

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTESTATION, PLANNING
AND POLITICAL CHANGE:
THE SAVE BISRI CAMPAIGN IN LEBANON

by
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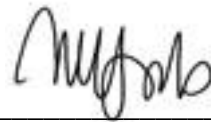
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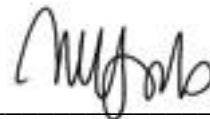
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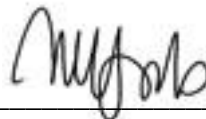
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To you all, my sincerest appreciation.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Though environmental contestation in the Global South is hardly effective (Haynes, 1999), scholars of social and environmental movements have observed new forms of collective action with increased potential for success (MJ, 2017; Haynes, 1999; DeLuca, 1999; Dellaporta and Diani, 2020). These movements are loosely organized and dealing with diverse localized issues, yet increasingly coordinating with each other, joining efforts through multi-scalar networks and coalitions, and building common discourses based on socioeconomic grounds.

The role of urban and regional planners in this regard is crucial. Advocacy planning theorists have highlighted the responsibility of planners in achieving social and environmental justice by redistributing resources, political power, and participation toward disadvantaged groups. However, as planners continue to struggle to challenge the capitalist forces and influence decision-making, they are encouraged to engage directly in politics either through representative democracy processes (Grooms and Boamah, 2018), or within the realm of activism and social movements (Sager, 2016).

This thesis analyzes the environmental campaign to save the Bisri Valley in Lebanon threatened by a World Bank-funded dam project. Coordinated by the author, the campaign emerged in a context where large dams are regarded as symbols of modernization and are subject to sectarian profit-sharing (Riachi, 2016), and where environmental activism is often unable to challenge the clientelist dynamics (Karam, 2006). This thesis argues that the Save the Bisri Valley campaign has been able to threaten the feasibility of the project by elaborating a set of strategies which incorporate advocacy planning and social movement logics. These strategies are distinguished by their multi-scalar and diverse modalities, and by their abilities to mobilize local and international support. Further, the campaign has operated effectively within the political landscape, challenging the state's power structure and shifting the paradigm that determines the making of water and development policies in Lebanon.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	x
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	11
A. Introduction	11
B. Research Statement.....	15
1. Thesis Argument	15
2. Thesis Significance	16
C. Methodology.....	16
D. Thesis Structure	17
II. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ADVOCACY PLANNING: A REVIEW.....	19
A. Forms of Collective Action	20
B. Political Resources and Opportunities.....	21
C. The Global Struggle for Justice	24
D. Components of Social Movement Analysis	27
E. The Role of Symbols and Cultural Representations.....	28
F. Planning and Political Action.....	30

G. Anti-Dam Movements in the Global South.....	32
III. WATER POLICIES, DAMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTESTATION IN LEBANON	38
A. Overview of History and Politics	38
1. Policy Shortcomings	40
2. Environmental Contestation.....	43
a. Historical Background and Current Situation.....	43
b. The Rise of the Anti-Dam Activism	47
B. The Bisri Valley and the Dam Project.....	48
1. Overview	48
2. The Bisri Dam’s Environmental Threats	50
IV. THE SAVE THE BISRI VALLEY CAMPAIGN: EMERGENCE AND STRATEGIES.....	54
A. Emergence and Power Map.....	55
C. Strategies of Organizing, Mobilizing, and Direct Action.....	59
1. Forming Public Opinion at a National Scale: A Facebook-based Communication Strategy	60
2. Stirring Local Mobilization: Personal Connections and WhatsApp Groups .	65
3. Organizing and Collective Action: Claiming Back the Valley	68
4. Networking and Lobbying with MPs and Key Stakeholders.....	74
5. Pressuring the International Funding Agency (the World Bank).....	79
a. Phase I: Dialoguing	79
b. Phase II: Demanding Accountability from within	81
c. Phase III: Denouncing and Allying with Member Countries.....	90
d. Phase IV: Back to Local Negotiations and Keeping the Pressure On.....	92
V. CONCLUSION.....	96
A. Synthesis.....	96

D. Summary.....	99
E. The Future of the Bisri Valley.....	100
F. Research Contribution.....	102
G. Limitations.....	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Power map 2018.....	57
Figure 2: Power map 2020.....	95

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“In trying to reshape the nature of America’s urban communities, there is one area, one set of institutions, practices, within America, that allows you to contribute greatly to the work that you seek to do as a professional planner. That is work with political parties that are shaping policy for this urban community. Unless people like ourselves (planners)[,] who come into this field because[,], basically[,], we think things are pretty awful in this society and do need changing[,], begin to be active and take responsibility, and begin to address the public and begin to gain public support for what we are trying to achieve, there’s very little chance we’re going to be successful”.

