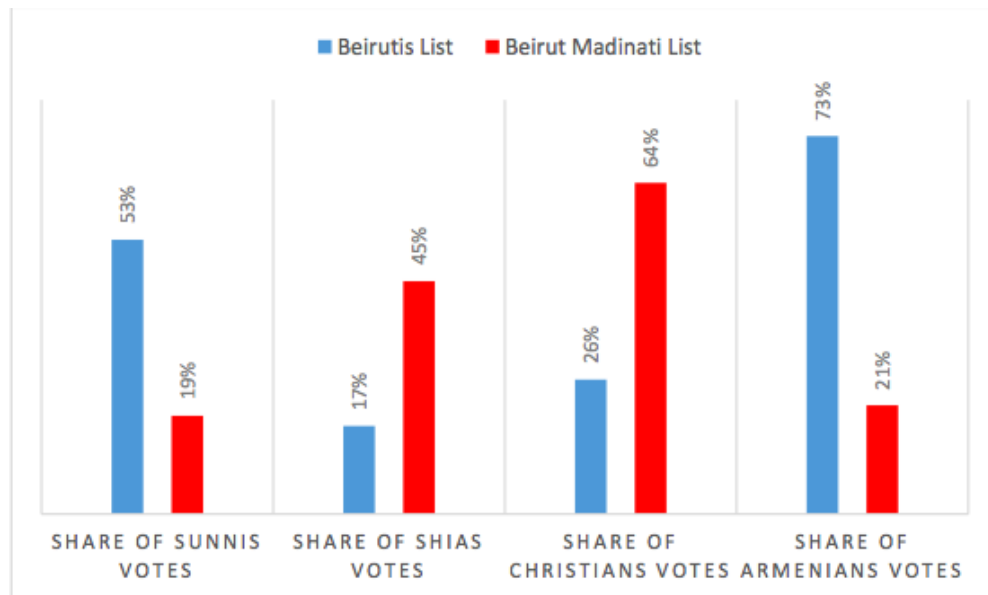


Figure 6- *The Distribution of Voting Shares Among Beirut's Sects (Haidar, 2017, p.67)*⁶

‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ however, was able to garner the largest support (53%), exceeding that received by the opponent lists (37%), in district 1 composed predominantly of Christians (Haidar, 2017, p.65) (see **Figure 7** below). The results, however, might have been situational. As conceded by several member of the campaign, votes casted for ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ in Christian areas were predominantly ‘oppositional’ or ‘protest votes,’ given the particular dismay among the Free Patriotic Movement’s supporters. Moreover, the low voter turnout, which remained stable at 21%, similar to the past municipal election in 2010, suggests that the electorate remains doubtful that change is possible and ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s

⁶ The three other lists, ‘Citizens in a State List’ (composed of four members, headed by former minister Charbel Nahas), ‘Beirut List’ (composed of 19 members, headed by Imad Al Wazzan) and the ‘Al Beirut List’ (composed of nine members, headed by Adnan Al Hakim and backed by the Najjada party) obtained 5%, 2%, and 1% of the votes respectively (Haidar, 2017, p.61).

communication strategy and presence as an alternative list working for change has not necessarily appealed to larger segments of voters (Haidar, 2017, p.69-70).

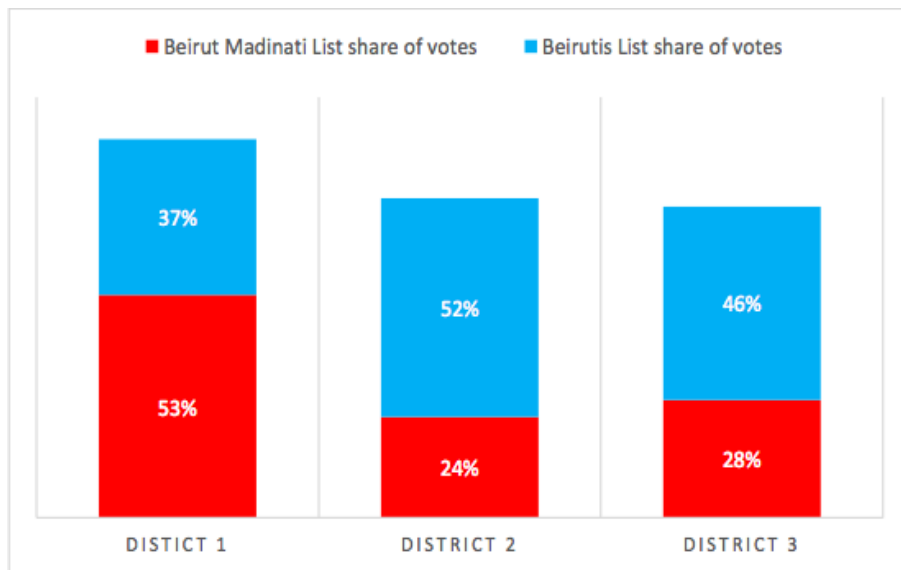


Figure 7- *The Distribution of Voting Shares Among Beirut's Districts (Haidar, 2017, p.65)*

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to mention that relative to the 2010 round of municipal elections, the establishment list’s support has drop from 75% in 2010 to 46% in 2016, while its share of Sunni votes dropped only from 69% to 53% in 2016 (see **Figure 8** below) (Haidar, 2017, p.66).

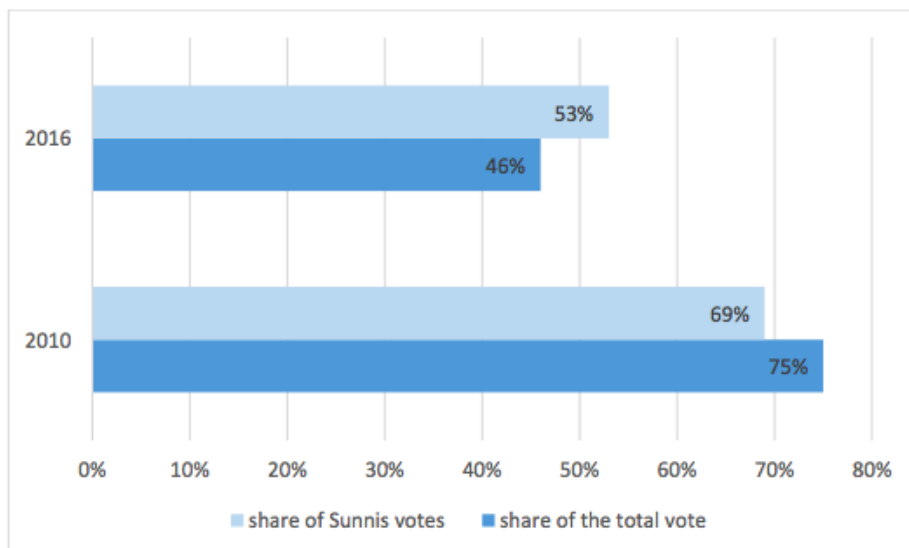


Figure 8- *Establishment List Share of Sunni Votes (Haidar, 2017, p.67)*

Given the absence of a statistical data of the class position of voters for ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ an analysis of the results beyond sect and gender remains absent. However,

members of the campaign have particularly conceded to its limited appeal beyond the middle and upper-middle classes, stating that the campaign fell short of appealing to the lower classes who remain tied to clientelistic and patronage networks. In the words of one of ‘Beirut Madinati’s’ members,

“Bluntly, the bottom line is NO, we weren’t able to reach all classes. But there are several reasons for this: one of these reasons is that this movement was not present before, it is not rooted. It is difficult to say that, but when one goes down to Mar Michael, for example, a place we consider as familiar, one discovers the extent of poverty, pain and craziness that is happening there. We don’t have previous relationships with the people, and able to reach out to different classes like political parties with years of experience and organization do. The campaign had to start from within its own circle and then expand” (Central Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

In the words of another member of the campaign in charge of the campaign’s communication strategy,

“It’s ok to appeal to middle classes...when you are a new group you need to expand within your own circle first...it’s a geometrical matter... then you have to reach as much as you can...but the expansion is normal” (Central Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Hence, while the strategic enigma was focused on appealing to the broadest mass of voters by avoiding enticing ‘sectarian sensitivities,’ an approach that figures above reveal had only limited impact, the more pressing dimension that requires attention remains: how can an alternative campaign rather convincingly appeal to the material and livelihood concerns of the marginalized and vulnerable people of the city? While ‘Beirut Madinati’ has effectively appealed to the daily lifestyle and cultural concerns of the middle and upper-middle classes, a closer attention to the material concerns and needs of the people of lower classes—conceived of as calculating and rational subject, rather than backward subject confined within primordial identities—remained marginal, despite some efforts, during the electoral campaign.

A. Individualizing Contention: Individualization of ‘Corruption’

Oppositional ‘alternative’ campaigns have directly a host of criticism against the political class over the past two years since the garbage crisis. A content analysis of their

posts reveals their primary framing of the political class as predominantly ‘corrupt’ and ‘ineffective’ (see **Figures 12, 13 & 14**). The major denomination of the protests, ‘all means all’ in reference to politicians’ as ‘corrupt,’ as explained by a ‘You Stink’ organizer, “is not a rejection of all the political class but a rejection of each one of them as corrupt.” This slogan reflects the general assumption that the problem resides with ‘individual,’ ‘inapt’ and ‘corrupt’ politicians, displacing attention from the systemic ails that reproduce differential interests, social injustice and wealth accumulation. ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ with its predominantly positive approach had significantly less critical references to the political class, yet ‘corruption’ remained a central frame (see **Figure 14** below).

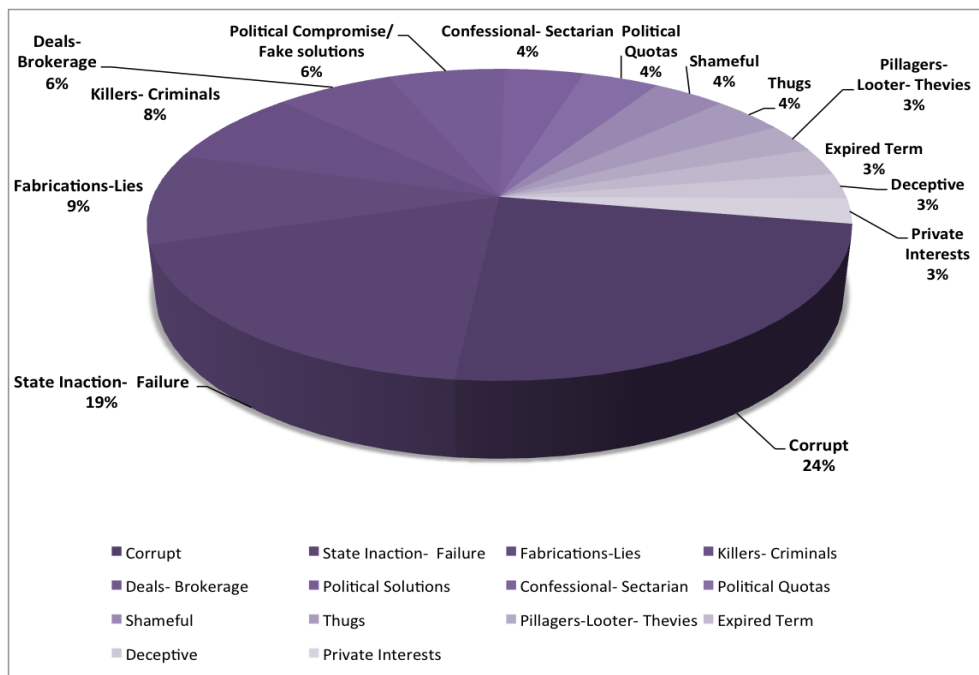


Figure 12- ‘You Stink’ Views on Politics Coded (from 07-25-2015 till 07-25-2016)

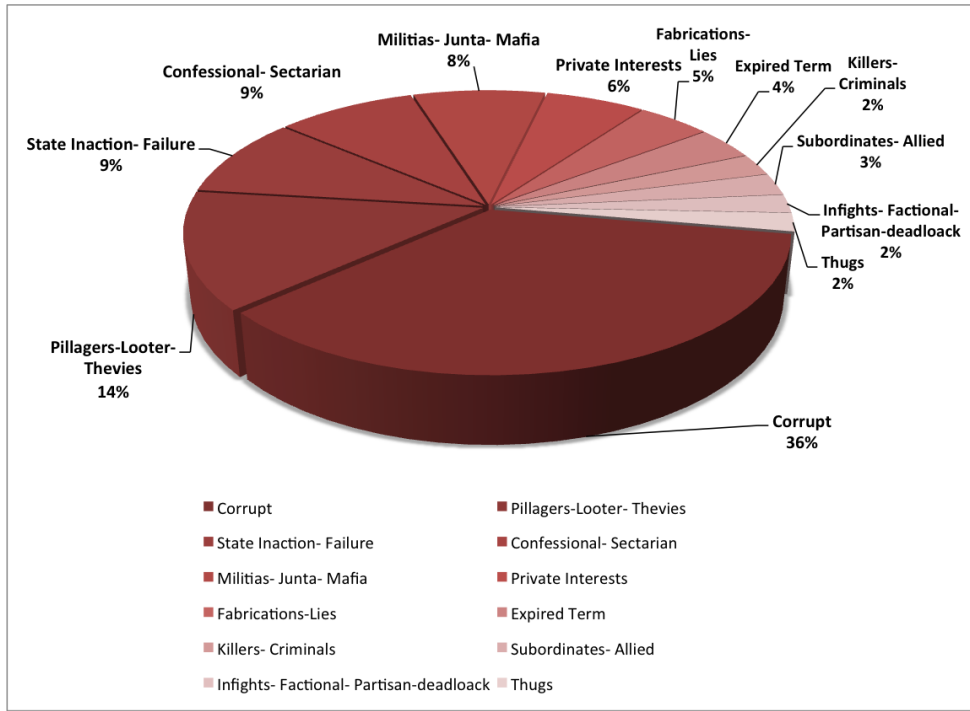


Figure 13- 'Badna Nhasib' Views on Politics Coded (from 08-28-2015 till 07-25-2016)

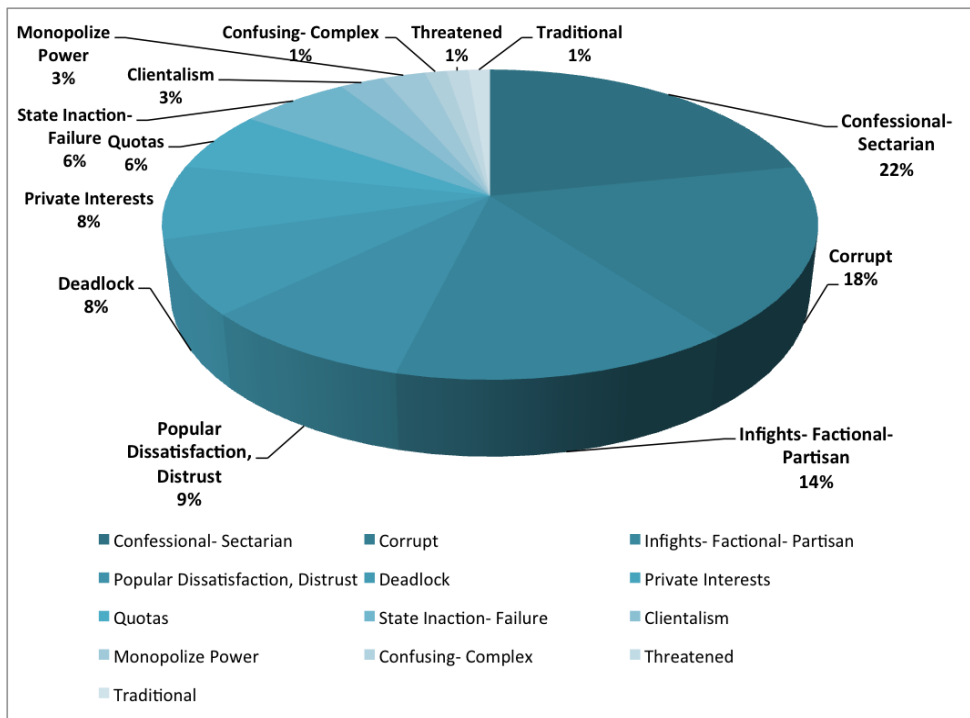


Figure 14- 'Beirut Madinati' Views on Politics Coded (02/09/2016 till 01/23/2017)

Nevertheless, 'Beirut Madinati's' municipal campaign, as well as 'Saba'a's' parliamentary campaign are guided by the need to change the political group ('*al-takam al siyasi*') controlling the state. According to such a perception, changing *individually* "bad"

politicians through elections, and replacing them with “new blood” becomes pivotal (Majed, 2017).

Corruption and ‘economic concentration’ are increasingly understood as a breach of competition laws and an inept governmental bureaucracy, rather than theorized as the inevitable results of the neoliberal economy (Traboulsi, 2014, p.8). While international organization go to length in working to fight corruption, their definition of corruption as the product of “exploiting public office for the purpose of private gains” focuses attention only to those ‘bribe-taking’ and corrupt bureaucrats, without realizing that the worst form of corruption, is practiced by rulers exploiting their position of power to amass private gains, argues Traboulsi (2014, p.8). These later are approached in a fight to curb ‘wastage’ and advance a fight against corruption and for ‘transparency,’ that serves best the interests of the ‘World Bank’ in reducing government centralization and expenditure on public services, handing those to the supposedly more efficient private sector or NGOs. While public discontent against state-sponsored accumulation and systemic violations of public interests has become evident in the past two years, the tendency to absolve the state as ‘ineffective’ and individual politicians as ‘corrupt’ overlooks the systemic nature of accumulation of wealth by dispossession. This oversight is best epitomized in the current assumption that to realize change, actors must replace the existing corrupt politicians with ‘morally superior,’ ‘youthful’ and ‘knowledgeable’ ones, and seek ‘change from within’ the state. Yet, as Majed (2017) argues, regardless of ‘qualifications and qualities’ of these candidates, the Lebanese people are likely to vote for their traditional leader, not because they are ‘naïve,’ ‘unaware’ or ‘blind followers,’ but on the contrary, because they are “very aware of the structure of the Lebanese system.” This neoliberal state, as argued in the first two sections of this chapter, is compelled to ‘retreat’ from providing services as a result of privatization and/or liberalization, while its power elites have been granted ongoing control over the economy and

increasing chances for wealth accumulation and distribution through informal patronage networks (Guazzone & Pioppi, 2009, p.6). Thus, as Majed (2017) argues, in a system where “power is not within the state, change cannot come from inside the state.”