Paul Davidoff, 1971

A. Introduction

In a time where dam-based water policies are being revised for their environmental and social impact, inefficiency and safety risks (Tahmiciogly et al., 2007), the government of Lebanon has enacted a water sector strategy based on 18 large dam projects (MoEW, 2012) posing threats to already limited natural resources and disregarding more viable alternatives for water supply. This policy is encouraged by international financial institutions like The World Bank offering loans for large-scale projects, and by the local power-sharing system intertwined with corporate interests (Riachi, 2016). It adopts the traditional discourses behind dams: modernization, water scarcity and security, job creation and water conflict.

Many of these dams require extensive land expropriation, destruction of agricultural area, displacement of residents, and encroachment on protected sites. The planning of these projects is monopolized by the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) and stem from an engineering-based approach to development. These institutions, and more generally, planning institutions in Lebanon, lack any participatory planning mechanisms and lack modalities for accountability. There has been a few attempts to integrate water management in a cross-sectoral, comprehensive and sustainable planning vision (namely the National Physical Master Plan in 2009 and the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment of the water strategy in 2015), but these have not been operationalized into legislations, and they are most often disregarded, and thus they have failed to achieve their goals.

Under the pretext of scientific expertise and efficiency, the MoEW and CDR's plans actually serve the sectarian system's interests and use research and studies to make what Habermas would call "instrumental claims" to justify dam construction, as have been argued by several scholars and activists (Eid-Sabbagh, 2014; Riachi, 2016). Abou Cham observes that dam projects retained what he refers to as "an almost idealized place" in Lebanon's water vision, and that dam projects have not been subjected to public debates (Abou Cham, 2013).

Following the approval of the National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS) in 2012 and the accelerated pace of dam construction, environmental activists started to mobilize against dam projects. However, their efforts, which included protests, lawsuits and media

campaigns, were limited and failed to impact decision-making, with several dam projects currently under construction or at the final phases of commissioning (Riachi, 2016).

Typically, environmental movements in developing countries are hardly successful, and efforts to stop construction of large-scale engineering projects often fail to challenge capitalist forces and their growth machine (McCormick, 2006; Van Der Heijden, 1999). However, scholarly articles on social movements have observed new forms of collective action with increased potential of success, particularly in the Global South (MJ, 2017; Haynes, 1999; DeLuca, 1999; Bülow, 2017; Schwedler & Harris, 2016; Dellaporta and Diani, 2020). These movements are loosely organized, fragmented and dealing with diverse localized and global issues, yet increasingly coordinating with each other, joining efforts through networks and coalitions at the local, national and even international scales, and building common discourses based on socioeconomic grounds. The ability of these groups to create change depends as well on external factors like the specific structures of opportunity in each country—meaning the level of persistence of old political conflicts, the political elites' efforts to counter opposition, and the closed/open structure of the state and how much room it leaves for participation (Van Der Heijden, 1999).

The role of urban and regional planners in the struggle against social and environmental injustice is crucial. Advocacy planning theorists have highlighted the responsibility of planners in redistributing resources, political power, and participation toward disadvantaged populations. Among the advocacy planning's theoretical models particularly relevant to environmental justice is the Progressive Regionalist model that calls for interdisciplinary and interregional collective action for social and environmental equity (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka, 2009). Criticism of advocacy planning point to its

inability to achieve a just society given the imbalances of power between the marginalized groups on one hand, and the political and corporate elite on the other (Mazziotti 1974; Grabow and Heskin, 1973; Parker and Street, 2018). To fill this gap, scholars are discussing new forms of advocacy planning, encouraging professionals to engage directly in politics either through representative democracy processes (Grooms and Boamah, 2018), or within the realm of activism and social movements (Sager, 2016).

This thesis analyses the Save the Bisri Valley Campaign in Lebanon, which I co-founded in 2018 and continue to coordinate. The campaign aims to stop the World Bank-funded Bisri Dam, the largest dam project in the government's water sector plan, and the largest financial investment of the World Bank in the country, amounting to 625 million USD. The project is also one of the very few cases where the World Bank finances land expropriation. While the Lebanese Government and the World Bank claim that the project would supply the Greater Beirut Area with water for domestic use to alleviate water shortage problems, the Save the Bisri Valley Campaign considers the project as highly expensive and land greedy, potentially destroying six million square meters of natural areas and agricultural land and dismantling tens of historical sites, in addition to posing serious threats to the local communities' safety.

Unlike previous campaigns to stop dams in Lebanon, the Save the Bisri Valley campaign has been able to threaten the feasibility of the project by elaborating, as I argue in this thesis and develop further below, a set of strategies which incorporate advocacy planning and collective action logics, that are distinguished by their multi-scalar and diverse modalities, and by their abilities to mobilize local and international support. Indeed, the campaign managed to influence drastically the processes of decision-making concerning

the dam project as demonstrated recently by how they compelled the World Bank to reconsider its financing for the project¹.

B. Research Statement

1. Thesis Argument

The research question that has guided this thesis asks: How can advocacy planning operate within a planning practice polarized between public planning agencies that are protecting the interest of the growth machine and urban activists without access to planning decision-making?

By analyzing the case-study of the Save the Bisri Valley campaign in Lebanon in relation to social movement and advocacy planning theories, I argue that the movement operated within a unique political opportunity structure that includes the involvement of an international financial institution, the World Bank, the mounting opposition to the power-sharing political system in Lebanon, and the conflicts between the political parties in power. The campaign has taken advantage of these opportunities and adopted three sets of interdependent tactics that enabled success:

1) Shifting the public debate from purely technical terms to political terms, in addition to operating within the political landscape, particularly identifying the cracks in the system that enable contestation and opposition.

2) Conducting systematic and sustained action that combines communication, mobilization, organizing, direct action, and negotiation, while prioritizing tactics of language and symbols over organizational structures.

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2020/04/16/lebanon-water-supply-augmentation-project-bisri-dam-project>

3) Upscaling the problematic from a local issue into a national one, privileging multi-sited and multi-scalar modalities of action, and building networks at the local, national and international scales.

2. Thesis Significance

The purpose of the research is, first, to document the Save the Bisri Valley Campaign, its functioning, challenges and achievements. Second, it seeks to extend our knowledge of environmental and social movements in general and of anti-dam movements in particular within the context of the Global South. Finally, this thesis reflects on the role of advocacy planning and its intersection with collective action.

C. Methodology

I am clearly writing this thesis from my position as an advocate planner, co-leading the Save the Bisri Valley campaign, and being significantly engaged in mobilizing, organizing, and on-the-ground direct action, especially since October 2019.

This research started with a review of the water policy in Lebanon, its history, key players and shortcomings, and the environmental contestation of dams. The review was based on resources from both academic and media articles and helped me analyze the political-economic context of my case study. For this end, I analyzed the data collected into a power map illustrating the emergence of opportunities for the campaign and that helps understand the influence of the campaign's actions.

Understanding the anti-dam movement requires accessing data related to the campaign's discourse, events, participants and organization. Therefore, the research builds on the campaign's archive that I have developed along the years of campaigning,

including accounts of events and meetings, studies, statements, letters, petitions, whatsapp groups, social media posts and others. A lot of the data collected comes from my direct participation in the campaign, and my direct participant observation of numerous events and situations that relate to it, including interaction with the local inhabitants of Bisri and collaboration with other activists, experts and environmental and political organizations. I also use data from media interviews and articles to further support the information I gathered.

Finally, the data is analyzed in relation to the literature review of social movement theory and advocacy planning theory supported with case studies in the Global South. This review helped further understand the campaign's strategies of collective action and the role of planning advocacy in the process, which helped the extraction of critical lessons related to the forms, processes and conditions for success in social movements in the Global South.

D. Thesis Structure

In this first chapter, I introduced the topic, research question, argument and methodology, and its significance and contribution to social movement and advocacy planning studies. The second chapter is dedicated to a literature review on the subject of social movements and advocacy planning, with a particular emphasis on case studies in the Global South, and culminates with the identification of an analytical framework to assess environmental social movements. The third chapter profiles the dam-based water policies in Lebanon, their environmental impact and the growing contestation they are facing. It also presents an overview of the Bisri Dam project. The fourth chapter investigates the case study of the Save the Bisri Valley campaign, focusing on the

collective action and planning advocacy strategies that were developed and implemented over the past two years. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes with a synthesis of main research findings and a reflection on the contribution of advocacy planning to political change, building on the campaign's experience.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ADVOCACY PLANNING: A REVIEW

What are the requirements for anti-dam movements to succeed in altering policies? And what is the role of advocacy planners in this regard? This chapter explores these questions by reviewing the different theories of social movements and advocacy planning. The first section examines the multiple degrees and forms of collective action and shows the necessity to study activism and social movements in relation to other local political dynamics. The second section relates social movements to the concepts of resource mobilization and structural opportunities. The third section provides a historic overview on the emergence of social movements and their evolving issues of concern and highlights the need to integrate social movement analysis within the global struggle for social (and environmental) justice. The fourth section examines the different components addressed in the analysis of social movements. The fifth section elaborates on the strategies and tactics of social movements and focuses on how symbols and cultural representations of social problems emerge and affect social movements. The sixth section investigates the potential contribution of the planning practice, particularly advocacy planning, to social and environmental justice. Finally, the last section profiles cases of anti-dam movements in the Global South.