B. Conclusion

This chapter argues in line with proponents of structural analysis, that the heightened popularity of the ‘new social movements’ paradigm across academic circles and advocacy groups has “played down the bigger picture of global power relations and the shifting character of socio-economic policy,” resulting in a “narrowing of the understanding of movements and their place in large-scale processes of social change” (Barker et al., 2013, p.5). In analyzing the collective actions that developed in the past two years (2015-2017), I reveal the limitations of single battles and electoral programs divorced from the larger structural context, and from socio-economic realities and struggles. These limitations have been evident in the protest movement’s tendency towards a technical and particular focus on ‘garbage’ as a single battle divorced from its social, political and economic context, and also present in ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ predominantly micro-, lifestyle and cultural approach to deeply entrenched structural inequalities and interest-based power-relations vested in the city.

Calling against social movement fragmentation and the reduction of struggles to cultural, identitarian or *lifestyle* concerns in the abstract, a dialectic analysis re-affirms the importance of bringing back structure and agency into a dialogue of mutual influence (Barker et al., 2013). This chapter serves to underline the continual salience of classist and material concerns and structural forces underlying the ‘new oppositional culture’s’ fragmentary, particularizing and shifting contentions. Nevertheless, as argued by Harvey (2005, p.205), “cultural wars”—“however misguided some of them may have been—cannot be sloughed off as some unwelcome distraction from class politics.” Instead, these should be seen as a step towards political resistance informed by a “moral repugnance already in motion against the

alienations, anomie, exclusions, marginalization, and environmental degradations produced through the practices of neoliberalization.”

Having discussed the theoretical underpinning of the *shift* in fields of contention away from classist and structural understanding, the next chapter analysis the organizational choices and strategies prevalent in the new social movements and campaigning field. The development of organizational strategies, I argue, similarly cannot be understood without placing it within the neoliberal global order that encourages certain modalities of organization and discourse (e.g. NGOs), while systemically weakening traditional others (e.g. unions). The next chapter will move to analyzing organizational challenges facing ‘new social movements’ and campaigns that depart from formal organizational frameworks, in relation to their repositioning of ‘the political’ and political participation.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICS OF ORGANIZATION & MARKETING OF PROTEST

“The Liberation of joining the personal with the political may represent a radical challenge to the hegemony of state domination, but it may also result in an ‘anti-politics of identity’—an apolitical withdrawal from politics” (Kauffman, 1990 in Pichardo, 1997, p.414).

A. Introduction

With the global eruption of protest movements without central leadership, party apparatuses and clear organization, theorists suggest that the world is witnessing totally ‘new’ forms of organization and political identities. Confident appraisals and grand gestures to novelty, however, tell us little about the antinomies of organization and the many challenges facing our political times (Bayat, 2013, p.47-8). The world-wide adoption of social networking sites (SNSs)⁷ for ‘online activism’ and organization in contemporary movements is believed to accord very well with the “requisite features of new social movements: non-hierarchical, open protocols, open communication,” self-generated information and identities, and lack of former membership and means of organizing (Fenton, 2006, p.225). Examining recent modes of campaigning and organization, I contend the extent to which they may be ‘politically effective and sustained’ (Bennett *et al.*, 2012, p.760; Tilly, 2004; Gladwell, 2010).

Building on the above, this chapter is particularly interested in analyzing the organizational forms and strategies adopted by nascent movements and collective actions that depart from the traditional frameworks of existing political parties, perceived of as corrupt

⁷ SNSs refer to ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211, in Borah, 2016, p.326).

and illegitimate. Studying the campaigns' organizational structures provides significant insights into NSMs' promulgated organizational structures (e.g. horizontal, leaderless, volunteer-based) and campaigning strategies (e.g. personalized, participatory). To this end, this chapter follows the development of collective actions in the past two years (2015-2017), starting from the protest movement in summer 2015, to the municipal electoral campaign, '*Beirut Madinati*,' and finally, to the creation of the political party '*Sabaa*.' The discussion combines theoretical literature, with substantial data collected from a thorough content analysis of the collective actions' respective campaigning pages, and around thirty interviews with their members and organizers. The next section provides a theoretical and conceptual background, and is followed by sections that analyze the central tenants upon which such movements arise and the organizational challenges involved, in relation to 'the political.'

B. 'Hybrid,' Social Media-Mediated Action

The Internet has been playing, for over a decade, an important role in the mobilization and advocacy of Lebanese activists, trying to fashion for themselves a "new kind of politics outside the dominant political factors (8-14 March blocs)" (Aouragh, 2016b, p.125). Encouraged already by Lebanon's rich culture of journalism, the Lebanese blogosphere became a key 'instrument' or 'means' to challenge conventional politics and seek an 'alternative' space to the sectarian rival blocs (Aouragh, 2016, p.132, 135-6). Following the eruption of the Arab Uprisings in 2011, "pre-existing waves of discontent (re)-mobilized thousands of Lebanese" who came to the streets chanting '*Al Shàb Yurid Isqat al-Nizam al-Ta'ifi*' (The People Demand the Downfall of the Sectarian System) (Aouragh, 2016, p.126). Although the movement of 2011 only succeeded in mobilizing and extending the inner, tight network of activists, these networks were soon afterwards capitalized upon in initiatives and small attempts at building organizations that remained marginal, as argued by several of the interviewed participants. The very same networks, however, reignited the protest movements

in 2015 following the garbage crisis. Besides the far-reaching, imminent and tangible nature of the garbage crisis that in itself served to mobilize large numbers of people, Facebook played a pivotal role in calling and mobilizing people through the dissemination of images, videos and regular updates on the crisis. Multiple Facebook pages and hashtags soon mushroomed mobilizing people to the streets, the most media-savvy and prominent of which was the ‘You Stink’ campaign, followed by ‘*Badna Nhasib.*’

In place of ‘brick and mortar’ key organizations, protests across the globe increasingly either sideline organizations and leadership roles to the periphery where coordination takes place through networks behind the scenes, while representing the movement as a people’s movement (e.g. PPF London protests⁸), or are organized predominantly through social networking and technology platforms, as in the case of the ‘Indignados’ in Spain and the ‘Occupy’ protests in the United States (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p.742, 754). Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p.755) refer to the former as “hybrid networks,” combining background organizational coordination with personalized engagement through social media. The trash crisis protests conform to a large extent to this model of hybrid organization. The movement brought together a number of individuals, campaigns, groups and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Offre-Joie, LADE, The Legal Agenda, Lebanese Eco-movement), coordinating and organizing the protests both behind the scenes and through social media, while representing the movement as a people’s movement. These groups varied from leftist membership-based organizations (e.g. ‘Union of Lebanese Democratic Left,’ ‘The Socialist Forum’) and members of ‘archaic’ ideological political parties (Iraqi Baath Party, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, Lebanese Communist Party, The People’s Movement) that came

⁸ ‘Put People First’ (PPF) organized the 28 March London mobilization in response to the G20’s meeting in 2 April 2009. PPF is “a UK civil society coalition of more than 160 development NGOs, trade unions, and environmental groups (e.g. Oxfam, Catholic Overseas Development Agency, and Friends of the Earth)” (Bennet and Segerberg, 2011, p.777).

together under novel group hashtags (e.g. ‘*Al Shaab Youreed*,’ ‘*Jeye el Teghyeer*,’ ‘*Badna Nhasib*’), to newly formed, social-media mediated campaigns, without constituency but with loose networks of volunteers (e.g. ‘You Stink’). Members of ‘archaic’ ideological political parties created their own ‘campaigns’ and hashtags, preferring to keep their ‘collective identities’ obscured, in favor of more inclusivity, neutrality and new media appeal. The ‘Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth’ (the youth organization of The Lebanese Communist Party), for example, rallied behind the hashtag ‘*Jeye el Teghyeer*’ to gain greater media-exposure, mimicking the general aura of the protest, as argued by several of its close affiliates. However, following the internal elections and reforms within the Lebanese Communist Party,⁹ the youth organization re-evaluated its decision to run under an illusive hashtag, deciding to uphold its identity in future movements, as argued by interviewed affiliates. The unprecedented large-scale mushrooming of hashtags and illusive campaigns represents an intriguing case study for examining the emergence of ‘alternative’ organizational forms and resultant reconfiguration of political activism.

SNSs’ online digital tools have become indispensable repertoires for social movement organizations (SMOs), and are often perceived as the “greatest dialogic move” for electoral campaigns (Camaj and Santana, 2015, p.325). Literature has, indeed, drawn extensively on the benefits of the Internet in disseminating information and promoting the eruption of social movements. Internet platforms were, in fact, significant to the eruption and diffusion of the Arab Uprisings through the dissemination of videos that sparked the initial momentum of revolutions (e.g. videos of Khaled Said’s murder in Egypt, and the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi in Tunis), and crucial for the creation of counter-hegemonic and relatively anonymous spaces for deliberation and communication (Aouragh, 2016a, p.507;

⁹ In the period following the protests and preceding the municipal elections, the ‘Lebanese Communist Party’ witnessed important reforms with the election of Hanna Gharib, a popular unionist that led the protests of public sector teachers and employees, as secretary general—and also saw the ascent of the protests’ youthful figures to leading posts within the Party itself.

Rane et al., 2012; Melki, 2014, p.6). In studying the Palestinian online resistance, Aouragh (2008) concedes to the many enabling features of the Internet in offering a counter-hegemonic platform for Palestinians to narrate their plight, defy repression and media misrepresentation, and overcome fragmentation by building solidarity networks. Moreover, as argued by several interviewees, SNS's help create alternative and relatively autonomous platforms for mobilization and self-representation, away from mass media's personalization and sensational narrow focus that often shifts attention from the actual demands. As stated by a central organizer in 'You Stink,'

"...this regime is so rooted, its rooted in the economy, in politics, in society, in media that magnifies someone but suddenly destroys him. That is why we were very keen on making our own media...our Facebook page had 220,000 people and our videos reached half a million people sometimes...a million people. Because we believed if we didn't have this, the media would have burnt us and created its own story of us as it pleases, which is still happening everyday...every time we do something, a story that we want to send out on the media, it doesn't go out, they change it as suits their interests. (...) They all attacked me on TV...and made me a leader without me wanting to be one" (Central Organizer in 'You Stink').

The use of social media in electoral campaigning is, similarly, heralded for its potential as a space for "political deliberation" and "open and active political dialogue" (Camaj and Santana, 2015, p.325). Although not intended as political tools, political groups and politicians in Western countries were quick to notice the advantages of these sites (Borah, 2015, p.2015). SNSs truly stormed the political scene with Obama's 2008 presidential campaign in which online advocacy was integral to the campaign's strategy to raise money, but more importantly, to engage and empower everyday people and volunteers to participate and contribute to the campaign (Aaker and Chang, 2010, p.16). It is argued that, the success of Obama's campaign is primarily linked to its strategic use of social media in enabling ordinary individuals' participation, involvement and grassroots efforts (ibid.). Yet, literature on the use of social media is divided between those who claim that these repertoires encourage totally new (non-'traditional') forms of organization, and those who remain skeptical of the proclaimed revolutionizing potential of e-tactics and their long-term impact.

While there is no doubt in the importance of the internet as an alternative and relatively anonymous repertoire for mobilization and dissemination of counter-hegemonic content, heightened optimism in social media's potential to revolutionize politics, democratize, and promote a "deliberative virtual public sphere" (Wright, 2012, p.245), or forgo traditional organizational requirements is much challenged. Aouragh (2008, p.122) is skeptical of overstatements of the potential of the Internet, referring, instead, to "online elements of resistance as tactical shifts rather than radical/strategic breaks." For instance, it is often argued that the cutting off of the Internet in Egypt didn't dismantle the revolution at all but rather reinforced it (Aouragh, 2016a, p.510; Rane et al., 2012, p.103). Moreover, referring to the Arab Uprisings as 'Facebook revolutions' risks sidelining the socio-economic and political coronaries of the Uprisings in favor of an orientalist, modernizing lens, depicting the protestors 'as young, urban and wired' and the Arab Uprisings as new, social-media-mediated forms of organization away from old-fashioned hierarchical, class-based and recalcitrant ideologies or political parties (Aouragh, 2016a, p. 125, 503). However, the reality in the region is a far cry from the picture presented by "horizontal," "autonomous," and "immaterial" paradigms, (Aouragh, 2016b, p.127), or from "the utopia of liberation technology" (Mejias, 2012).

While making successful use of the online tools as communication and mobilization platforms, the three forms of collective action under study, nevertheless, made particular use of traditional media for communication and campaigning with the general public. The live uninterrupted TV coverage of the '*Hirak's*' major demonstrations played a key role in propagating the movement and its messages to the public. '*Beirut Madinati,*' in turn, posted a significant number of links (34% of the posts) to local and international newspaper articles written about the campaign (see **Figure 18** below). This aspect, combined with the large numbers of TV appearances that were announced on its page, reveals the campaign's ongoing

reliance on traditional media.

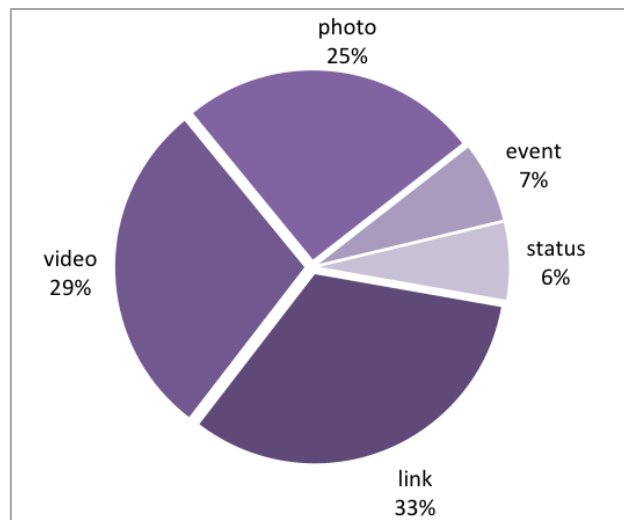


Figure 18- *The Distribution of 'Beirut Madinati's' Post Types*

This conclusion reached through content analysis was confirmed by one of the core organizer who conceded to the importance of 'Facebook' in reaching out to volunteers and non-voters, yet emphasized the ongoing significance of traditional media in actually *convincing* the voters, where Facebook alone "is not enough." Moreover, internal studies, according to the core member, revealed that the majority of the people had, in fact, heard of the campaign through traditional media (TV, newspapers). Similarly, in its launching phase, 'Sabaa' paid a ludicrous amount of money, \$62,000 dollars according to its official website (www.sabaa.org), for billboards across the country. Indeed, the campaign seems to invest less in Facebook campaigning (given its low Facebook admin posting activity), yet remains markedly interactive in responding to users' comments. In this sense, social media plays a significant, yet non-exclusive, role in mobilizing people, relaying information and framing the campaign or cause. Given the above, this chapter focuses on 'Facebook' campaigning as one aspect, among others, that constitute the backbone of 'alternative' organizational strategies and tools.

C. 'Participatory' & 'Personalized' Politics of Self-expression

Compared to past tools of mobilization, social media has advanced a whole set of new tools for action that are significantly less demanding and resource intensive. Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p.739) argue that communication and networks have become integral parts of organizational structures with the emergence of a new "logic of action," dubbed "*connective* action," associated with media networks and "*personalized* content sharing," that is purportedly different from traditional forms of "collective action" that rely heavily upon resource mobilization and *collective* identity. Personalized politics is understood "as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles and grievances" and an individualized "propensity to develop flexible political identifications based on personal lifestyles" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p.743-4). Manifestations of personalization and personalized politics may vary from relatively autonomous action (e.g. climate change and personal carbon footprints; fashion choices, fair trade practices...etc.) to highly coordinated action involving multiple or single issues (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011, p.771), as I will reveal below. Yet, while *flexibly* mobilizing wide and large segments of the population through 'non-demanding,' 'non-ideological,' 'inclusive' and 'personalized' polemics, the need to transcend from reactionary protests to concrete action through 'effective,' 'lasting' and 'powerful' bodies capable of challenging the established political class has become a global dilemma for emerging grassroots protests and campaigns.

An analysis of the subsequent collective actions and initiatives that developed over the past two years (2015-2017) reveals their overarching adoption of participatory and personalized approaches in online Facebook campaigning as well as offline mobilizations and out reach. Online participation serves to encourage and empower regular people to contribute, identify and engage in the campaign through promoting individual and personalized acts of online sharing, requesting donations, and calling on people to volunteer.

‘You Stink’ Facebook page invited people repeatedly to share content and participate in sharing content, as some posts below reveal:

“Add the invitation to Saturday to your profile pictures on Facebook and Twitter via this link, help us spread the word to the largest possible number of people” (04-08-2015).

“Dear friends, since we are all part of this movement we all share the responsibility of promoting it. We are now in the midst of preparing a video and so ask you to record yourself or loved ones stating your reason for participating in Saturday’s protest. The video must begin with the phrase “I am joining Saturday’s protest because (state your reason). Make it short make it sweet and send it via WhatsApp to the following number...”(05-08-2015).

“(...) we call on all friends to shoot videos of slow murder of the citizen and the nature which is carried out by the government through randomly unloading trucks of garbage. #You_Stink #WeWatchYou” (06-08-2015).

Also significant were the page’s attempts to engage people, especially the Lebanese diaspora, transnationally. Those were encouraged to share picture of themselves endorsing the campaign or organize small demonstrations in their respective countries.

“To all Lebanese diaspora please take a picture from the streets of the cities you are currently in and say: ‘You Stink to the extant that your smell reached... and mention the country you are in. Please send to our inbox to share.” (04-08-2015).

The affordances of social media have allowed the campaign to reach out to transnational audiences and communicate their message to broad segments of people. Besides empowering ordinary people to contribute and identify with the campaign, engaging the diaspora and international community serves in enlarging the campaign’s legitimacy and credibility both locally and internationally. In fact, ‘You Stink’s’ Facebook page was able to garner a total of 216, 365 likes distributed over 45 countries worldwide (see **Figure 15** below).¹⁰

¹⁰ Based on data extracted with ‘Netvizz’ Facebook application and plotted using ‘Tableau’ software.