A. Forms of Collective Action

Collective action has been associated with political parties, activism, social movements, riots and other expressions of claim-making. The different types of collective action often overlap, and the definitions and limits of each may vary (Yip et al., 2019).

According to Miguel Angel Martínez López (2019), activism makes claims that are not completely satisfied through the administrative channels of the state. However, when activism involves extensive coordination among different groups, supporters and allies, and when it persists for longer periods of time and challenge the power structures, activism can be identified as a movement (Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Martinez Lopez, 2019). The term “social movement” often refers to a form of collective action typically more conflictual than activism, requiring less participation in institutional processes like hearings and forums, and more media mobilization and direct action like demonstrations, blockades, etc. (Yip et al., 2019).

Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (2020) added to this definition the notion of identity building, arguing that the development of a sense of belonging is essential for collective action to be identified as a movement. The properties of social movements can therefore be summarized as following: 1) Oppositional relationships with clearly identified opponents; 2) Dense informal networks and permanent coordination among individuals and organizations; 3) The building of a collective identity beyond specific campaigns (della Porta and Diani, 2020).

Della porta and Diani’s emphasis on collective identity draws a line between social movement dynamics and coalitional dynamics. Coalitions are instrumental by definition and rely primarily on exchanging resources between different groups in order to achieve a particular goal without necessarily aiming at a broader and long-term action

(della Porta and Diani, 2020). Conversely, social movement dynamics imply the building of solidarity ties even after specific events or campaigns are accomplished. Identity building helps movements survive, especially that they usually oscillate between short phases of intense action and long phases of inactivity and self-reflection after which they need to bounce again (Melucci, 1996). Collective identities can also trigger the development of other movements and solidarities (della Porta and Diani, 2020).

Social movements, activism, and coalitions as well as other forms of collective action often intersect with each other and episodes of action rarely correspond to one pure form (Martinez Lopez, 2019; della Porta and Diani, 2020). For instance, empirical research has shown that sustained small-scale actions may nurture large movements and result in structural transformations and regime changes (Yip et al., 2019). Movement dynamics may also involve actors typical of interest-based politics like political parties or allies within the administration (Martinez Lopez, 2019). Accordingly, understanding the complex interactions between different processes of collective action is important in the study of social movements (della Porta and Diani, 2020).

In this section, I examined the notion of collective action outside state institutions, particularly the concepts of activism and social movements, how they relate to each other and how they integrate within the broader, complex, political dynamics. In the next section, I elaborate on how individual views and collective dissent evolve into social movements.

B. Political Resources and Opportunities

The process through which values and ideas are turned into collective action was first examined by American sociologists like Mayer Zald (McCarthy and Zald, 1987; Zald

and Ash, 1966), Anthony Oberschall (1973, 1980) and Charles Tilly (1978) who considered social movements as rational and purposeful actions and part of the broader political process. According to this approach identified as the resource mobilization approach, actors of social movements calculate the costs and benefits of taking action based on the available material and non-material resources that can be mobilized. Their ability to build and benefit from support networks and the tactics they choose determine the results of collective action and its impacts on the political system (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy and Zald, 1987). In addition to the direct results that social movements aspire to achieve, the building and strengthening of long-term solidarity links within and outside the movements is crucial (Oberschall, 1973). However, critiques of the resource mobilization approach considered it too rational that it overlooks the structural origins of movements (Melucci 1989; Piven and Cloward 1992). These critiques rejected the overemphasis on the entrepreneurs' ability to mobilize resources and the disregard of the organizational skills of groups with less leverage (Piven and Cloward 1992). Finally, the resource mobilization approach is indifferent to the role of feelings and emotions as important resources in the mobilization process (Goodwin et al., 2001).

The development of social movements as strategic actions has been also approached through the political process perspective. This approach focuses on the political and institutional conditions that either facilitate or hinder collective action, and on the relationships between social movement actors and institutional political actors (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). Among this approach's key concepts is the political opportunity structure that aims to understand the characteristics of the social movements' external environments. These characteristics include the degree of openness or closure of

the state's institutions (Eisinger, 1973), electoral stability or instability (Piven and Cloward 1977), availability of allies (Gamson, 1990; Tarrow 1989, 1990), system's tolerance of protest (Jenkins and Perrow 1977), and conflicts between the elites (Tarrow 1989, 1994). Indeed, the variables of opportunity differ between the Global South and Global North, democratic and non-democratic states, and so on (Yip et al., 2019). For instance, the protection of civil rights, the freedom of press, the independence of courts, and the institutionalization of political power transfer, may be taken for granted in countries of the Global North but not in many countries of the Global South (Osa and Schock, 2007). Still, movements in non-democratic countries have recently been able to achieve large-scale transformations benefiting from the political opportunity structure (Yip et al., 2019). This is due to 1) the fact that authoritarian states may reduce repression in times of economic crisis when the economic promises are launched to maintain legitimacy (Osa and Schock 2007), and 2) the cracks in the ruling regimes (McAdam et al. 2001) and the availability of material support like financing, and moral support (media, sympathizing groups, etc.) outside state institutions (Yip et al., 2019). Critiques of the political opportunity structure considered that the large number of heterogeneous variables of opportunity accumulated through decades of studies on different movements has become impossible to handle, which resulted in inaccurate and unspecific assessments (Dellaporta and Diani, 2020). Another criticism highlighted the approach's lack of attention to role of movement actors' perception and understanding of structural availabilities and state responses (Gamson and Meyer, 1996; McAdam 1986).

In addition to political opportunities originating from state institutions and political parties, some researchers have emphasized discursive opportunities, arguing that the dominant public discourses impact movements' intensity and potential of success

(Koopmans and Statham 1999). Moreover, social movements may take advantage of opportunities outside their countries of action, seeking support from international organizations (della Porta and Tarrow 2005). The study of complex and multileveled mechanisms of contention gave shape to the theoretical tradition known as the contentious politics approach. One of the key concepts of this tradition is the idea of scale shift denoting the diffusion of contention into other venues on higher and lower levels where it can target different actors and achieve better results (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). Ngai Ming Yip (2019) suggested to expand the concept of scale shift to include the demands and policies addressed by activists, including hegemonic worldviews and cultural codes. Multi-scalar strategies are particularly useful when governments upscale their processes of resources and policymaking (Nicholls et al. 2013).

In this section, I highlighted important dimensions of social movements as strategic actions that utilize material and non-material resources and taking advantage of opportunities in the system. In what follows, I provide a historical overview of social movements highlighting the relation between collective action and issues social struggle, globalization and neoliberalism.

C. The Global Struggle for Justice

Before the 1960's, social movements were concentrated around the issues of labor and national identities, and the analysis of protest politics and collective action was largely influenced by the traditional Marxist approach which analyzed social conflict in the frame of class relations within the capitalist mode of production (della Porta and Diani, 2020). The paradigm that collective action is conditioned mostly by social order dynamics also dominated the structural-functionalist approach advocated by Smelser

(1962). Smelser's view of collective behavior consisted of six components: 1) the social structure that either facilitates or constrains the rise of collective action; 2) the collective experience of tensions and problems in the system; 3) the development of shared beliefs and interpretations; 4) stressful events pushing actors to take action; 5) organized events and actions; and 6) the social control agencies determining the evolution of collective behavior.

In the 1960's, a new wave of protest emerged across the world, including the 1968 revolt in France, the pro-democracy demonstrations in Spain, the students' protests in Britain, Germany and Mexico, the workers-students coalitions in Italy, and others. New themes of contestation started to take shape, and non-materialistic demands related to gender, ecology, and peace began to emerge (Offe, 1985; Arrighi and Silver, 1999). With the neoliberal turn of the 1970s, the new movements spread further and were more fragmented and less institutional than traditional movements (Offe, 1985). Similar to the Marxist and the structural-functionalist approaches, scholars of the "new social movements" emphasized the social structure's central role in collective action (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981; Offe, 1985). However, the new approach rejected the Marxist's idea that class struggle is the only conflict provoking protest action in the post-industrial society, especially with the emergence of movements of diverse claims outside the system of production. Among the new movements those that sought more personal freedom and rejected the state and market's interference in their private life (Melucci, 1989). Scholars of the new social movements also criticized Smelser's perspective, arguing that social movements are not reactive responses to social conflict, but central agents seeking the production of new norms in society (Touraine, 1981).