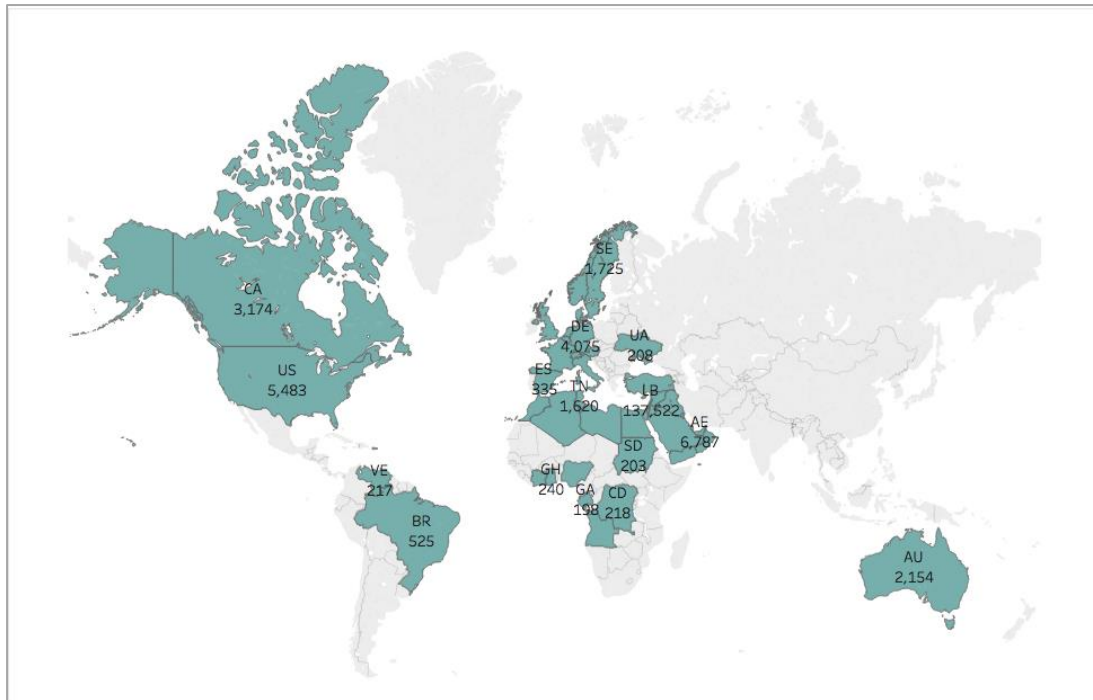


Figure 15- *'You Stink's' International Facebook Fan Base (until 22-01-2017)*

Moreover, a content analysis of 'You Stink's' mobilization posts reveals a significant number of posts on behalf of supporters and endorsers, such as artists and celebrities, university faculties, hospital staff, associations and media reporters. By seeking wide personalized participation the campaign is likely to gain for itself greater credibility and popularity, by marketing the cause as a people's cause, and gaining popular legitimacy from celebrity and institutional endorsements.

For the sake of drawing a parallel, *'Badna Nhasib'* garnered less followers on its Facebook page: a total of 42,663 likes from 17 countries worldwide (see **Figure 16** below). Compared to 'You Stink' campaign, *'Badna Nhasib'* only made limited use of a participatory approach to mobilization, calling only on very few occasions for online participation. The campaign, moreover, did not request any form of donation or funding. However, it did call on few occasions through its Page for people to volunteer.

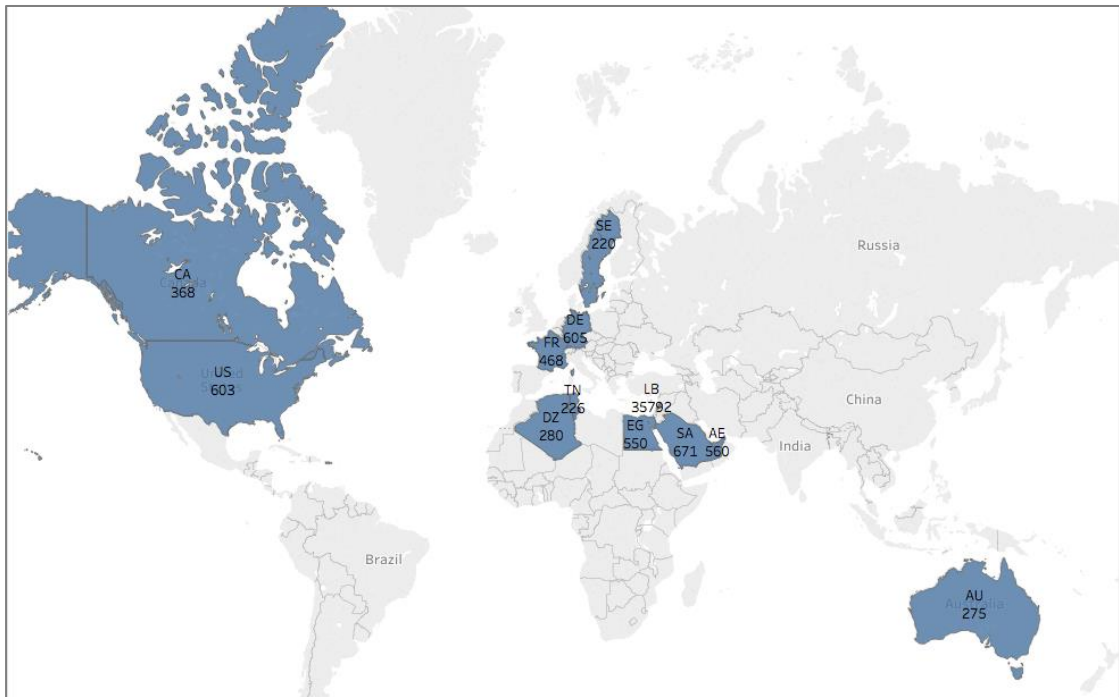


Figure 16- *'Badna Nhasib' International Fan Base (data until 22-01-2017)*

The analysis of *'Beirut Madinati'*'s Facebook page also reveals the campaign's marked strategic use of social media in enabling ordinary individuals' participation, grassroots efforts and personalized identification. The campaign departed from conventional political participation—often limited in contemporary democracies to elections that people increasingly perceive as futile—placing instead a large value on people's direct participation in the campaign itself as well as in decision-making and collective problem solving. In pursuit of the latter aim, the campaign held a large number of public meetings to reach out to different neighborhoods of Beirut and listen to their demands and needs. *'Beirut Madinati'* also sought to engage people in the electoral campaign itself, presenting it repeatedly as “volunteer-based,” and calling upon people to volunteer, donate and participate, reiterating that: “#BeirutMadinati is your campaign. It only grows stronger with your support.” Moreover, posts repeatedly claimed to provide a “platform” “which focuses solely on people's concerns and everyday life issues” and “a *space* for citizens to perform the role of

savior,” and “join the public discussion” “to express their opinions, needs, demands, pains and hopes,” reflecting its deeply participatory nature. In fact, posts recurrently encouraged user participation on social media, requesting people to contribute with their opinions and suggestions for the campaign.

“How do you see your city Beirut? What would you change in Beirut?”

“What is Beirut missing? #BeirutMadinati”

“Share your story by emailing us at social@beirutmadinati.com”

“Think with us! Where Should Beirut Madinati go from here? Contribute with your ideas here or via email: social@beirutmadinati.com.”

The campaign also frequently posted user’s creative adaptation and personalization of its logo and themes. The page, similarly, posted a large number endorsements from public figures and prominent cultural venues, serving to increase its legitimacy and relay its positive reception among prominent venues and figures. Finally, towards the end of the municipal campaign, the page posted a number of ‘thank you messages’ to the hundreds of volunteers and people of Beirut for their backing and support. An analysis of ‘*Beirut Madinati’s*’ Facebook campaign page, therefore, reveals its marked reliance on participatory, personalized approaches to political action that encourage people’s belonging and identification with the newly formed campaign.

‘*Sabaa*,’ similarly, frames itself recurrently as a “modern” and “non-traditional” “political platform.” As argued by one of its founders the party seeks to employ a ‘participatory,’ ‘non-traditional’ approach in setting its program, following consultations and open meetings with the people of different regions as well as with its own members. Moreover, the party itself is run by an electronic application, where different members can interact, invite their friend from outside ‘*Sabaa*’ and form ‘clubs,’ communicate through video conferencing and share documents. “This will allow us to mobilize people much faster and create a sense of belonging,” as explained by one of its founders.

The evolution of collective action in the past two years has been towards adopting more inclusive and online participatory approaches, as revealed above. In this new form of

organizational logic, the “capacity to maximize connectivity and interaction is ‘the’ political act...operating on the basis of the participation of all citizens rather than the hierarchical model of traditional politics” (Fenton, 2006, p.230). In this sense, post-institutional organization and cyber-activism represent a more inclusive and accommodating space for struggles than the alienating formal political system and its organizations. However, while some authors argue that Web 2.0 applications¹¹ have changed the breadth and role of traditional media’s “passive audience” towards active participation and direct communication, and encouraged the formation of an “alternative public sphere” (Katz-Kimchi *et al.*, 2015, p. 249, 252), others argue that the “personalization of political action,” “presents organizations with a set of fundamental challenges involving potential trade-offs between flexibility and effectiveness” (Bennett *et al.*, 2011, p.770). Authors have argued that online activism promotes ‘lazy politics,’ ‘clicktivism’ and ‘slacktivism’ (Aouragh, 2016b, p.132) in that “it makes people feel good but does very little” (Fenton, 2006, p.235).

“Controlled by a few, consumed by most” (Mejias, 2009, p.611), the use of the Internet is, moreover, often problematic at the democratic level, given the control of a small number of admins with little to no accountability and representativeness (Fenton, 2006, p.227). Aouragh (2016a, p.498) argues that while the prevailing “consensus-style activism” may seem more acceptable and even morally superior, it fails to ensure accountability. “What is at stake in the privatization of public space advanced by social network services is not just the control over the channels of information (which are indeed more evenly distributed than before), but over the control of the modes for transforming information into action,” argues Mejias (2009, p.609). Contributing to a critical theory of networks, Mejias (2009, p.603, 607) critiques the modern “epistemological exclusivity of the node,” the normalization of a

¹¹ The term refers to the changes in the way Web pages are designed and used to place greater emphasis on ‘user-generated content’ by transforming from a passive source of information to a collaborative and participatory platform. Social media (e.g. Facebook, Flickr) and video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube) are the best examples (Devedžić, V., Gašević, D., 2009; 2010).

“privatized sociality” and public space, and the “commodification of social life.” Hence, rather than promote, as assumed, ‘publics’ who actively contribute to public discourse, given their supposed “democratic potential,” SNSs may produce ‘masses’ by promoting “never-ending self-expression” that doesn’t translate into action. In other words, while contributing to advancing a participatory and inclusive conceptualization of political action, this form of ‘personalized politics,’ resuscitated individualized and fleeting commitments, as I argue in the next section.

D. ‘Easy,’ yet Transient Commitments

In addition to encouraging “self-motivated sharing,” participation and self-expression, *connective* action forgoes “collective identity” and “collective action frames,” for broader and looser public engagement, using “easy-to-personalize action themes” (e.g. ‘we are the 99 per cent’) (Bennett et al., 2012, p. 739, 742, 753). In place of hierarchical brokering organizations and demanding collective action frames that are resource intensive and may pose challenges in terms of getting individuals to contribute, “social networking involves co-production and co-distribution,” easily-personalized action frames, loosely tied networks of personal expression and self-validated sharing of ideas, lifestyle concerns and actions (Bennett *et al.*, 2012, p.752-3).

DNA emerges at a period when late modern democracies are facing a historic shift, most notably in youth’s disengagement from parties, broad reform movements, and ideologies (Bennett *et al.*, 2012, p.759). Bennett *et al.* (2012, p.743, 751-2) attributes the rise of “digitally networked actions” (DNA) to “structural fragmentation and individualization,” whereby people’s increased individualization makes them structurally or psychologically unavailable to engage in ‘collective action’ and thus, makes resource mobilization a costly endeavor of diminishing returns. Yet, a growing literature is critical of the narrative that posits weak/strong ties in terms of cost/benefit calculations only, claiming that this view

misses out factors like “solidarity, camaraderie, unity and of course necessity” (Aouragh, 2016a, p.491). The increased conceptualization of cyber space and ‘new social movements’ as more ‘accessible,’ ‘inclusive’, and ‘accommodating’ for social struggles, than the ‘alienating’ national or ideological political system, has encouraged the emergence of “new types of political subjects more at home outside formal political systems” (Sassen, 2005, in Fenton, 2006, p.230). In fact, a number of interviewees have expressed repulsion from traditional forms of organization and demanding ideological commitments, arguing for the need to create “pragmatic,” “positive,” “inclusive,” “non-ideological” and *low-commitment* alternatives that do not “frame the individual” or demand large sacrifices, or time-consuming efforts. Yet, as Tarrow (1998 in Fenton, 2006, p.236) argues, the speed of social movement response, as its short term focus and rapidly shifting issues, replaces coherent ideologies and is not conducive to “long standing commitments or deeply held loyalties, but a following that is also fleeting and momentary.” These new forms of organizations, I argue, reinforce and accord very well with neoliberalism’s structural fragmentation, de-politicization and individualization.

From the choice of the name and logo to the necessity of focusing solely on the garbage, ‘You Stink’ campaign succeeded in mobilizing a broad segment of people around a demand that everyone can identify with very easily: garbage, and easy-to-personalize slogans such as ‘You Stink’ and ‘all means all’ in reference to the political class, which became the major denominations of the protests. In an attempt to realize small, incremental wins, these groups, having by nature no constituency, rely on mobilizing large segments of the population around an ‘easy-to-personalize’ demand, and hence often remain clear of ‘ideological’ or loaded political discourses. Furthermore, as argued by a scholar in civil society activism in Lebanon, “people mobilized under these campaigns are very well aware of the limits of their commitment to them, and hence would not be willing to grant them to

speak in their names on subjects larger than that single specific demand.” In this sense, the challenge facing these forms of social movement organizations remains one of compromise between *flexibility* and *efficiency*. The more inclusive and participatory these campaigns need to be, the less efficient they may become in carrying forward substantial and lasting change, given the need to de-limited demands in a consensual framing, that if granted, would lose the campaign its purpose.

‘*Beirut Madinati*’ was similarly built on the need to be the most flexible and participatory possible to insure winning and reduce risk of alienating potential voters. The campaign, as several interviewees have mentioned, prioritized the ‘daily concerns’ of the people of the city, such as traffic, green spaces, housing...etc. as was evident on the campaign’s Facebook page and stated by its members. ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ focus on daily *well-being* and everyday concerns provided a consensual veil and inclusive appeal, while overshadowing contentious politics and differential interests vested in shaping and reconstructing the city in its current form. In other words, in an attempt to attract the broadest possible popular support, ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ consensual and ‘easy-to personalize’ approach kept the city’s open wounds untended, in favor of a cosmetic make-over that everyone ‘agrees’ the victimized city is in need of.

Despite adopting ‘easy-to-personalize’ frames, campaigns remain markedly predicated with fleeting commitments, short-levity and transience. In one interviewee’s words, ‘*Beirut Madinati*,

“was created as an electoral campaign, not as a party, not as a political movement...and the aim was to end it on May 8th this was the aim...after 8 May we will move to something else (...). That's it. But what happened exceeded us, and we felt responsibility to transform into something else. I don't agree, I believe we should have packed our stuff and moved out. In the end, everything should remain within its own size and capacity” (Member of ‘*Beirut Madinati*’).

Organizers of the protest movement expressed the same concerns and sense of responsibility when surprising numbers of people came to the streets. These concerns raise

important questions on the challenges facing transient campaigns and movements and their accountability and responsibility towards their supporters, in whom they risk instigating recurrent disappointments. Indeed, people themselves may not be convinced enough to sacrifice or contribute to transient campaigns and a “passing message received via online platforms” (Aouragh, 2016a, p.491). Several of the interviewed organizers, themselves, acknowledge the long-term commitments and timely sacrifices needed to build political and sustainable organizations. Central organizers within ‘Beirut Madinati’ expressed their preference for short-term campaigns and commitments:

“Its not an inability, we have created political platforms several times, the problem is none of us is free full-time for politics, we need to work a lot in this country to make a living. When you are not fully free for political work it becomes your part-time job, and it's impossible...it's really hard...you really have to strive a lot... that's why the people who were recruited are people who during their course of life fight for these things so it's easier for them to keep up, for them it was a normal thing” (Central Organizer in ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Another interviewee and central actor also argued,

“Beirut Madinati’ was a campaign, had we won we would have continued through the people who have won, if not the campaign would have ended. But the results that came out... For example, if they would have told me come join a party or a movement called ‘Beirut Madinati’ I wouldn’t, couldn’t.... This is a campaign, it ends...we all have work and are short on time. This is on the personal level, but I believe my colleagues feel the same way. But when we saw the amount of trust we created, we felt a great sense of responsibility for this initiative to continue, we no longer have a choice. You created something you cannot turn off. If you turn it off it would be destructive...” (Central Organizer in ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Cognizant of the limitations and drawbacks of seasonal campaigning, ‘Sabaa’ represented a development in this regards, as argued by one of its core founders, through its creation of a “lasting” and “serious” political party that is “here to stay.” Yet, similar to its precedents, joining or leaving the party is made easy with “psychological barriers for joining or leaving reduced to minimum,” as explicitly claimed by one of its founders. Instead of “swearing” yourself into the party or holding “a membership card,” ‘Sabaa’ offers its members access to an application that members could remove very easily if they decide to leave the party, or simply send an email that they are not interested anymore. Here, ideology and commitment are deemed as recalcitrant things of the past. As described by one of

‘*Sabaa*’s’ founders:

“I don't want to be part of a closed circle... ‘Sabaa’ is just a tool...it's just a platform. There is no loyalty to Sabaa there is only loyalty to Lebanon. ‘Sabaa’ is just a tool in your hands if you want be in public life then you use this platform that is only what it is” (One of ‘Sabaa’s’ Founders)

Instead, the interviewee continues,

“I want to be a free thinking person. I want a platform which has specific values specific guidelines but I also don't want to frame the minds of people who join this party of how they should think this is not for 2017 anymore. (...) The aim is to organize thousands of people...”

Yet, rather than attract lasting commitments based on strong political vision, ideology, passion and commitment, ‘*Sabaa*,’ as argued by a close follower of the initiative, risks creating a platform only for people hungry for political office.

Hence, while traditional forms of ‘collective action’ mostly require more difficult choices, demanding sacrifices, “self-challenging social identities,” and common group or ideological identification, digitally-mediated ‘*connective action*’ significantly decrease personal participation costs, while emphasizing “inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression” (Bannett *et al.*, 2012, p.744, 748). Yet, while promoting less demanding commitments and easy-to-personalize frames, organizations face challenges pertaining to sustainability and effectiveness. Indeed, I argue that rather than assumedly ‘re-strengthening’ political participation and organized action by making it less demanding, these new adaptations of political parties actual cater to increased individualization and commodification of commitments, as the next sections further reveals. Not only are new organizational forms predicated with non-commitment and transience, but their organizational structures and decision-making processes also put to test their supposed novelty, leaderlessness and horizontality.