The growing neo-liberalization and financial restructuring in the 1980's and 1990's and the associated labor crises in the North as well as in the South encouraged several scholars to revisit Marxism and re-investigate the connection of social movement with the global economic processes (Arrighi et al., 1989; Reifer 2004; Silver 2003). For instance, Manuel Castells (1983) argued that social movements challenge the capitalist hegemony in society, though he incorporated historical and cultural components in his model of social movements (gender, ethnicity, residents' ambition to control their urban space, etc.). Castells referred the emergence of new types of conflicts to the growing information technologies shaping what he termed as a "network society" (Castells, 1997). Critiques of Castells' approach pointed to its disregard of the structural contexts of social movements such as the impact of political party dynamics and the state's administrative structure. (Pickvance, 1985).

With the beginning of the new millennium and later with the Great Recession of 2008, additional waves of social movements appeared, increasingly linking conflicts typical of new social movements to issues of class struggle (Arrighi and Silver 1999; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Smith 2008; Tarrow 2005). Anti-austerity protests following the 2008 crisis fueled a widespread concern for economic inequalities and social injustice in the public opinion worldwide (della Porta and Diani, 2020).

The analysis of social change as a key element of social movements remained at the center of focus for many scholars. David Harvey (2001) highlighted the need to further understand local conflicts whose "interests, objectives and organizational forms are fragmented, multiple and of varying intensity", and to relate them to universal phenomena like capitalism or environmental impacts. For Harvey (2008), approaching local struggles from a global scale remains necessary (Harvey, 2008).

This approach is particularly relevant for environmental social movements. Hein Anton Van Der Heijden (1999) argues that the concepts of ecological modernization and sustainable development have failed to be convincing, even in the West, since they do not challenge the social order at the root of the ecological degradation. For him, radical environmental and social movements in the Global South are the readiest to present alternatives, because they do not accept the hegemonic worldviews of development. The ability of these groups to create change depends on the specific structures of opportunity in each country, which are further discussed previously.

The previous sections presented the main schools of collective action across the history of social movements. In what follows, I show the different components of social movement that are currently analyzed by scholars of collective action.

D. Components of Social Movement Analysis

In their review of previous analyses of social movements, Dellaporta and Diani (2020) identified four different dimensions of social movements on which analysis usually focuses:

i) The emergence of individual views opposing particular policies and the expansion of these views through dialogue among opinion makers. This leads to the spreading of social and economic concerns at the level of the public opinion.

ii) Individual attempts to alter neoliberal and capitalist policies and promote alternative options by signing petitions, donating money, mobilizing to stop particular development projects, etc.

iii) The properties of events organized by social movement actors. These events include meetings to discuss strategies and agendas, protest actions to disrupt the

opponent's events, etc. Such actions provide opportunities for more visibility and can have strong emotional impact on public opinion as well as on activists themselves. Events help social movements strengthen the sense of belonging and build common identities, particularly when action shifts in scale and targets international actors (EU, World Bank, etc.).

iv) The organizations and coalitions operating in social movements. These groups secure continuity of collective action and provide resources and opportunities for action to escalate when political opportunities emerge. They also provide the basis for the creation of collective identities.

In the next section I demonstrate the way cultural representations of social problems can trigger dissent among the public and generate collective action.

E. The Role of Symbols and Cultural Representations

While theories of social conflict help understand the impact of structural social change on the formation of social movements, the development of movements was more straightly addressed by other traditions. Scholars of the collective behavior tradition in the 1950s and 1960s highlighted the role of individual feelings and frustrations stimulating collective action, and emphasized the importance of unexpected dynamics in movements (della Porta and Diani, 2020). This approach was criticized for underestimating the social dynamics and cultural representations through which individual experiences and feelings develop into action (Coleman, 1990). Later, the contemporary school of collective behavior acknowledged the role of social movements as a strategic engine of normative change emerging when dissatisfactions with existing systems and norms spreads in society and when institutions fail to respond (Turner and

Killian, 1987; Blumer, 1951). Large-scale social transformations like migration, information technology and mass communication accelerate this process, and as a result, new ideas, symbols, and identities were created (Gusfield, 1963).

However, critiques of the collective behavior tradition argued that the component of feelings and emotions was missing and the focus on rational symbolic production was too exclusive (Snow and Benford, 1992). James Jasper (1997) discusses the moral shocks experienced by individuals when deeply rooted norms are broken. Movements produce rhetoric and symbols to trigger emotions and create a collective identity. Kevin Michael DeLuca (1999) argues that publicity through image events, which are “events that explode in the public’s consciousness”, is a powerful social tool through which environmental movements can hold the states accountable. He criticizes the conventional sociological approach that prioritizes organizations and resources in defining social movements. Rather than organizational patterns, he argues that tactics of language and symbols outside the system’s grid of intelligibility are essential for the creation of successful social movements. He supports the idea that rhetoric and image events should be a constitutive part of any social or political collectivity in the post-modern world to contest the modernist and industrial arguments (DeLuca, 1999).

The analysis of social movements as agents of meaningful change remains relevant in today’s literature, especially with the growing concern about accelerating social transformations in the context of climate change (della Porta, 2018; Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggiero, 2018). I will now present how advocacy planners could be key players in collective action, engaging with the struggle for social and environmental justice.

F. Planning and Political Action

Instead of dealing exclusively with the physical dimensions of the community, advocacy planners seek a just and democratic society by working on moving resources, political power, and political participation toward disadvantage groups (Krumholz, 2015). Advocacy or equity planners conceive the contribution of planning in broad economic and social terms and, according to Paul Davidoff's definition (1965), engage in deliberate discussions with the government's planners. Paul Davidoff (1965) argues that the advocate planner represents the views of a particular group, a client, and reflects them in an alternative plan proposal. This process allows to attain just solutions that don't marginalize low-income and minority groups, and combines the professionalism of the planning practice with political engagement (Krumholz, 2015). A key foundation of advocacy planning comes from Howard's principle of "common ownership of land" which were adopted in the US at the turn of the 20th century by planners like Paul Davidoff, Benjamin C. Marsh, Catherine Bauer, and others, who were against real-estate speculators and predatory forces of the industrial cities (Krumholz 2015: 218).

More recent attempts to address structural conflicts and challenges through planning include Fainstein's theory of the Just City (2000) that emphasized the need to empower communities to fight inequality, and the Progressive Regionalist Approach which considers regions as the appropriate geographic scale to address social inequities and environmental degradation (Reece, 2018:306). In this case, progressive regional change is driven by interdisciplinary collective action and advocacy based on communicating interregional dependencies between all communities and within the competitive global economy (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka, 2009).

However, the ability of planners to achieve the goals of social justice and equity has long been - and continues to be - highly questionable, because the planning practice is currently controlled by the elites and capitalist class or what is referred to as the “growth machine” (Grooms and Boamah, 2018). Even the advocacy planning model has brought with it “advocacy for the powerful” (Parker and Street, 2018). Indeed, revealing the capitalist political forces behind the planning practice has proved to be insufficient (Karki, 2015).

Wes Grooms and Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah (2018) argue that there is a need to “bridge planning’s power gap through the development, teaching, and practice of a political urban planning” whereby planners engage in direct politics through election campaigns and promote equitable cities. Gavin Parker and Emma Street (2018) propose to renew the advocacy tools of planning in the UK. They suggest the roles of what they called the “neo-advocate” to include the following: (i) brokerage, enabling and communication; (ii) induction and organization of activities/events to insure input from people; (iii) critical interrogation of local plans/projects produced, vis-a-vis equity/sustainability principle; (iv) identification and reflection on key planning junctures/moments (insuring pressure over long periods of time is maintained); (v) insuring access to/support from a cadre of people willing and able to provide expert help; (vi): using new media tools and technologies to ensure open and accountable processes of decision-making.

The potential direct contribution of planners to social movements is further examined through the concept of Activist Planning. Tom Sager (2016) argues that the professional competence of planners can be crucial for social movements’ functioning: writing expert statements, conveying information about backstage dealings in the official

planning process, advising on how to file complaints or submit proposal, lobbying, etc. According to Sager, there are three core features for an ‘activist planner’: (1) To use direct action beyond just engaging in government-initiated participation processes; (2) To initiate, facilitate or take part in the preparation of alternative plans.; (3) To address specific and localized planning problems.