E. Leaderless or Elite-centered?

A growing critical literature on contemporary movements highlights the continual

salience of organizational dynamics, leadership roles, and strategic mobilization in shaping and directing movements that are otherwise seen as leaderless and non-hierarchical people's movements or 'Facebook revolutions' (Noakes *et al.*, 2005, p.7; Poell *et al.*, 2016). Authors increasingly challenge the idea that social-media mediated mobilization and communication are neutral and independent of leadership influence (Poell *et al.*, 2016). Admins or "centrally positioned online actors" play an important role in strategically shaping how collective action communication and mobilization unfold (Poell *et al.*, 2016, p.1009). In fact, activists' mobilization tactics and strategies are often not spontaneous, but carefully planned, pre-mediated offline and developed over the years through national and transnational activist networks (Poell *et al.*, 2016, p.996). Literature has, indeed, revealed that even in those movements that seemed or proclaim to be the most horizontal, leaderless and 'disorganized,' as the Egyptian or 'Occupy' protests have often been perceived to be, evitable element of organization were involved and have later developed and helped sustain these movements (Schaumberg, 2013; Poell *et al.*, 2016; Kerton, 2012). Although the protest movement of 2015 in Lebanon may, similarly, appear unorganized, a significant amount of thought and inter- and intra-group debates were actually taking place behind the scenes and in coordination meetings in an attempt to define and direct the movement. In fact, while a growing literature proclaims the Internet has forgone the need for traditional organization and paved the way for leaderless, participatory and non-hierarchical movements, this research reveals the enduring prevalence of economic and social capital in directing a movement.

By their very nature, the newly formed campaigns lack both constituency and representativeness, yet proclaimed themselves the superior movers and shakers of the streets, and those to whom the task of directing and shaping the movement falls. In fact, one of the most recurrent issues raised by interviewees across circles is the high level of 'ego' displayed by a number of individual activists. This problem is not unique to the case at hand, but in

fact, predicates 'hybrid' and online mediated social movements worldwide, that characteristically lack both representational legitimacy and accountability through democratic organizational and decision-making processes. For instance, in a study of the emergence of the 'Occupy Wall Street' (OWS) movement, Kerton (2012, p.302) reveals how the Egyptian revolution was strategically and tactically approached by 'Adbusters,' a Canadian anti-consumerism group of professional activists, to frame the OWS movement based on the group's self-assigned "superior" position to decide how best to emulate and "replicate" the Egyptian successes (e.g. reiterating a specific demand similar to Mubarak must go). Acting as a group of "professional activists" with networks and mainstream press recognition and cooperation, 'Adbusters' took for itself the superior position of knowledge to define the legitimate speech, the nature of the demands, and the 'branding' of the movement. This case is highly indicative of the effects of "who does the speaking" and their "active superiority" in shaping discourses and meanings for the masses, and 'policing' the direction of the movement, while excluding others and limiting the "realm of the possible" (Kerton, 2012, p.304-5).

These dynamics predicate new forms of organization worldwide, as Lebanon's recent cycles of collective organization similarly reveals. The criteria for inclusion or exclusion from the coordination meetings of the protest movement in Lebanon were inherently tied to actors' positionality within the tight networks of activism. As one member of the 'AUB Secular Club,' that has participated in the protests, puts it:

"Going into the backstage of organization is built more on personal relations and who knows who and meets who and tells him to come to the meeting than on characteristics and representation" (Member of the 'AUB Secular Club').

Hence, through their 'aesthetic practice,' Kerton (2012, p.307) argues, following Ranciere, campaigns may transform 'politics' to 'policing' in working to reorder and condition "the

distribution of the sensible” for their own ends. In other words, the task of shaping and defining the nature of any movement often falls to those with higher social and educational resources (Fenton, 2006, p.235). This became evident to central activists thinking back retrospectively to their role in organizing the protests. A central organizer from ‘You Stink’ conceded,

“I was one of those who believed that the people did not go down to the streets because of the arrests or for ‘You Stink.’ They went down to the streets because they are really disgusted (and fed up) from this situation and we have no right to proclaim ourselves as leaders of these people (...). What we learned is that this street is not for us, we are not entitled to say that we represent everyone...we represent ourselves” (Central Organizer from ‘You Stink’).

Yet, ‘we represent ourselves,’ also entails we lack any responsibility or *accountability* towards this movement or the people in whom we may have instigated recurrent frustrations and disappointments. In fact, while new organizational fixes appear to reject the traditional organizational frameworks of political parties that they claim ‘delimit’ and ‘frame’ the individual, proclaiming to represent liberal democratic characteristics of ‘openness’ and ‘leaderlessness’ they nevertheless, lack accountability, constituency and internal democratic mechanisms. As described astutely by one interviewee, not only do these structures lack ‘walls,’ but they also have no internal mechanisms, such as elevators or stairs for internal mobility (see **Figure 17** below). Instead, these organizations are only composed of columns, on the very top of which is a small, closed room in which a limited number of people monopolize decision-making and prevent others from joining in. Meanwhile, a whole body of volunteers, sacrificing their time and efforts for a cause they believe in, may be exploited without having any right or opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes. Hence, rather than provide for more participation, freedom and inclusivity, these forms of organizations risk becoming more exclusionary, un-representational and un-democratic than their traditional organizational counterparts.

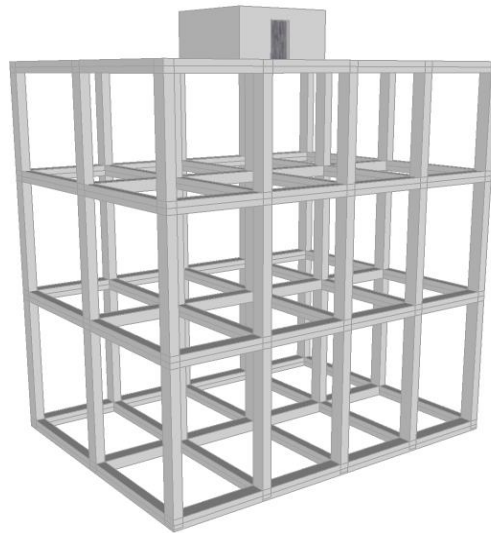


Figure 17- Organizational Structure Sketch

Similarly, although ‘Beirut Madinati’ has been perceived of by some of its members as a marked development and departure from an ‘oppositional movement limited to protestation and opposition,’ the campaign’s electoral and post-electoral organization remains fraught with similar organizational challenges to those it hopes to overcome. As argued by more than one of its central members, despite the creation of internal organizational mechanism, decision-making processes and bylaws, the electoral campaign’s organization remained predicated by the control of a small group of people and core founders to whom major decisions and internal deliberations were reserved. Even though this small circle did not pose itself as a leadership or create from itself public figures, it, nevertheless, held all the major responsibilities and strategizing decisions. Hence, although these figures did not intend to pose themselves as public leaders, they, nonetheless, held and owned the campaign, to the extent that their internal contradictions and differences started posing threats to the campaign itself. Moreover, in terms of decision-making processes, the quest for greater efficiency often came at the expense of ensuring democratic and participatory mechanisms. As argued by one member,

“When insuring greater efficiency and less participation and information disclosure becomes a ‘modus operandi,’ you will no longer have a ‘movement.’ Instead, you only have three to four people deliberating within their closed circle, while the rest are occupied with small, tedious tasks” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

The absence of a solid organizational structure and membership commitments, eventually led to the movements’ slow decline following the end of its electoral campaign, especially so with the rise of conflicting tendencies on ‘what to do next?’, and despite new efforts to re-invigorate it. Following the end of its electoral campaign, ‘Beirut Madinati’ voted for a collegiate body of seven members whose task is to ‘coordinate’ (and not ‘lead’) the campaign, as argued by one of its members, employing a bottom-up approach that grants executive powers to smaller task-forces and working groups, elected to carry-out particular tasks. As described by one member of the collegiate body,

“All decisions and activities are decided at the bottom and taken up just for review and coordination. This is really revolutionary. It is bottom-up in that sense... we reversed the structure... we only coordinate. This is challenging it's not easy it's not easy at all it makes you much slower, less efficient and requires more time and discussion. In my opinion, this is an outstanding structure that will be a role model for future movements” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’'s collegiate body).

However, not all members seem to agree as problems in leadership have remained. As described by one member,

“Beirut Madinati was an electoral machine and in this machine you have 5-6 on top. It was an electoral machine and when it started expanding in its decision making it led to destruction, not destroyed but non-functional or in deadlock... There was an urgency for people to stay, but when this urgency ended... so we invented seven people and these seven aren't able to agree, its too centralized, the people aren't enthusiastic anymore. So we open it up... but we are suffering” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Besides the control of a small number of elites, ‘alternative’ electoral campaigns have unknowingly been promoting ‘a new form of leadership,’ in which the campaign or ‘brand’ replicates the idea of the ‘zaim’ (leader) by financing, controlling and choosing the candidates, as was the case with ‘Beirut Madinati’ and also currently endemic of ‘Saba.’ The campaign or brand takes upon itself the superior position to choose and manage the candidates, as its expositional public face. Leadership in democratic platforms, however, as

argued by one interviewee, is understood to imply constituency and influence. The leader is the individual able to garner the most votes and support from the constituency. In this sense, the campaigns or brands risk undermining representational and legitimate leadership, in favor of its self-assigned superior position to choose and control who represents the people. As argued by a candidate from ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’

“Instead of discouraging leadership, we should be encouraging more leadership in life... that there are people able to inspire others, able to speak, and give speeches, build relationships, invest time and effort and their life and be responsible for their groups and organizations... We should encourage not personal leadership but democratic leadership” (Candidate for ‘*Beirut Madinati*’).

‘*Sabaa*’ was more cognizant to the importance of building “new leadership” and providing a democratic platform for members to join and become part of the leadership, as expressed in its website and by two of its members. The whole concept of ‘*Sabaa*,’ as reiterated by one of its founders, is built on the idea that the people who designed it “didn’t design it to lead it themselves,” as is the case with ‘traditional’ parties in Lebanon. As one of the founders put it,

“Today the most sensitive positions are not handled by the people who came with the idea. We were able to kill our egos because our project is to really make this platform happen, it's not that we want to handle it...we don't want to handle it...and within one year we will have general elections where the people who came up with the idea might actually not all be there. So this is unconventional” (One of The Founders of ‘*Sabaa*’).

However, this emerging political party also risks suffering from similar predicaments. By becoming a ‘tool’ for candidacy selection, control and financing, emerging campaigns and political alternatives risk reproducing a new form of leadership and control, that lacks accountability, constituency and legitimacy. Moreover, as argued by a close observer of the initiative, financed predominantly from one main founder, Jad Dagher, a businessmen and previous member of the ‘Lebanese Phalanges Party,’ ‘*Sabaa*’ risks falling into a new form of ‘*informal*’ leadership that finances and thus controls the party, yet is at the same time non-

elected and non-accountable. In this sense, ‘informal’ leadership ends up being more dangerous than its formal, elected counterpart within traditional political parties.

F. The ‘Branding’ of Movements: Campaigns and Start-ups

The tools of protest and mobilization have developed significantly with the rise of extra-institutional and informal organizational frameworks, increasingly reliant upon the affordances of SNSs and their potential as marketing platforms. With annual profits of USD 3.7 billion in 2015, Facebook is, in fact, the world’s 188th largest transnational corporation (Fuchs, 2016, p.2), and along with Alphabet Inc. (a conglomeration that includes Google and YouTube), the world’s largest advertising agency (Fuchs, 2016, p.2). In the words of an active member of the ‘Union of Lebanese Democratic Left’ and ‘Communist Party,’

“I’ve been fighting for causes and present in the squares since 1997. Since then, there has been a marked development on the level of the tools used for struggles. Imagine today what excites people, before the content, is the appearance...not exactly that, but when we sit and meet to work on a new campaign, all we do is put all our efforts to come up with something like what ‘You Stink’ came up with. (...) The main factor is to attract people psychologically, to give them something they feel they belong to, by identifying with the name at the first instant when they hear something attractive. Only later do you think of a way to convey your discourse. (...) Some people consider that they have achieved success. But a name without content, soon afterwards dies...and it died I believe. Whatever is born quickly, dies quickly” (Member of the ‘Union of Lebanese Democratic Left’ and ‘Communist Party’).

This has become particularly evident with the emergence of ‘digital activism,’ promoting a new conceptualization of citizenship that is individualized, commercialized and depoliticized, rather than collective, political and contentious. As stated by the same activist, “the real danger resides in transforming from a ‘citizen’ to a ‘digital citizen’ and from an ‘activist’ into a ‘digital activist.’”

The page, argue Poell *et al.* (2016, p.1004), indeed, needs to be understood as a “marketing instrument,” or a “brand.” Contrary to “collective action frames,” ‘branding’ is built on “commercial brand management techniques,” characterized by “indeterminacy, openness or potential” (ibid.). ‘Branding,’ in this sense, creates a dynamic platform that actively engages users and demands their participation and input, channeling those, as in

marketing, into ‘feedback loops’ that ‘pre-structure’ and ‘anticipate’ user actions and meanings (Poell et al., 2016, p.1010). In contrast to traditional ‘collective leaders,’ Della Ratta & Valeriani (2012) name online top admins ‘connective leaders,’ since they mainly link people to information, using their ‘marketing skills’ to direct social movement frames (Poell et al., 2016, p.996-7). Hence, rather than direct, command, and proclaim in the traditional sense, ‘connective leaders’ rely upon online ‘communication streams,’ participation and horizontal networks. Moreover, unlike traditional leaders who usually represent prominent figures, ‘connective leaders’ usually present themselves as the ‘collectivities’ and ‘publics’ to secure the inclusivity of the movement (Poell et al., 2016), and distance it from ideological and political associations. Hence, while the affordances of social media have allowed movements and campaigns with low resources and constituency to expand exponentially and rapidly, they have also promoted a ‘new logic of action’ increasingly premised upon commercial marketing appeal, rather than on lasting, ideological commitments.

A growing literature criticizes the conceptual dominance of ‘non-ideological’/’networked politics’ in theorizing ‘online activism’ (Aouragh, 2016 a, b; Meijas, 2009). Recent literature has increasingly been critical of “the limits of a participatory culture in the context of capitalism and consumerism,” and the commercial nature and heightened personalization of social networking sites (SNSs) (Meijas, 2009, p.605-7). Critical social media literature argues that “transformations regarding the availability and usage of communication and information has always had political implications,” and is often in line with new stages of capitalist development (Aouragh, 2016a, p.487-8). Talks of ‘newness,’ therefore, often overlook SNSs’ historical development and organizational requirements (Kerton, 2010; Poell et al., 2016).

1. The Marketing of Protest

'You Stinks' epitomized the new media-mediated marketing of protest in its marked use of "stunts" and "branding" technics, as attested by several of its organizers. Organizers claimed to have made special use of their expertise in 'branding,' 'advocacy' and campaigning in developing 'You Stink' as a "brand." In addition to the name and logo that were designed to be "brand catchy," as argued by several of its central members, the campaign relied heavily, on social media to disseminate "stunts" that could build momentum, market the cause, and mobilize people to the streets. In the words of one of its organizers,

'We did more than 20 stunts and they were fascinating and that was part of the brand that's why this brand was stronger than any other brand. (...) This is what distinguished us a little from movements of the past and politically we were very specific. (...) We decided to be smart about it. All other groups, they did one thing these past two years, either demonstrations or sit-ins. We broke this way of telling our story, so we decided to make our story and what distinguished us were the stunts. We were the first people to think of something like bringing a catapult to the demonstration...it didn't work but its symbolism...it was all over TV stations. We were the first to bring 5000 ping-pong balls with faces of ministers and parliamentarians on them and make them drag to the government. We were the first to create a parody video of the Ministry of Tourism that reached CNN the second day and that gave attention to the cause a thousand time more than a thousand demonstrators coming to the streets.'

Organizers repeatedly attested to the importance of media stunts and symbolic stand in igniting the movement in its decline, and in raising the reach of the page over half a million (and even a million), defending accusations from other groups for their political naivety with the huge reach and mobilization capacity of the campaign. However, the continual focus on creating 'a show' may risk holding the campaign hostage to seeking media attention, rather than focusing on developing coherent strategies and effective plans of action. Hence, while serving in mobilizing large segments of people through inclusive and participatory techniques, these tools, built upon commercial 'branding' and communicative techniques increasingly value the packaging and appearance far more than the actual content.

A growing critical literature forgoes a study of the 'kind of opportunities' provided by SNSs in favor of exploring instead the 'kind of markets' in which SNSs operate and hence in which 'digital activism' is increasingly spawned (Mejias, 2009, p.607). To start with, critics

claim that the “relationship between new media technologies and social/political mobilization is a specifically modern phenomenon, contemporaneous with and responding to dominant capitalist communications” (Fenton, 2006, p.225), arguing that the “ICT (information and communication technology) sector is at the heart of neoliberal globalization, if not its life-line” (Aouragh, 2016a, p.499). Hence, moving away from an alternatively evolutionary or revolutionary conception of the Internet (Mansell, 2004, p.101), a growing literature criticizes the ‘techno-fetishistic ideology’ (Fuchs, 2017, p.3) informing contemporary research. Instead, critical social media theories call for a rejection of ‘technological reductionism’ that overlooks ‘necessary material-political explanations’ and “the disempowering materiality of technology” (Aouragh, 2016a, p.483). Neoliberal platforms and tools for action, hence, may risk de-politicizing, commercializing and individualizing protest by transforming them into a ‘virtual’ realm of marketable goods.

2. Start-ups & Aversion to Risk

In discussing ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ several of its members used a similar rhetoric, claiming that the campaign was approached with a strategic emphasis on “clever” marketing and “focused” communication. The campaign, as described by one member, was not only there to make a good score or record a position, but was adamant at winning. Therefore, ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ was approached similar to a “*start-up*” business, diligent on propagating a suitable *packaging* that sells, yet aversive to *risk* and, thus, to contentious politics. Hence, to minimize risks and increase chances of achieving this *single* win, the campaign was adamant on adopting a distinctively ‘positive communication strategy,’ confidently bringing forth a plan of action in an affirmative and predominantly non-confrontational or accusatory approach. Interviewees from the campaign affirm that this approach was chosen strategically to come out as a ‘novel,’ ‘effective’ and ‘confident’ alternative to the ‘corrupt’ and ‘ineffective’ political class, as well as to the trite ‘negative discourse of the streets.’ As one

interviewee described it:

“It’s a totally different dynamic and a different approach to politics. It was pro-, it was focused and not diluted, and happy not angry” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

The danger, however, resides, as the same member of the campaign continues, in the increased reliance upon good ‘packaging’ at the expense of building lasting and coherent alternatives:

‘Which is scary by the way because it could mean that you can sell bullshit to people if the packaging was good...it’s not bullshit but it needed a bit of consolidation.’

G. Conclusion

The development of collective action over the past two years has increased the perceived need for creating lasting, political organizations in the eyes of collective actors. However, the wide-spread adoption of a ‘new logic of action’ and organization, has resuscitated fleeting and ephemeral belongings rather than promote lasting political participation and commitments. This chapter sought to study the politics of organization increasingly adopted in nascent movements and initiatives that depart from traditional organizational frameworks, and increasingly rely upon the affordances of new social media platforms. The chapter argues that the focus, for the most part, laid less in developing a political discourse and sustainable organization, than in being the most media-savvy, appealing and inclusive ‘brand’ in the ‘virtual’ street. Talks of newness or continuity aside, the implications of favorable forms and organization fixes upon political action have been paramount. The chapter reveals that while claiming to have radically departed from traditional, hierarchical and centralized organizations towards more participatory, easy-to-personalize, and leaderless organizations, new forms of organization often risk undermining formal democratic organizational structures, reducing political contention, and directing political ‘alternatives’ towards conformity in favoring the ‘packaging’ that ‘sells.’ An

analysis of organizational frameworks and campaigning logic as well as activist's strategies and discourses, reveals the extent to which they increasingly conform to neoliberalism's individualization and commercialization of commitment and participation. Hence, while the Internet and recent organizational innovations may have relieved some of the burdens of political organizing, most remain salient and non-altered (Aouragh, 2016a, p.492). This chapter, therefore, questions the celebrated novelty, leaderlessness and participatory potential of new organizational forms that claim to depart from traditional political frameworks, and their impacts upon 'political citizenship,' making clear how organization is not a *technical* but a *political* question (Harman, 1978 in Schaumberg, 2013, p.380).

CHAPTER V

THE NGOIZATION OF CONTENTION: DE-POLITICIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

“(B)y pushing aside very real political differences and identities in the quest to foster tolerance and consensus, NGOs may render themselves incapable of dealing with these differences in a way that is meaningful to people” (Nagel et al., 2015, p.228).

A. Introduction

A growing literature theorizes ‘a global associational revolution’ in non-profit and non-governmental organizations, encompassing both the developed and developing countries (Salamon, L., 1994, p.109). The turn of the 21st century has, in fact, been perceived by some as a new era of “bottom-up growth and social improvement,” premised upon a shift from large bureaucratic institutions and the state to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the latter seen as the “*de facto* agents of democracy” and “the primary catalysts for change” (Kamat, 2010, p.155). The Arab World at large has been witnessing, as a result, a large increase in the number of non-governmental organization, boasting of more than 70,000 NGOs by the mid-1990s (Bishara, 1996 in Jad, p.5). However, critical examinations of the role and contribution of NGOs to local contexts—especially those already fraught with conflict, but also others suffering under poverty or blatant underdevelopment—reveal their drawbacks and limitations. Using Wallace’s (2004) expression, Harvey (2005, p.117) argues that today NGOs function as “the Trojan horses for global neoliberalism,” staffed by elitist individuals and organized in non-democratic, unaccountable (except to donors) organizations that are largely distant from the people they serve. Additional literature draws on the impact of NGO-ization on social movements’ strategies and tactics, arguing against ‘civil society’ fragmentation, de-politicization and professionalization (Jad, 2014; Hanafi and Tabar, 2003;

Alvarez, 2009; Kosmatopoulos, 2014; Nagel *et al.*, 2015). In Nagel *et al.*'s (2015, p.237-8) words, "the goal of much NGO activity has been to avoid politics and to replace still-salient political divisions with exercises in consensus-building and incremental change." The impacts of the above NGO-ized logic upon the social movements field have been paramount in reshaping the prevalent logic of action as well as actors' relationship to 'the political.' Drawing on a thorough literature review, and analysis of data in the preceding two chapters, this chapter *synthesizes*, what I perceive as, the '*NGO-ization*' of collective action and activism in Lebanon in the past two years (2015-2017).

B. The Neo-liberalization of 'Civil Society' in Lebanon

'Civil society' activism has a long history in Lebanese society extending back to the 16th century and the Principedom of Mount Lebanon (Abou Assi, 2006, in d'Aspremont, 2011). While most associations were historically religious and/or familial nature, what is known as 'communal society' (*Moujtama' ahli*), non-sectarian and non-confessional associations began to establish during the pre-civil war period (1958-1975), alongside associations for Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Aspremont, 2011). These came to be known as 'civil society' organizations (*moujtama' madani*). At the onset of the civil war (1975-1990), associational activism was much needed to compensate for the absence of a strong central government (*ibid.*). However, after the end of the civil war, and during the second half of the 19th century (Karam, 2006) the associational sector grew exponentially at a rate of some 250 associations per year (Kingston, 2013, p. 55). The postwar neoliberal reconstruction model adopted under Rafiq al-Hariri's premiership opened the flow gates for the voluntary sector and NGOs to fill in the gaps created by state retrenchment (Saloukh *et al.*, 2015, p.54). Millions in aid money dedicated to 'bolstering Lebanese civil society' has resulted in the mushrooming of NGOs in size and scope over the past decade (Nagel *et al.*, 2015, p.231). Given Lebanon's strategic importance in the

deepening regional geopolitical rivalries, the country has been targeted extensively by donors (Nagel et al., 2015, p.223). Western aid increased significantly after 2005 with the emergence of an “anti-Syrian, anti-Iranian, pro-Saudi, Sunni-led faction” led by Saad Hariri, for the sake of countering Hizbullah’s¹² influence (Nagel et al., 2015, p.231). Since 2011, aid additionally increased due to fear of political instability linked to the Syrian civil war (Nagel et al., 2015, p.231). Although the number of functional NGOs is difficult to estimate, today, around 8,311 civil society organizations are officially registered (by April 2014) at the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (Beyond Reform & Development, 2015, p.53).

These organizations became powerhouses for Lebanese activists and concerned citizens hoping to realize change, yet faced with political closure. In recent years, a host of NGO-led campaigns have caught the public eye rallying around single-issue demands through awareness marches combined with strategic litigation, leading to the passing of a number of laws, albeit following major distortions and non-implementation (Melki, 2014, p.6; McKernan, 2016). While these campaigns mostly attract positive and supportive national and international media coverage, their impacts remained marginal, faced as they often are by strong structural and systemic impediments (patriarchal system, sectarian system and capitalist neoliberal economy). Nagel *et al.* (2015, p.225, 241-2) argue, based on interviews with NGOs operating in Lebanon, that while directors adhere to the discourse of Western liberal-democracy, they are often aware of their limitations in fomenting substantive change, as they routinely question their efficacy, and seek to circumvent donor conditionality. Meanwhile, the main premises upon which NGOs are seen as favorable channels for change and development have been subject to large criticism and skepticism.

A growing body of literature remains critical of the ability of NGOs to realizing change given their prevalent de-politicized, techno-moral and fragmentary logic. Examining

¹² A militant Shi’a organization and political party backed by Iran and Syria.

the Lebanese post-war reconciliation attempts, Kosmatopoulos (2014) reveals the repercussion of donor requirements of professionalization and de-politicization on the ‘civil society’ landscape. The author argues that what began as ‘civil society’s’ mobilization for social and popular justice through judiciary war tribunals following the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), gave way to “conflict resolution workshops” where the people themselves became targets for intervention from “technomoral” experts (Kosmatopoulos, 2014, p.535). Kosmatopoulos (2014, p.536) observes a shift underway from a once “vibrant political society” with domestic legitimacy and credibility that perceived of peace as an outcome of a struggle for justice, to a “paralyzed ‘uncivil society’” (Kosmatopoulos, 2014, p.536) or “morally handicapped society” (Kosmatopoulos, 2014b, p.788), perceived as such by technomoral and professional experts of peace for whom intervention is a strictly individualized civilizing mission (Kosmatopoulos, 2014, p.533).

Strengthening ‘civil society’—defined in the narrow sense to imply NGOs—became the key indicator of democracy in transitional societies (Nagel, 2015, p.227). Yet, rather than bolster ‘democratic transition’ this governance model created “self-regulating citizens who *adapted* to the postwar neoliberal order,” argue Saloukh *et al.* (2015, p.54). The postwar multiplication of NGOs—for women, people with disabilities, families of the disappeared, LGBT and others—served in internalizing and fragmenting problems of exclusion by devising specific solutions, legal provisions and services aimed at mitigating the costs of postwar neoliberal policies, rather than renegotiate a more inclusive and holistic postwar citizenry agenda (Salouk *et al.*, 2015, p.54). The proliferation of NGOs and the ‘NGOization of politics’ served in fragmenting, divesting and obviating political opposition among the non-sectarian sectors of society, argue Saloukh *et al.* (2015, p.53). Instead, following donor dictates, NGOs attempt to address Lebanon’s sectarian political structure—itsself promoted by Western powers in the 19th century—by encouraging participants to leave behind political

differences, promoting instead ‘universal’ values,’ dialogue, ‘incremental change,’ ‘consensus’ and ‘sublimating contentiousness’ (Nagel *et al.*, 2015, p.228). Yet, as Nagel *et al.* (2015, 235-6) argue, “NGOs risk creating a civil society that, while perhaps ‘civil,’ is depoliticized and detached from the messiness of everyday political life.”

While donors perceive themselves as contributing to fostering “a robust, non-sectarian” environment and instilling “liberal-democratic values,” NGOs, nevertheless, remain “entangled in the sectarian political system” (Nagel *et al.*, 2015, p.231). Traboulsi (2014, p.30) is critical of the *binary* distinction drawn between ‘*communal* society’—defined in terms of primordial ties of belonging—and ‘*civil* society’ premised upon ‘individual freedom.’ Traboulsi (2014, p.30-1) argues that this binary distinction overshadows societal *stratification* (between classes, city/periphery, manual/intellectual labor), confuses the state with the political, social, cultural and economical system controlling the state, and resuscitates the break between society and the state, serving to sideline the latter’s role in social distribution and its responsibilities towards its people. In fact, rather than represent a separate realm for ‘individual freedom,’ modernity and development, Kingston (2015, p.2), argues, that ‘civil society’ not only mirrors “societal divisions but it also works to reproduce them over time.” NGOs emerge as “strategic partners to both the sectarian/political elite and international organizations determined to involve the third sector in a governance model based on neoliberal structural adjustment and state retrenchment” (Salouk *et al.*, 2015, p.53). The political elite have deployed strategies to manipulate, co-opt and neutralize ‘civil society,’ through their appropriation of associations that provide healthcare and educational services for their respective sectarian communities, while reinforce clientalistic patronage networks (Saloukh *et al.*, 2015, p.54).

C. NGO-ization of Popular Contention: Fragmentation & De-politicization

Following the end of the Cold War, development policy and aid transfers became increasingly influenced by the ‘good governance’ model and the Washington-based ‘New Policy Agenda,’ that encouraged new forms of highly-professionalized and ‘de-politicized’ NGOs (Hanafi and Tabar, 2003, p.213), making them the ‘favorite child’ of Western donor agencies (Edwards *et al.*, 1995, p.849). Post-colonial countries have, thus, been witnessing important challenges following the shift from older versions of community based organizations (CBOs)—once deeply rooted within communities and concerned with political struggles—towards new forms of NGOs often limited in their mission by their entry into the aid industry and dependence on donor funds and requirements of professionalization, neutrality, accountability and de-politicization (Kamat, 2010, p.160; Hanafi and Tabar, 2003, p. 207, 213). The resulting ‘oppositional culture’ that NGOization has promoted finds itself, I argue, increasingly trapped within neoliberal tools and discourses. These predicaments are not unique to the Lebanese case at hand, and have come to predicate all levels and tools of struggle and opposition.

In their study of the aid industry and the Palestinian Intifada, Hanafi and Tabar (2003, p. 206, 212-3) reveal the transformation of Palestinian ‘civil society’ since Oslo and the 1990s ‘state-building’ project—a period characterized by multiplication of aid funds—to new, ‘imported,’ ‘professional,’ ‘neutral,’ ‘dis-associated’ and ‘de-politicized’ forms of action. Contrary to the first Palestinian Intifada, during which activists, intellectuals, and community leaders played an important role and were “embedded within the popular struggle,” the Second Intifada exposed NGOs as mere “spectators” unable to reconcile their contradictory “neutral” and “disengaged” position with the necessities of local synergies with political actors and local populations and a clear articulation and understanding of the struggle (Hanafi and Tabar, 2003, p.207).

In a research on Arab women's movements, Islah Jad (2004, p.10) observes a similar 'NGOization' of women's movements in Egypt and Palestine. The author defines 'NGOization' as "the spread of a different form of structure" that "limits the struggle for national causes to 'projects' geared to priorities set by an international discourse without diversity, and fragments the accumulation of forces for social change" (Jad, 2004, p.11). Sonia E. Alvarez (1999, p.198) had drawn similar observations regarding neoliberalism's reconfiguration of Latin American feminist movement field, where growing state and international organizations' demand for specialized knowledge, maximized impact and monitoring of results had pushed NGOs further away from their constituents, and resulted in a loss of "critical edge" and ability to address structural realities. Ten years following her initial study, Alvarez (2009, p.179) describes the growing disillusionment and increased critical introspection among women's groups on the impacts of NGO-based activism and their return to "counter-hegemonic spaces," by participating in "anti-systemic" resistance, and anti-neoliberal movements during the 2000s. Despite these rising trends, Alvarez (2009, p.180) asserts that "NGOized NGOs show few signs going away in the near future."

The perceived inability to influence reform or change has often drawn recurrent frustrations, pessimism and despair among 'civil society' activists in Lebanon in the ability of ordinary people and 'civic activism' to effect change and political reform in the system (Geha, 2016, prologue; Kosmatopoulos, 2014, p.538; Ticktin, 2011, p.191). This same pessimism and despair became pervasive among many organizers and participants in the '*Hirak*' of 2015 and many 'civil society' activists in NGOs and initiatives in face of state irresponsiveness. Activists became increasingly aware, as argued by several of the interviewees, of the need to '*do politics*,' build lasting organizations, and try and reform the regime '*from within*.' '*Beirut Madinati*'s' electoral campaign and the many groups working towards the next parliamentary elections represent a step in this direction, as conceded by

several of them, given their inability to enact reform from ‘without,’ only through ‘civil society’ activism. Nevertheless, ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ as one such electoral initiative adamant at ‘winning,’ suffered similar limitations, decline and frustration following the end of its electoral campaign, given the exclusionary majoritarian electoral law set in place. Activist circles deliberating and networking together in hope of running against the establishment political parties in the next parliamentary elections represents another more recent manifestation of this perceived need.

Yet, while seeking ‘to get involved in politics,’ the frameworks and discourses adopted by nascent forms of collective action, I argue, persistently sideline ‘the political’ in politics—defined by Mouffe (2005, p.14-7) in terms of ‘agonism’ and ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggles—in favor of an *NGO-ized* approach to politics and organization. Making use of a thorough literature review and analysis of data collected, analysis in **Chapter II** has revealed the increased de-politicization and fragmentation of political participation and contention characteristic of the tendencies to posit the ‘garbage’ crisis as a technical and single-issue demand, or structural problems facing the city in a strictly technical and consensual framework of ‘daily’ politics or ‘politics a small ‘p,’” while strategically sidelining contentious politics to realize a *single win* in elections. This NGOized shift towards ‘consensual,’ ‘depoliticized’ and ‘pragmatic’ governance away from contentious politics has also been evident in the case of ‘Sabaa’ political party experiment.

D. Ineffective State, Effective Civil Society

‘Civil society’ organizations came to be celebrated as agents of democratic transition and consolidation and “schools of civic virtue” (De Tocqueville, 1863, in Saloukh *et al.*, 2015, p.51), in light of the decreased *credibility* and *efficacy* of the state and centralized action. In this sense, NGOs become “the Magic Bullet” for carrying forth development in face of state downsizing (Gruhn, 1997 in Alvarez, 1999, p.182; Banks *et al.*, 1995, p.708). Yet, this discourse I argue reinforces a simplistic rhetoric of *inefficient* state and *efficient* civil

society. The approach of absolving the state as ‘ineffective’ has become endemic in recent campaigning rhetoric hoping to present alternatives as ‘novel,’ ‘qualified’ and ‘non-partisan.’

A content analysis of the Facebook posts of the ‘You Stink’ campaign reveals the campaign’s marked, recurrent framing of the political class as ‘inefficient,’ ‘negligent,’ and ‘failed.’ Advancing technical and developmental solutions to crisis becomes the occupation of activists that perceive of the state as ‘ineffective’ or ‘ignorant.’ Individualized acts of garbage sorting and packaging become additional personalized acts of responsibility that absolve the ‘ineffective’ state responsibility, despite its well-known *effectiveness* in brokering profitable deals that benefit its invested interests at the expense of environmental and public interests. Subsequent interviews with the campaign’s organizers and environmentalists reveals a contradictory understanding of the trash crises that posits it as state ‘ignorance’ or ‘inaptitude,’ while similarly conceding to the absence of a political ‘willingness’ to forgo vested interests. As conceded by several interviewees, political leaders ‘trapped’ activists into finding and offering technical solutions for the trash crisis, presenting the crisis in ‘technical’ terms and displacing responsibility from the state to ‘civil society’ actors. However, as recurrent crises have made clear, and as attested by several other interviewees, the problem resides less in state ‘inefficiency’ in need for ‘technical solutions,’ than in political ‘unwillingness’ given vested interests of the political elite in the waste management file.

The *ineffective state/effective* ‘civil society’ discourse not only resuscitates state entrenchment, but is also part of a dichotomizing discourse that posits the state and ‘civil society’ as two separate entities. “The Gramscian idea of the state as a unity of political and civil society” has given way to the concept of ‘civil society’ as “a center of opposition, if not an alternative, to the state,” argues Harvey (2005, p.78). Alex Jeffrey (2012 in Nagel *et al.*, 2015, p.227) similarly describes this “process of developing, institutionalizing, and professionalizing local NGOs” by donors as the “gentrification of civil society.”

“Gentrification” promotes the deceptive conception that NGOs are independent of governments and states, although a great deal of NGO activity is directed by state or quasi-state agencies, and is rather promoted as a substitute for state provisions and services (Nagel *et al.*, 2015, p.227). These arrangements both “compromise state legitimacy” and “prevent NGOs from expressing political dissent,” argues Nagel *et al.* (2015, p.227). As mentioned by several interviewees, NGOs reliant on foreign funding often express their private support for a certain movement, yet do not risk partaking in it. Indeed, major NGOs (Legal Agenda, LADE, Offre Joix, *Wehdatouna Khalasouna* (Our Unity is Our Safety)) did take part in the coordination and organization of the protests alongside the different campaigns, providing, as claimed, a “neutral,” trustworthy and inclusive embrace to the movement’s ‘contending’ groups.

Trapped in an accommodating and non-confrontational discourse, *‘Beirut Madinati’* tactically adopted an NGO-ized discourse of technicality, development and accommodation, sidelining political contentions in favor of achieving a *single win*: winning elections. As content analysis reveals and as also attested by a member of the campaign, “*Beirut Madinati* soon after the end of its electoral campaign seemed to have transformed into an NGO,” or back to advocacy and ‘single issue’ campaigning on issues such as ‘*Ramle el Bayda*’ public shore, ‘*Horsh Beirut*’ and ‘Mar Michael’s Beer Factory.’

The logic of action that posits struggles in largely *technical, consensual* and *singular* light (as argues in **Chapter II**)—is complemented by organizational fields of action that pose challenges in terms of representation, accountability and commitment (**Chapter III**). The two dimensions that predicate contemporary ‘alternative’ action in Lebanon seem to accord with the characteristic approaches, challenges, and limitations brought about by NGO-ization of ‘civil society.’

E. NGO-ized Organization: Fleeting Commitment, Representativeness & Accountability

Activists expressed recurrent frustrations in their ability to build sustainable, effective and democratic decision-making processes and organization, stating those as pivotal challenges facing the creation of alternative political organizations. These recurrent frustration unravel the shortcomings of organizational fields adopted by alternative movements that conform more and more to neoliberalism's promulgated un-democratic, un-accountable and techno-moral frameworks, namely NGOs.

Literature has increasingly challenged the eulogized role of NGOs in bringing about change and 'democratization.' Contrary to views of NGOs as the ultimate arenas for participation, of the registered organizations in Lebanon, 77.4% have less than 10 employees due to fluctuating foreign funding, and 72.1% have less than 50 volunteers (Beyond Reform & Development, 2015, p.57). Indeed, NGOs decreasingly rely on constituents, and increasingly rely upon small numbers of qualified staff whose 'job' is to 'advocate' on behalf of and 'educate' a 'target group' within the overall time-frame and location of the 'project' (Jad, 2004, p.11-2). New forms of social movement organizations (SMOs) and campaigning epitomize the challenges facing organizations reliant on transient volunteer-based membership and no constituency, and on 'seasonal activism' within a limited time-frame. Moreover, while acting as 'representatives of democracy,' nascent organizational frameworks, similar to NGOs, lack means to hold them accountable to the people (Kamat, 2010, p.156). Being characteristically weak in internal decision-making processes, representational mechanisms and accountability, as revealed in the previous chapter (**Chapter III**), these new frameworks indeed increasingly resemble NGOs' organizational structure.

F. ‘Civil’ Society/ ‘Political’ Society

Although conforming to a large degree to the *NGO-ized* model as I sought to argue above, a striking majority of interviewees across activist circles surprisingly expressed their ambivalence, distrust, and even disgust from the term ‘civil society,’ despite the fact that this term was used interchangeably by both media channels and activists to describe their activism in the streets, but also in municipal electoral campaigning. Yet, the term has, indeed, been subject to greater thought and skepticism in the past two years given the scrutiny and criticism it has been subject to from within and without activist circles. As a central organizer of ‘You Stink,’ lately argued,

“We refuse the idea that we are civil society...the majority of civil society lives on foreign funding and submission of proposals to receive money to implement a project. We don’t believe in this. All our funding is voluntary we don’t take money from anyone the only money we took was from Lebanese citizens by crowd funding” (‘You Stink’ Central Organizer).

Moreover, several interviewees of the protest movement argued the choice of the name ‘*Hirak al-moujtama’ el-madani*’ (civil society movement) or ‘*nashiti moujtama’ al-madani*’ (civil society activists) was not chosen by them, but rather propagated through media. Indeed, content analysis of ‘You Stink’ and ‘*Badna Nhasib*’ Facebook campaigning pages doesn’t reveal an adoption of this framing. As a main organizer in ‘You Stink’ argues,

“I don’t know why...honestly, its like someone is getting the curse for himself. You know what does civil society mean for the people of the Beqaa and the South today? Civil society directly equals funding and embassies. Then why!? I am an activist, a social activist, why civil? What, not political?! We are all working politics! The name became a bad label” (‘You Stink’ Central Organizer).

The same central organizer of ‘You Stink’ had preciously mentioned in response to a question in a conference at AUB on whether the ‘You Stink’ group would consider becoming a formal political organization, that the group dismissed the idea completely, and denied any “wish to be part of any future official post, especially under the current political system that is inherently sectarian, racists and authoritarian as well as corrupt, fraudulent and dishonest in matters of politics, rights and economy.” (Mapping the Movement’ Conference, 13 October,

2015, AUB). However, this position changed markedly following the increasingly perceived need among activists to create lasting organizations able to compete at the political sphere and realize change from ‘within’ the system. The same organizer has recently been active in networking attempts between groups working towards the next parliamentary elections.

As similarly argued by a member of the ‘Civil Society Movement,’¹³

“The problem I started being disgusted by the term ‘civil society,’ although our name is the ‘Civil Society Movement.’ (...) There are a lot of NGOs and a lot of them exist only by name but have no people on the ground, only a few employees and they get funding, and use social media to mobilize. (...) The problem is with NGOs who receive funding that may be conditioned; others insist on working alone and appearing; the third problem is with people who open an NGO and get lets say a funding of 100,000 dollars or a million dollar. It’s the end, he is stuck, regardless whether its conditional or non-conditional funding, he is stuck in this system and cannot fool around or be present in demonstrations that may lead to violence or...and endanger the funding” (Member of the ‘Civil Society Movement).

‘Beirut Madinati,’ however, did represent itself as a ‘civil,’ ‘non-politically affiliated’ and ‘independent’ campaign in its posts.

“Almost 9 months since the unrest began the Beirut Madinati campaign has signaled the shift in Lebanon’s civil society from demands on the streets to elected office with a clear agenda and full transparency” (Ginosblog)

“#BeirutMadinati, a civic campaign in the face of the Lebanese political alignments” (Aawsat)

Yet, several members of the campaign, similarly, expressed ambivalence and skepticism towards the term. As one member argued,

“I hate this term, I don’t find it a useful, because its definition is very contextual and academically it can mean a thousand things. (...) On one side you have a fragmentation of political struggle to build a secular and democratic country through NGOs that is something negative according to me, it is not negative in total but what is bad is the branching of 100 NGOs. They are trying to substitute themselves to the state but they will not succeed and second they are dividing the struggle” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Indeed, a significant number of activists across activist circles argued against the dichotomization of civil/political activism, preferring to refer to themselves as ‘political activists,’ and arguing that their activism is evidently *political* in nature. However, in describing the difference between ‘civil’ and ‘political’ society, several other interviewees

¹³ ‘Tayar el moujtama’ el madani’ established by the renowned leftist, secular priest Gregoire Haddad.

described them as two *separate* realm. According to another ‘You Stink’ organizer and member of a NGO, ‘civil society’ is only a lobbying and pressuring body that does not seek public office. Most Interviewees also argued that the term includes political parties, yet some went further by defining only those political parties *outside* power and the corrupt establishment as ‘civil society.’ Yet, when asked whether the recent candidacy and organization of electoral municipal and parliamentary campaigns by ‘civil society’ activists is a positive development, the same interviewees affirmed its significance and importance. As expressed by a central member of the ‘Civil Society Movement’,

“My dream—and the dream of every girl or boy of 16, 17 years old that wake up to the sectarian reality and dreams of this but doesn’t know the problems involved—was that one day all the secular and non-sectarian try and work together to build a civil, secular state and create a pressuring power that is present on the ground to create change. What is needed is the creation of an alternative, and the alternative is the people, the political parties, the NGOs and the individuals that are trying to be serious concerning change and directed towards a goal, and these proved they exist on the ground...” (Central Member of the ‘Civil Society Movement’).

This tension reveals the contradictory positions of activists trying to fit the conceptually ambiguous and opposing categories of ‘state’ vs. ‘civil society.’ Yet, while most interviewees question the conceptual significance of the term ‘civil society,’ as well as the credibility of donor-reliant and project oriented NGOs, I argue that they often, unknowingly, adopt their organizational and strategic approaches in building initiatives and campaigns, as I sought to argue in this chapter.

G. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that ‘NGOization’ has become endemic in ‘non-sectarian,’ ‘alternative’ activist networks trying to build for themselves new spaces of contention beyond the safety heavens of NGO activism in which they have experienced recurrent frustrations and outside the alienating ‘sectarian’ and ‘corrupt’ political parties. ‘NGOization’ has reduced a *once* ‘vibrant’ ‘civil society’ by encouraging a depoliticized and accommodating discourse that ends up resuscitating power interests and maintaining structural inequalities.

The chapter provided a synthesis of the discussions and results of the two previous chapters, arguing that activists' choice of framing: structural vs. particular (**Chapter II**) and of organizational framework (**Chapter III**), increasingly conform to the strategies and organization promulgated by the 'NGO-ization' model. The next and final chapter elaborates upon the consequences of NGO-ized discourses and fields of action on 'the political' level.

CHAPTER VI

CONTENTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS: 'CONSENSUAL POLITICS'

“The desperate desire to avoid a politics based on binary oppositions and exclusionary meta-narratives may end up with biting our individual noses off to spite our collective face” (Fenton, 2006, p.237).

A. Introduction

In the context of the growth of ‘transnational governmentality’—premised upon a shift to ‘governance’ and ‘governmentality’ as a new logic of development—a growing body of literature talks about a new era of ‘anti-politics’ (Ticktin, 2011; Ferguson, 1994), ‘post-politics’ (Ranciere, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2009, 2010) and ‘techno-politics’ (Kosmatopoulos, 2014; Mitchell, 2002) striving under neoliberalism. According to critical theorists, while NGOs, activists, and international organizations purport to create for themselves spaces outside ‘the political’—defined by Mouffe (2005, p.14-21) as *agonistic* and *conflicting* struggles between *opposing* projects—their institutionalized discourses and practices often produce a pre-eminently political situation, that often reinforces the established order, reproduces inequalities, and pre-empts possibilities for genuine redress or change (Ticktin, 2011; Ferguson, 1994; Mitchell, 2002). Making use of a thorough literature review and analysis of interview and content analysis data carried out in **Chapters II** and **III**, this chapter *synthesizes* the premises of actors’ contentious relation to ‘the political,’ in their marked adoption of ‘anti-political developmental,’ ‘*techno-moral*’ and ‘*consensual post-political*’ approaches to change.

B. Anti-Politics of Development

Since the mid-1970s, development defined itself in term of “quality of life” and “standards of living,” taking a “moral” rather than “historical” directionality, and a technical

approach apparently blind to the political nature of problems, and consequently often “crushed by the political realities” (Ferguson, 1994, p.15, 225-6). Ferguson (1994, p.225) provides a critical analysis of the logic of ‘development’ that has come to be seen as a “natural,” “unquestioned value” that is “so self-evidently necessary” that if it were to be challenged, it is done in the name of “*real* development” (Ferguson, 1994, p. xiii, xiv). The development apparatus, today, according to Ferguson (1994, p.xv), increasingly works as an “anti-politics machine,” depoliticizing everything it touches. Cautioned as it is to abstain from getting “involved in politics,” while paradoxically expected to realize ‘social change,’ a anti-political developmental, approach has “no teeth available to it to chew what it had bitten of,” argues Ferguson (1994, p.226). Yet, while often ‘failing’ to realize intended goals, developmental discourses and activities “accomplish important strategic tasks,” political “side-effects” and structural changes by promoting *technical, de-politicized* approaches to both the crises and the state, behind the backs of the most sincere participants (Ferguson, 1994, p.256, 275; Ticktin, 2011, p.191). The consequences of developmental “anti-politics” transcends actors’ best intentions often evoking recurrent frustration among activist who nevertheless remains trapped in an order larger than themselves with its own discourses and practices.

This approach was mostly evident in ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ local municipal program. In the words of Mona Harb (2016, p.18), a university professor and central member of the campaign, ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ emphasized the need to replace the paralyzing “sectarian political agendas and interests” with “municipal development,” “governed by a harmonious team of independent experts who will implement a programme that will improve the liveability of the capital.” Indeed, the campaign benefitted from the ‘local nature of elections,’ being a municipal rather than parliamentary campaign, as argued by several interviewees, ‘to sideline larger political contentions,’ in favor of an (anti-political)

‘developmental’ logic that conceives of Beirut as a city and not *the capital*, and a focus on the ‘daily’-*lifestyle* concerns of the ‘people,’ often portrayed during the campaigning period as a homogenous entity with universalized interests. While proclaiming to resolve urgent and legitimate problems pertaining to traffic congestion, pedestrian mobility, affordable housing or access to the public beach, matters of local concern for municipalities, the campaign, however, sidelined the intricate political and economical contentions vested in the ongoing crises, in favor of a ‘post-political developmental’ discourse oblivious to the political nature of its demands. Instead, the majority of demands were often framed in statistical and managerial terms:

“90% of waste produced in Beirut is landfilled although 90% of this waste could and should be recycled #BeirutMadinati” (24-3-2016).

“Beirut today secures less than 1 square meter of green space per capita, while the World Health Organization recommends at least 9 square meters per capita” (2-4-2016).

From the advancement of real-estate interests and environmental degradation to the systemic privatization, degradation and de-humanization of livelihood in the service of capital, the problems facing the *capital*, however, are far from ‘neutral’ or ‘technical’ in nature. Yet, this apparent sidelining of the political nature of the problems is not the result of actors’ ignorance but of the very nature of an ‘anti-political developmental’ approach that sidelines larger political contentions in favor of a technical, consensual and neutral focus. Interviewed central organizers also attest that the sidelining of contentious politics in favor of a ‘developmental’ framing has been a strategic decision for the electoral campaign in order not to alienate potential voters, and limit chances of winning. However, the strategic sidelining of political contentions in favor of a ‘post-political developmental’ framing risks keeping systemic injustice and inequalities outside the realm of discussion, in favor of conservative and limited reforms that maintain power imbalances and differential interests.

C. Techno-Politics and Techno-Moralism

Activists' technical framing of crisis and of solutions was evident in the past two years, particularly in the case of the 'Hirak' and 'Beirut Madinati's' electoral campaign. The major tendency of the 'Hirak,' as I argued in **Chapter II**, has been towards adopting a singular focus on finding 'sustainable,' 'environmental' solutions to the garbage crisis, compelling some groups towards individual acts of garbage sorting and collection, and a preoccupation with advancing technical solutions to a crisis with blatant political and economic coronaries. Moreover, while SMOs did recurrently frame the crisis in political terms by exposing the political interests vested in the ongoing crisis, the predominant tendency among organizers, especially 'You Stink' group, remained on achieving a 'single win' in the 'least common denominator' between contending groups, in this case 'garbage,' sidelining the multitude of socio-economic demands raised by protestors (Kreichati, 2017), and what were perceived by some organizers to be more 'radical,' or 'un-achievable' slogans (e.g. social justice, the patriarchal system), or 'irrelevant' demands (e.g. foreign domestic workers, LGBTQ), as argued by several interviewees.

The 'techno-political' focus was also evident in 'Beirut Madinati' that recurrently framed itself in terms of expertise, professionalism and know-how. This was clear in the campaign's posts (be them quotes from newspaper articles or direct posts):

"The first thing the campaign pledges to do is resorting to the expertise urban planners entrusted with the organization and management of the city affairs" (al-akhbar 23-05-2016).

"A new non-partisan list of technocrats and activists aims to topple the establishment in Beirut municipal elections NOW Lebanon" (24-03-2016).

"In a step considered first of its kind, more than 60 experts, all of whom are active in the field work on forming an electoral list for the capital Beirut" (Albalad online, 26-03-2016).

"#BeirutMadinati is your opportunity to reclaim Beirut and trust it to be guided by honest professionals and experts in urban living, who have designed a viable program for transportation and housing, pollution and waste, security and health, architectural preservation and public space" (19-04-2016).

The leading figures, as well as most candidates, of the campaign were predominantly introduced as activists, researchers, architects, urban planners and engineers with high university attainments, and professional and/or entrepreneurial profile (university professors and/or owners of businesses).¹⁴ The campaign, moreover, recurrently framed itself as composed of “qualified and effective candidates” with “integrated competencies” and “well thought out programs.” A growing literature, however, remains skeptical of the supposed superiority of experts and expert knowledge, speaking of a new era of ‘techno-politics.’

In his book on twentieth-century Egypt under British colonialism and then IMF-led structural adjustment policies, Mitchell (2002, p.15) reveals the colonial consolidation of the “rule of experts” and “reason” as spokespersons for development and modernity. Technocratic expertise, according to Mitchell (2002, p.34), is far from a neutral or scientific form of advancement, and instead is part and parcel of a 20th century politics whose aim is to simplify the world, gaining for itself “the powers of expertise by resolving it into simple forces and oppositions.” According to Mitchell (2002, p.15, 37), experts do not merely apply knowledge to the world, but through their strategies, structures, and *silences*, actively engineer it. Mitchell (2002, p.1), therefore, challenges the conception of experts and technocratic knowledge as the triumph of “modern, secular rationality,” revealing instead the grim impacts of expertise on the world and on local communities. The systemic depoliticizing, techno-moral discourse promulgated by NGOs and international organizations—that posits problems in terms of ‘natural’ ails of a society in need of more expertise and knowledge—inadvertently serves the interests of elites by insuring that politics and social inequality remain beyond the realm of discussion. Consequently, consolidating the dominance of ‘techno-politics’ and reason has severely undermined the democratic project in

¹⁴ Candidates also included artists, journalists, marketing professionals, a woman with special needs as well as a fisherman from Ain Mraisse neighborhood, chosen wisely based on their public and familial profile to appeal to larger sections of potential voters.

both the Middle East and the West, argues Mitchell (2011, p.253). The technocratic framing of crises has been an over-arching tendency particularly in the ‘*Hirak*’s’ singular focus on solving the garbage crisis and in ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ framing of the ‘city’ as a locality in need of professional planning and expertise by a ‘harmonious’ team of ‘professionals’ and ‘experts.’ By keeping political and economical interests and power-imbalances outside the realm of discussion, in favor of a technical planning of the city or the garbage crisis, therefore, undermines actors’ ability to realize substantial change given the political and structural nature of crisis.

The techno-managerial focus is often accompanied with a techno-*moral* register that frames crisis—within the horizons of the existing order—in a universalized, consensual discourse of ‘right and wrong’ that is beyond dispute. In Mouffe’s (2005, p.5) words, “contrary to what post-political theorists want us to believe, what we are currently witnessing is not the disappearance of the political in its adversarial dimension but something different. What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the *moral register*.” In place of the ‘left/right’ struggle, which in the words of several interviewed activists is ‘a thing of the past,’ the moral discourse of ‘right/wrong’ or ‘good/evil’ dominates (Mouffe, 2005, p.5). Election battles, in the past municipal and upcoming parliamentary level, are increasingly framed in the above moral register between ‘decent,’ ‘transparent,’ ‘independents’ and ‘corrupt,’ ‘inept,’ ‘thieves’ or politicians. Posts containing selective quotes from news articles and TV coverage frequently served to frame ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ campaign as rising on unique moral high grounds of: ‘responsibility,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘trustworthiness,’ ‘commitment,’ ‘hard-work,’ ‘integrity’ and ‘transparency’....

“The people behind the campaign stress that achieving economic prosperity and environmental safety, as well as the preservation of heritage, are all at hand, and the requirement to achieve them is well thought out programs implemented with transparency and integrity” (25-04-2016).

“Beirut Madinati campaign is an opportunity to restore the city and build trust through hiring in its management experts and specialists, who have plans for transportation,

housing, pollution garbage, security, health, the preservation of heritage buildings and public places” (25-04-2016).

However, claiming to act in the name of a ‘moral imperative’—‘beyond or outside politics’—moral ‘anti-politics’ remains grounded in structural relations of inequality and outside the realm of accountability (Ticktin, 2011, p.4). The characteristically ‘post-political’ moral approach to development has ‘unintended,’ yet consequential impacts on the ability of actors to realize change, given its limited conceptualization of otherwise highly politicized and structurally-embedded crises (Ferguson, 1994; Ticktin, 2011). This moralism was also present in ‘You Stink’s’ framing of the political class as ‘corrupt,’ ‘liars,’ ‘criminals,’ ‘looters’ and ‘thieves.’ While successfully serving to expose the *political* nature of the garbage crisis and popular disdain of the political elite, this moralism serves to cover up systemic injustice and power dynamics with a moralism that annuls the political as the power struggle of hegemonic and conflicting interests.

“Crime on all levels: on the environmental, economic and national scale is perpetrated every day since the concerned Ministers and the political class prioritize their deals and transactions over the life of the People. It is an indescribable crime against the nation and the people. They are murdering us...” (Aug 13, 2015).

“Politicians’ corruption, theft, negligence, quotas and disrespect are the only ones behind the environmental and health crisis we have come to face today...” (Sep 25, 2015).

“There are people who have put their lives on the line for someone to feel ashamed of himself and resign.” (Sep 14, 2015).

Hence, the problem with contemporary framing of politicians as ‘corrupt,’ and ‘civil society’ initiatives as ‘independent,’ ‘decent’ or morally superior is that it limits corruption or transparency to individual acts of monetary or bureaucratic transactions, and covers up systemic injustice and corruption with a moral discourse of ‘good’ vs. ‘bad.’

D. Post-Politics & Consensual Politics

A large critical literature theorizes the reduction of politics and democracy to apparatuses of particular and largely *consensual* governance, referring to those as “post-political” formations (Swyngedouw, 2010; Zizek, 2006, Mouffe, 2005; Ranciere, 2004).

Swyngedouw (2010, p.213-4) reveals, how a highly politicized subject like climate change, has been reconfigured into a “post-political” and “post-democratic,” technocratic, and consensual management and policy-making. Presenting climate change as a “global humanitarian cause,” the problem as a singular chemical component (CO₂), and the people as homogenous, universal victims united in “human-wide action” is undercut by a ‘populism’ that undermines constitutive social difference, silences ideological debates and disavows conflicts of interest, under the rubric of universalizing threats and technocratic management (Swyngedouw, 2010, p.221, 3). Swyngedouw (2010) defines “post-political populism” as a “politics of not naming” and not calling any specific political subject into action, whereby only empty signifiers dominate, emptied from any embodied content with respect to the future (such as liberalism, communist...etc.). The new forms of “autocratic governance-beyond-the-state” and “stakeholder-based arrangements” that partner with experts and NGOs are emblematic of “consensual post-politics” (Swyngedouw (2009, p.608).

This has been particularly evident across collective action realms. It became apparent in the tension that arose among the groups of the ‘*Hirak*,’ between conceding to the political nature of the garbage crisis, entrenched as it is within politically-backed networks of interests and money-making, and a ‘post-political,’ consensual focus on the garbage file and its nitty-gritty technical particularities (as argued in Chapter II). According to the latter ‘post-political’ conception of the crisis, it suffices to arrange for institutional and managerial solutions that would remove the garbage from the streets and find environmental solutions for it, while ignoring the conditions, social relations and power dynamics that produced the crisis in first place. Instead, as the major slogan of the protest expresses, the whole political class, ‘all means all’ (‘*killon ya’ne killon*’), or rather each and every one of the politicians, as explained by one ‘You Stink’ organizer, is rejected as outright corrupt and self-serving. According to this conception, and as revealed by discussions with several interviewees, the problem resides

less in the fatal flaws of the ‘system’ of excess (capitalism), rampant injustices and unevenly distributed power relations, to use Žižek’ (2006a: 555 in Swyngedouw, p.222) words, than in the lack of technical expertise or ‘inefficient’ and ‘failed’ political governing of the crisis.

This tendency was similarly evident in ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ municipal electoral campaign that sidelined larger political contentions in favor of a ‘post-political populist’ framing of demands in a universalized, moral and consensual aura. ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ insisted on sidelining the contentious and confrontational in politics as well as the larger political-economic context from which these injustices and, the political class implicated in them, feed, in favor of a *consensual* approach to ‘politics, with a small p,’ as termed by several of its members. ‘*Beirut Madinati*’s’ keenness on ‘not naming’ or even addressing the injustice, privatization and dispossession—implicated for instance in Hariri’s reconstruction policies—is emblematic of a ‘post-political’ consensual discourse. The campaigns’ resultant discourse, in line with Swyngedouw (2010, p.222) analysis, displaces, externalizes and reifies the enemy rather than confront the ‘system’ of excess (i.e. capitalism), inherent injustice and uneven power relations. Therefore, rather than make possible a socio-ecological and egalitarian transformation, the current technocratic approaches reinforce the status-quo by quelling debate and replacing it with ‘consensual,’ technical solutions. The campaign’s posts have, additionally, recurrently claimed to depart from the model of ‘partisan’ politics that has led to political ‘deadlock’ and paralyzed the municipal board in previous years,

‘The spirit with which Tarek Ammar talked simply reflects the deep popular pulse which has had enough of the partisan and sectarian disputes that flooded the country with corruption and paralysis. When this Beirut Madinati spirit prevails in the capital, it will be an introduction to a broader spirit that carries the title “Lebanon is my home”’ (Alanwar, 8-4-2016).

‘We have been able to win the support and trust of Beirutis. They tried to confine us in lanes of their narrow factional politics’ (7-5-2016).

‘It is also a confirmation that any factional attempt to control Beirut is not an attempt against another particular faction or group, but rather against everyone, against Lebanon and against democracy’ (Almodon, 11-5-2016).

However, among the factors that have historically paralyzed Beirut's municipal board, as well as the national political system, is not 'partisanship' or 'political disagreements,' but rather the 'consensual' formulas premised upon "dividing the pie" (Haidar, 2017, p.48) and spoils of municipal office among establishment political parties, despite political differences.¹⁵

'*Beirut Madinati*' has, additionally, come out in a number of posts as adopting a predominantly consensual discourse, focused upon a positive, universalized, monolithic understanding of 'people's' 'daily' concerns and 'well-being.' An analysis of the campaign's Facebook posts reveals its marked emphasis on framed itself as a representative of 'the people.' The campaign made recurrent use of the category of the 'people' in the abstract, claiming that "the campaign is an opportunity for the people of Beirut to regain their own rights" and whose "goal is to implement a program whose focus is the people" or is "people-centered." However, 'the people' of Beirut are composed of vastly different social classes whose priorities and needs, concerns and vulnerabilities may vary considerably. The campaign's abstraction of the category of 'the people' from its different dimensions reifies it into a homogenous and consensual totality. According to Swyngedouw (2010, p.223-4), it is precisely in the negation of a constitutive split between people, that the proper democratic political is undermined. Following the end of its electoral campaign, and cognizant of the need to reach out to the different constituents of the city and beyond the middle and middle-upper classes, '*Beirut Madinati*' placed significant efforts in addressing different neighborhoods in Beirut, creating in conjunction with inhabitants a number of 'neighborhood initiatives' that tackle their particular needs.

While claiming to represent a development from both street politics and seasonal electoral campaigning towards building a 'lasting' political party, '*Sabaa*' adopts a

¹⁵ See also <http://bintjbeil.org/article/25561>

(centralist) “pragmatic” conceptualization of politics that perceives of ideological struggles as “a thing of the past,” “celebrating all choices and projects available to come up with suitable solutions in all sectors” (www.sabaa.org). Moreover, the party claims to “depart from classist divides” towards a primary focus on “individual development” and the building of a new identity for a “new Lebanon” (ibid.). While celebrating a “modern,” “non-traditional,” and “pragmatic” logic of political participation that hopes to advance politics as “fun,” “participatory” and “non-restrictive” (as argued in **Chapter III**), this logic annuls the constitutive nature of politics as a space of dis-census, power, between opposing, differential interests and projects.

E. Post-Political, Consensual Organization: ‘Least Common Denominator’

The protest movement’s coordination meetings, as argued by almost all interviewees, would sometimes extend for hours and hours without being productive. Interviewees have brought up several reasons for the mal-functioning of the coordination meetings. First, activists’ and groups’ level’s of organizational and political experience varied significantly with tensions rising between the movement’s newly formed media-savvy components that were able to attract popular discontent through social media, and their more organizationally experienced and ideological counterparts, that sought to advance a more politicized discourse to the crisis. This has created an internal dilemma in terms of distributing voting weights to the different individuals, groups and NGOs involved, making the process an impossible task that instead dictates consensual decision-making. While attempts were made to draft a reference text, decision-making procedures and structure for the coordination meetings, these were soon aborted and not accepted by certain groups involved. Second, the presence of large numbers of people and the fluidity of attendance made it impossible to manage the discussions, let alone build democratic decision-making processes. Third, the table brought together a vast array of groups ranging from the radical left to NGOs and moderate liberals. These groups were able to maintain coordination to the extent that its aim was mobilizing

large segments of people on an inclusive demand. However, coordination meetings were partly unable to remain functional and were fraught with conflict as soon as the goal became to actually realize an effective strategy or discourse to proceed in solving the garbage crisis. Hence, given their high internal heterogeneity and group's divergent strategies and approaches, and in the absence of clear decision-making processes and structure, coordination meetings were only able to successfully mobilize large numbers around an inclusive demand such as garbage, yet fell short of realizing a common strategy towards effectively confronting the crisis. Indeed, the obsession with consensus and unity hindered attempts at building democratic, and representational decision-making processes. Instead, bringing largely heterogeneous and politically divergent people and groups together on the basis of consensus and unity, resulted in the narrowing of contention towards dealing singularly with garbage, as the lowest possible denominator. Put differently, given the heterogeneity of the groups involved, the movement could not but focus only on the garbage file, as the lowest common denominator to maintain internal cohesion and not disintegrate. The absence of an organizational structure and decision-making processes eventually compromised the role of the coordination committee to logistical and managerial matters, keen on consensus-building and cautious as ever to avoid disagreements that may disrupt the 'unity' of the movement and cause it to collapse.

The situation was similar in the case of '*Beirut Madinati*' that also brought together a wide array of people that included such diverse groups as feminists, socialists, liberals, 8th of March leanings and 14th of March leanings. Since the battle was local municipal elections, these groups were able to 'set aside' their political differences in favor of a developmental and technical plan for the city, as conceded by several interviewees. Yet, the result was again 'the lowest denominator' and singular focus on consensual, 'post-political developmental' and "daily-life" concern, or as it was also termed, "politics with a small 'p.'" Favoring

inclusivity through easily-adopted consensual demands—while sidelining contentious politics that may divide constituencies—has, however, compromised the campaign’s sustainability and the possibility of advancing a clear political discourse. Several of the members interviewed argued that the internal political heterogeneity of the campaign and its unwillingness to take the time to develop a coherent political identity has eventually kept ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ at the local level, compromising its sustainability in favor of internal cohesion and external inclusivity. Yet, others express relief that the campaign opted out of national elections, precisely due to its internal political heterogeneity and thus, susceptibility to breakdown. Finally, as more than one member of ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ have attested, the 14th/8th of March divide remains strong, and the fear of weakening the constituency of the 14th of March bloc at the expense of the unshakable 8th of March constituency has been another consideration that stood in the way of turning ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ into a real player at the national scene.

Similar ideological and organizational challenges persist among the most recent networks of activists hoping to raise popular confrontation into the national political realm. Although the oppositional, activist networks generally agree on the central tenants (such as the creation of a non-sectarian political system and respect for the constitution), as argued by most interviewees, they, nonetheless, vary significantly in terms of political ideologies and strategies. For instance, there exists a strategic tension between proponents of a ‘unified national list’ or ‘front,’ as some describe it, that would unite all alternative ‘civil society’ activists, given the challenges involved, and proponents of building ‘region-specific’ ‘strategic’ alliances, and multiple initiatives, given the impossibility of uniting. Finally, interviewees have similarly sited organizational and decision-making processes as the main challenges facing the creation of national platforms, even among activists with similar

political and strategic visions. In the words of a member of ‘Beirut Madinati’ working towards parliamentary elections,

“Why aren’t we working together for parliamentary elections? We tried to sit around the table, once we start talking about a structure for decision-making processes and governance...I think we have absorbed the idea of consensus that we have been hearing since a hundred years in the country...the idea of voting is out of question, they say you are excluding people. I am trying to understand why things aren’t working out, and are not sustainable...why there is always an expiry date” (Member of ‘Beirut Madinati’).

Another central organizer of ‘You Stink’ also working towards national parliamentary elections claimed that,

‘I’ve been working for three and a half month with the groups that are running and want to run for parliamentary elections and unfortunately, I’ve been trying for three and a half months to unite them in one list, but its difficult, because of egos...everything called internal decision-making processes fails, internal elections, general conference announcing a national opposition...all fails’ (Central Organizer of ‘You Stink’).

At the time of the interviews, the political elite were still in disagreement on the form of the new electoral law, leaving activists lost as to the best electoral strategies to adopt in the next parliamentary elections, and more importantly, whether the new law would allow independent, non-sectarian lists an equal opportunity to compete. The disadvantages of the majoritarian law have been compelling activists to rally and campaign for a new parliamentary, non-sectarian electoral law based on proportionality in large districts or with Lebanon as one electoral district. After years of political bickering, a new ‘proportional law’ was passed mid-June 2017, coupled with a third extension of term till March 2018. However, the new law retained sectarian-based allocations across 15 districts and is argued to limit the capacity of minorities and ‘independents’ to compete fairly given its limitations on ‘proportionality’ (Diab, June 2017). Reforms, such as a women’s quota, allowing security personnel to vote and reducing the voting age to 18 years, were also dismissed (Al-Jazeera, June 2017).

F. Conclusion

In this chapter, I reveal activists’ contending relationship to ‘the political,’ that is increasingly premised on the adoption of ‘techno-moral,’ ‘de-politicized’ and ‘consensual’

frameworks. The protest movement's contending position in relation to the 'garbage' crisis has revealed actors' contradictory position, caught between advancing technical and environmental solution for an otherwise highly politicized file vested with political and economical interests. '*Beirut Madinati*' found itself caught up in a similar position, whereby having to insure the internal and external inclusivity of the initiative, the electoral campaign sidelined the city's contentious files, in favor of a politics of 'not naming.' By sidelining larger political contentions in favor of a consensual, technical framing, '*Beirut Madinati*,' however, risk resuscitating the hegemonic political and economical interests vested in the city by keeping them outside the realm of discussion, while negating the constitutive split between the 'people' of the city, in favor of a moral and consensual framing of demands, under the rubric of universalized concerns. Finally, although premised upon the need to create lasting political organizations and projects, '*Sabaa*' approaches 'the political' more as 'modern,' 'non-traditional' organization and "pragmatic" problem solving than as a space of dis-census, power interests and conflicting political projects. The chapter, finally, analyses collective actions' increased adopted of organizational frameworks premised upon consensual, rather than democratic, decision-making processes, and particular 'least common denominator' and 'non-demanding' consensual demands.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

“Far from depoliticized, citizenship in Lebanon remains deeply contested” (Nagel et al., 2015, p.243)

Situated in a region infused with revolutionary energy and mass dissent, Lebanon, although not un-affected by the ‘spillovers’ of the Arab Uprisings, has often been described as immunized to the regional upsurges (Felsch and Wählisch, 2016, p.1). The Lebanese squares, however, have been far from dormant as growing popular discontent boiled just underneath the surface, often erupting in response to recurrent political deadlock, widening inequalities and worsened living conditions. While previous accounts described the Lebanese public and society as characteristically ‘adrift,’ caught up in conspicuous leisure and consumption, and pervasive ‘indifference’ and ‘lethargy’ (Khalaf, 2012, p.15), the onset of the trash crisis and unbearable stench and sight of garbage in the streets has marked the tipping point of popular political disaffection and disdain. The most recent large-scale movement erupted following the accumulation of garbage in the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon towards the end of July 2015, and the absence of any governmental strategy to solve the severe environmental and health-implicated catastrophe. The movement witnessed the multiplication of campaigns, representing a few people behind their newly created ‘brand,’ or ‘archaic’ political-party affiliates refurbished to fit the demands of the moment. The movement’s organizational and campaigning tools, indeed, marked, for the first time on such a large scale, a move away from ‘brick and mortar’ organization and formal political party frameworks towards a ‘hybrid’ model that combines background coordination with social media-mediation participation and mobilization.

Although street protests eventually declined, without arriving at realizing their demands at least in the garbage file, the collective energy and dynamics of the protest movement were perpetuated in the unprecedented involvement and achievements of ‘independent’ candidates and lists in the municipal elections of May 2016, the first national election after six years of political stalemate. Built on the need to bring together years of single-issue battles (e.g. the protection of public property and cultural heritage) into a more organized electoral campaign for winning office, ‘*Beirut Madinati*,’ represented the first such initiative from the center. Coming a few months after the protest movement, many interviewed members of ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ see it as the product of the movement that followed the trash crises and spoke to people’s long-standing disillusionment and discontent with the political class. Others, however, perceive it as a marked strategic and organizational development from a ‘reactionary,’ oppositional, and ‘*anti-*’ movement, towards an ‘organized,’ ‘program-based,’ and ‘*pro-*’ alternative. While ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ did not win seats in the municipal battle, the post-elections campaign was literally torn between internal tendencies that support the need to transform into a lasting political movement that would run for parliamentary elections, and tendencies that strongly argue for remaining at the local level as a monitoring body for the current municipal council. Eventually, the campaign voted not to participate as a campaign in parliamentary elections, partly due to discernable internal political heterogeneity and fears of disintegrating. Yet, ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ remains a player to be reckoned with. Indeed, the campaign has been part of great efforts that successfully led to the election of Jad Tabet as the president of ‘Beirut’s Order of Engineers,’ against a candidate backed by an alliance of establishment political parties (Daily Star, April 2017).

While the future of ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ remains unclear, few months after the national reverberations of the ‘municipal battles’ waned out, ‘*Sabaa*’ announced itself as a ‘new,’ ‘modern’ and ‘non-sectarian political party,’ hoping to run for parliamentary election, and

build a ‘lasting’ ‘political platform.’ ‘*Sabaa*’ is not the only announced group hoping to battle at the national level. ‘*Badna Nhasib*’ also announced according to a central interviewed member the candidacy of eight of its members. Members from ‘*Beirut Madinati*’ who supported the idea of working on national politics are also deliberating and networking with other groups and individuals from different regions of the country. However, as activists knew all too well, the electoral law that political elites, themselves, have been cooking behind closed doors would have consequential impact upon their chances to compete. After years of political bickering, the parliament announced on the 14th of June, a new parliamentary electoral law based upon proportional representation, albeit with major obstacles to the participation of new political forces and minorities (Diab, 2017). While it remains early to foresee the outcomes of the ongoing parliamentary efforts, given the postponement of elections for the third time till May 2018, electoral work, as I argued, should not become an end in itself, but a means among others towards a goal: building coherent political organizations.

Given the rapid accumulation of struggles over the past two years (2015-2017) since the trash crisis in summer 2015, and the political opportunity presented by, the then, salient internal political contradictions and deadlock, mobilization tools and relations to ‘the political,’ have been subject to marked development and re-negotiation. The point of departure of this inquiry has been actors’ overarching contentious relationship to ‘the political,’ characterized by an ‘un-willingness’ to address larger political contentions. This tension has been evident in the case of the protest movement between its two central tendencies: the one favoring a techno-moral and singular focus on the ‘garbage,’ while the other insisting on the impossibility of divorcing the crisis from its larger political coronaries and from addressing the system as a whole. The movement advanced a momentous rejection of politics and its organizational forms (political parties), calling against ‘all means all’

politicians as corrupt, embodying their feelings of having been betrayed by the politics of representational democracy. This tendency was also evident in the subsequent case of *'Beirut Madinati's'* municipal campaign. The campaign's 'strategic' sidelining of contentious politics in favor of presenting the governing of the capital as a kind of consensual, 'technical reform,' apparently blind to the political realities, accords with the techno-moral logic that perceives of 'partisan politics' and 'collective identities' as a thing of the past, and consensus and individual 'lifestyles' as the gift of progress (Mouffe, 2005, p.1). However, these strategies and tactics were subject to self-critical examination and fierce internal and external debate for their shortcomings and contradictions. Following these debates, *'Beirut Madinait'* came to this realization and admitted to doing political work, albeit an 'alternative' form of politics. In his work on the 2001 Argentinian uprisings, Schaumberg (2016, p.391) reveals how a rejection of organization and politics resuscitates and serves neoliberal's agenda, rather than oppose and challenge it. Finally, cognizant of the need to organize in a lasting political framework, the creation of *'Sabaa'* as an 'alternative' 'political platform,' rather than reconcile individuals with political participation, similarly, caters to increased individualization and the annulment of 'the political' as a space of contention, by defining it, instead, in 'pragmatic' terms while advancing it as 'fun' and subject to revolving-door entry or exist. Nevertheless, as this research argues, this apparent blindness to the political nature of crisis, is not the outcome of individual ignorance, but of the very nature of a techno-moral, consensual conceptualization of politics and organization.

This research has, therefore, been particularly interested in tracing the development of organizational frameworks and discourses, and their resulting re-configuration of political contention and citizenry. The research situates the discussion of actors' contending relationship to organization and 'the political' within the neoliberal logic that increasingly pre-configures actors' fields of action, advancing new forms of 'oppositional cultures'

(Harvey, 2005). The ‘common sense’ informing Western sociology and social movement theory, is the idea that thanks to neoliberal globalization, the world has entered a ‘second modernity’ in which individuals liberated from collective ties, can now dedicate themselves to cultivating “a diversity of lifestyles, unhindered by antiquated attachments” (Mouffe, 2005, p.1). A “free world” liberated from ideology and “partisan conflicts,” and guided by ‘consensus’ and ‘dialogue’ is now possible (ibid.). Social movement theories conceptualize this paradigmatic shift towards ‘*new* social movements,’ characterized less by class struggles and institutionalized conflicts over distribution, than by cultural and expressive ‘politics of the first person’ (Habermas, 1981; Touraine, 2002). I argue that the above conceptual and discursive structures increasingly guide *new* forms of organization and relations to ‘the political.’ Yet, as this research further argues, the realities of the region are a far cry from the picture represented by ‘immaterial’ and ‘post-political’ paradigms.

Indeed, while classist analysis has increasingly fallen out of repute among academic and advocacy circles, the world has been witnessing the massive eruption of protest movements carrying material and classists concerns. The global aspect of political disaffection and disdain, epitomized in the massive eruption of protest movements on a worldwide scale, reveals the systemic, material and political nature of the crisis. The slogan, ‘the people want the downfall of the regime,’ that reverberated across the Arab region, signaled a break away from NGO-ized fragmentation and particularization of social issues and components, towards perceiving them as interlinked and intersectional (Traboulsi, 2014, p.33). More importantly, the popular slogan attests to the unity of the regime in its different components: authority, security, army, economy and culture (Ibid.). This is the ‘regime’ and power balance, argues Traboulsi (2014, p.33), that requires de-composition and overturn in favor of advancing a democracy built upon the ‘people’s will.’ This research, therefore, addressed the need to foreground analysis of the contemporary surge and development of

contentious action in Lebanon within the context of the neoliberal structural turn in collective organizational forms and strategies, and actors' resulting paradoxical perceptions of 'the political.'

The rise of new forms of organization and political participation, such as digital activism, has often been linked to the overall structural individualization and fragmentation facing political participation (Bennett et al., 2012, p.743), and the increased disengagement from and widespread rejection of politics as a vehicle of change, given the increased perception of politicians, as a whole entity, as outright corrupt and self-interested (Jones, 2016, p.11-2). Indeed, as Errejon (2016, in Jones, p.11) puts it, "Political representatives resemble each other more and more, and their constituents less and less." Given the increased political alienation and structural fragmentation and individualization facing political participation, Bennett *et al.*, (2012, p.759) argue that "many organizations are finding they must engage people *differently*." However, as this research seeks to argue, rather than reconcile individuals with political participation, 'institutional fixes' that claim to depart from past forms of hierarchically-brokered organization and partisan 'politics of the past,' actually cater for increased fragmentation, commercialization and individualization, while resuscitating inequalities by keeping them out of the realm of discussion.

Analyzing, the nature of new organizational frameworks adopted by the three subsequent case studies that claim to depart from traditional organizational frameworks, I argue that they actually exhibit contradictory impacts. While proclaiming greater 'participation' and grassroots empowerment (Swyngedouw's, 2005, p.1991-2), these organizations increasingly resemble NGOs in their low-commitment requirements, lack of internal and external accountability, and weakness of democratic representation and decision-making processes. Moreover, while claiming to depart from 'leadership' requirements towards greater horizontality and leaderlessness, this research revealed that leadership and

organization still play central roles in shaping movement's direction and potential, with constant challenges, continuities and discontinuities from past forms of action. In fact, conceiving organization as: "centralism + hierarchy = authoritarianism," as Aouragh (2016, p.497) argues, often guides a rejectionist and reductionist view of organization and leadership. Instead, Aouragh (ibid.) argues that without "an organized body with a center...resistance is more likely to dissipate."

Moreover, analyzing the impact of 'digital activism' and online participation upon the social movement field, I argue against the increased individualization and commercialization of struggles away from structural inequalities and conflict. This research approaches technology as both an enabling and constraining 'medium' and outcome of society (Fuchs, 2012, p.387), questioning the celebratory approach guiding the analysis of social media's role in collective action. Instead, this research argues that 'cybercultural politics' can be effective if, first, it becomes aware of the dominant worlds and power relations created by the technologies upon which it relies, and second, acknowledges the realization of 'cyberpolitics' ('political activism of the Internet') into 'place politics,' or concrete political activism by balancing online and offline activism (Escobar, 1999, p.32 in Fenton, 2006, p.231). Hence, rather than theorizing 'new inventions,' or adopt stable social movement leadership typologies, this research foregrounds the need to take into account the particular historical formations and processes under which movements emerge and constantly mutate (Schaumberg, 2013, p.398-9). As revealed by this research, the marked shift towards social media-mediated action and campaigning has bared the limitations of 'seasonal campaigning' and 'digital activism,' compelling several activists towards re-examining their organizational choices and repertoires. In fact, a significant number of activists across circles claimed that the choice of organizational frameworks and decision-making processes poses the greatest challenge for building sustainable, effective and democratic collective action fields.

This research revealed that far from representing ‘de-politicized,’ or ignorant ‘new’ forces, ‘civil society’ actors’ exist in contending positions combining a growing disillusionment with national politics, with an increased resort to ‘new social movement’ tools of action and ‘NGO-ized’ discourses. Yet, by adopting new organizational structures and de-politicized, particular discourse that increasingly conform to NGOs’ model, activists and new initiatives end up fighting the consequences of a neoliberal order with tools and discourses that conform to its imperatives. The ‘unintended,’ yet ‘instrumental’ consequences of neoliberalism’s discursive and conceptual structures (Ferguson, 1994, p.256, 275)—propagating an NGO-ized logic of action—have sidelined political contentions and power relations in favor of techno-moral, universalized rationality. While keen on not getting ‘involved in politics,’ developmental and managerial approaches to change serves a strong de-politicizing function (Ferguson, 1994, p.226), that risks resuscitating inequalities and injustices by keeping them out of the realm of discussion. This apparent blindness, hence, stems not from the personal ignorance of its members, but from the very nature of a techno-moral, consensual approach. This logic, argues Ferguson, (1994, p.2260), is ill-equipped to play the political game it suddenly finds itself in the midst of. The alternative path towards achieving social change, according to Ferguson (1994, p.285-6), rests simply in citizen’s ‘political participation’ in society. Experts and holders of special knowledge are especially responsible to engage in ‘political work,’ according to Chomsky (1969, in Ferguson, p. 286). Hence, in direct contradiction to anti-political approaches, rearticulating and rethinking what ‘political action’ and engagement means for everyone is necessary (Ticktin, 2011, p.224). It is, moreover, not enough for liberal thought to acknowledge ‘plurality’ and extol inclusivity, democratic politics need “to have a real purchase on people’s desires and fantasies” (Mouffe, 2005, p.6). “To be able to mobilize passions towards democratic designs,” Mouffe (2005, p.6), argues, “democratic politics must have a partisan character.” Hence, while working

towards overcoming 'sectarian politics' that guide the Lebanese political system, activists must equally resist '*post-political*' tendencies, that are equally guided by *consensual, technomoral* governance that annul the democratic aspect of 'the political' as a democratic space for *dis-census* and of competing projects/interests. Movement participants can move from "oppositional collective action bound by scope, aims and cultural 'language'" towards "wide-ranging and more radical projects for change" by overcoming 'fragmented knowledge' and isolated notions of wrongdoing, for more structural and relational understanding of the realities of injustice (Cox et al, 2013, p.73-4). Only then can local and specific movements, or what Cox et. al. (2013, p.77) call struggles of "militant particularisms," shift from *campaigns* to 'social movement projects,' targeting the "social totality as an object to be transformed."

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APENDICES

Appendix A: Content Analysis Coding Scheme

Main Coding Categories	Sub-Coding categories (1)	Sub-Coding Categories (2)	Sub-Coding Categories (3)
A. <i>Self-representation or self-framing</i>	1) Campaign Framing	a. Transnational b. Representatives of the people c. Peaceful d. Novel e. Civil/ civic f. Volunteer-based g. Youthful h. Effective/ Efficient i. United...Etc.	
	2) Framing of Candidates or Members	a. Experts b. Activists c. Highly- educated...Etc.	
	3) Alternative Politics	a. Non-politically affiliated b. Moral c. Personalized politics d. Positive e. Transparent f. Independent g. Non-traditional h. Diverse i. United j. Modern k. Horizontal l. Non-sectarian m. Leaderless ...Etc.	

<p>B. Demands or issues raised</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) State violence/ arbitrary arrests 2) Environment 3) Public health and safety 4) Economy 5) Garbage 6) Accountability 7) Electric shortage 8) Public space 9) Minister resignation 10) Transfer of municipal funds 11) Daily concerns 12) Cultural heritage...Etc. 		
<p>C. Perceptions of politics</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Corruption 2) State Inefficiency/ Neglect 3) Sectarianism 4) Fabrications/ Lies 5) Pillagers/ Looters 6) Killers/ Criminals 7) Self-interested 8) Political brokerage/deals 9) Political Quotas 10) Thugs 11) Militias/ Mafia 12) Illegitimate 13) Shameful...Etc. 		
<p>D. Organizational forms</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Conventional campaigning: 2) Post-conventional campaigning: 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ground action b. Reaching out a. Fund-raising events b. Online reaching-out 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Call for protest ii. Call to vote i. Public meetings ii. Media appearances iii. Newspaper articles

		c. Sign a petition d. Volunteering	
		e. Participatory approach	<u>Offline:</u> i. Participatory democracy ii. Inviting political participation iii. Collective problem solving <u>Online:</u> i. Endorsements ii. Donations iii. Social media participation
<i>Tone</i>	1) Positive 2) Negative		
<i>Audience addressed</i>	1) Primary: authorities 2) Secondary: public		
<i>Discourse rationality</i>	1) Emotional 2) Logic-based appeal		
<i>Admin's function</i>	1) Report 2) Inform 3) Identify issues		

Appendix B: The Distribution of Interviewees Across Initiatives & Groups

Collective Action Initiatives	Groups/ Campaigns	Number of Interviewees
'Hirak' (25)	'You Stink'	4
	'Badna Nhasib'	2
	'Al-Shaab Youreed'	3
	'Jeye el-Teghyeer'/Lebanese Communist Party/ 'Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth'	2
	AUB Secular Club	2
	Civil Society Movement	1
	Journalists	2
	Lebanese Eco-movement	1
	Democratic Renewal Movement	1
	Independent Participants/Organizers	7
Municipal Elections (16)	'Beirut Madinati'	10
	'Mouwatinoun Mouwatinat fi Dawla' (Citizens Within a State)	1
	'Badna Nhasib'	2
	Zgharta Municipal Campaign	1
	Lebanese Communist Party	2
Parliamentary Elections (15)	'Sabaa'	2
	'Badna Nhasib'	2
	'Beirut Madinati'	5
	Lebanese Eco-movement	1
	'You Stink'	1
	Democratic Renewal Movement	1
	'Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla'	1
	Individual Deliberators	2

Appendix C: List of Groups Discussed

GROUP NAME (AR.)	GROUP NAME (ENG.)	DISCRIPTION
<i>Tol'et Rihetkon</i>	You Stink	- The name has been coined to refer to the inapt and corrupt politicians. - The campaign includes a few friends and activists that made particular use of their 'branding' and 'campaigning expertise,' to create an attractive and catchy Facebook campaign, while also carrying creative actions such as depositing trash bags at the doors of ministries and ministers' homes. - The campaign relied upon donations and volunteers call for on its Facebook page.
<i>Badna Nhasib</i>	We Want Accountability	- The campaign includes political party affiliates from 'archaic' political parties, such as Iraq's Baath political party, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (of Aali Haidar), Haraket Shaab, as well as non-political party affiliates. -The campaign places emphasis on holding the political elite 'accountable,' through demonstrations and legal action.
<i>Al Shaab Youreed</i>	The People Want	A radical leftists group, incorporating grassroots movements and small political parties, such as the Socialist Forum.
<i>Jeye el Teghyeer</i>	Change is Coming	A campaign formed primarily from the 'Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth,' the youth branch of the 'Lebanese Communist Party.'
<i>Ila al-Share'</i>	To the Streets	A smaller group, which gathered activists from the Democratic Left Movement.
<i>Tayar al Moujatama' al Madani</i>	Civil Society Movement	A secular, left-leaning youth group founded by the deceased priest Gregoire Haddad.
<i>Al-Moufakira al-Kanouniya</i>	Legal Agenda	A multi-disciplinary local NGO that monitors and analyzes law and public policy in Lebanon, specifically, and the Arab region, generally.
<i>Mouwatounoun Wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla</i>	Citizens Within a State	A secular, left-leaning group founded initially as a municipal campaign for elections in Beirut in May 2016 by the former Labor Minister and Economic Specialist, Charbel Nahas.
<i>'Min Ajel al-Jomhuriya'</i>	For The Republic	- A smaller group of activists and friends that came together against the parliamentary extension of term

		<p>in 2013 and then again around the garbage crisis, focusing particularly on political ‘corruption.’</p> <p>-The group’s main concern is to fight and protect democratic and republican values, according to its central organizer.</p>
‘Nedeh el A’lmeneh’	AUB Secular Club	<p>- University-based club based upon values of secularism.</p> <p>- The club has been part of the <i>Hirak’s</i> central members and participates.</p> <p>- The club has formed the backbone of ‘Beirut Madinati’'s volunteering body.</p>
‘Beirut Madinati’	Beirut, My City	<p>- An ‘independent’ municipal campaign of highly educated individuals, academics, professionals, and urban activists, that formed an oppositional list to the traditional parties that dominated Beirut’s municipality.</p> <p>-The campaign advanced a technical reorganization plan for the city with a positive tone and appealing visualizations.</p> <p>- The campaign garnered 32% of the total votes in Beirut’s municipal elections (Haidar, 2017), yet did not win seats due to the limitations of the majoritarian electoral law set in place.</p>
‘Sabaa’	Seven	<p>- A nascent ‘cross-sectarian’ political party led by a number of experts, activists and concerned citizens, seeking to ‘organize the participation of citizens in public affairs’ through building a ‘modern’ and ‘advanced’ model for political action, following the latest technologies and political concepts.</p> <p>- Its name is inspired by the symbol of victory, which resembles number ‘7’ in Arabic: ‘٧.’</p> <p>- The nascent ‘political platform’ recently launched its parliamentary electoral campaign ‘<i>Ibtisamat Watan</i>’ (The Nation’s Smile).</p>