In this section I showed the split between equity planners and the growth machine planning supporters. Based on analyses from the US (Grooms and Boamah, 2018) and the UK (Parker and Street, 2018), I explored potential ways to enact advocacy planning beyond words, in ways that disrupt dominant and systemic power structures. Indeed, planning in Lebanon has been closely associated with elite and capitalist’ interests in the post-war era (cf. Harirism as epitomized in the Solidere project as discussed in Baumann, 2012). These interests dominate the sectarian political process and determine the game of urban and environmental politics and planning. They also systematically shape the agencies of other groups and individuals (such as planners in the CDR, the MoPW, municipalities, and even community members in Bisri) through domination, persuasion, and exclusion. The need for planners to be increasingly involved in political action and in social movements seems very relevant in this case. In what follows, I will present cases of anti-dam movements in the global Global South, extracting lessons related to their key strategies and modalities of action

G. Anti-Dam Movements in the Global South

The anti-dam movement in Brazil offers numerous cases to be examined. According to Sabrina McCormick (2006), the Brazilian anti-dam movement has three main goals: “(a) to increase democratic participation in energy policy, (b) to change

policy, and (c) to alter public understanding of dams and their alternatives”. The movement started with rural unions allying with groups in the progressive Catholic Church and a local college to contest dam building, leading to the formation of the movement and its institutionalization as the Regional Commission of People Affected by Dams, which later evolved into the Movement of Dam-Affected People (MAB) that operates at the national level.

Collaboration with researchers has been essential to debunk the government’s incorrect information and distorted studies. The new alternative information generated through expert/activist collaboration stimulated grassroots organizing. The anti-dam movement shared membership with other social movements in Brazil, including the Movement of Landless People (MST), the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Catholic Church, the Rural Workers Union (Sindicatos), and the Rural Women Workers. These groups provided the anti-dam movement with “legitimacy, resources, and tactical insight” (McCormick, 2006). The movement also includes international groups like the International Rivers Movement that provides great financial and technical assistance.

The Brazilian anti-dam movement has worked extensively on evaluating Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and developing new studies through lay/expert partnership. Although the EIA is supposed to involve environmental concerns in the planning process, the anti-dam movement identified a number of problems in the EIA process: (1) the EIA is most often conducted by experts hired by the dam builders, which constitutes a conflict of interest, (2) EIAs often miss important details as the experts develop most of the study’s components from distance and calculate land values without even visiting the affected area, (3) EIA experts are often not trained to assess social costs, (4) rural workers and other community members are unable to assess the validity of the

technical reports, (5) public hearings that are supposed to involve locals in the EIA are often not always held, and even when they are held, communities are not alerted early enough to be able to effectively critique the EIA, (6) the ability to stop the project through the EIA is limited to the initial phase of licensing

The movement tried to counter these challenges through different tactics. In the case of the Irapé Dam, a group of academic researchers and local community members developed a large-scale critique of the official EIA report, in parallel with demonstrations in the public hearings where local community members testified to the importance of their agricultural land, showing the products they produce. They pushed the state's environmental agency FEAM to recommend the cancellation of the project. However, this success did not last long as the state's legislative body superseded FEAM's decision and approved the dam, judging that the resettlement plan is fair.

In the case of the Tucurui Dam, the post-construction dam flooding was greater than originally anticipated, forcing more people upstream and downstream to relocate. However, in 2000, the World Commission on Dams wrote a report exposing the real effects of the dam. The study stimulated local communities to organize and demand better compensation. Additionally, activists organized a conference at the University of Pará providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to share views. Presentations were given by researchers, activists from groups including the movement of dam-affected people, indigenous groups, workers, etc., and representatives of state departments, which allowed for the crossing of governmental, expert, and lay discourses. The discussions emphasized lay critiques of the government's scientific claims, and activists questioned the government's codification of an impacted person, asking to consider people who lost access to water as impacted. Activists were able to engage in direct negotiations with

officials after they drew local and international attention to their situation. Access to international resources and publicity were essential to pressure international companies and the Brazilian government.

In the case of the Belo Monte Dam, international anti-dam protests took place in 1989 leading to the temporary suspension of the project. International rock star Bono, powerful local and international NGOs, and international media attended the protests. Ten years later, the government put forward a second plan, claiming it is an “engineering marvel” that has great generating potential and minimal effects. However, activists believed that the government is misinforming the public, building on previous experiences with similar dams in the country. They also believed that, contrary to the officials’ claim, more than one dam will be built. This conviction was based first on their knowledge of the functioning of such plans, and second on previous practices where one dam was promised and more were built. Grassroot activists collaborated with experts to construct strong critiques of the project, organized several protests, and worked with the public prosecutor who requested to stop the EIA. This time, since there was less international attention than in 1989, collaborations between the activists and experts were even more important.

Another successful anti-dam campaign would be the case of the World Bank-funded Narmada Dam in India. The campaign initially started as groups of activists aiming to ensure that the environment of a specific area is protected, and that displaced citizens are properly compensated financially. The campaign later evolved into an anti-dam movement that took stand on the general issue of large developments in India.

The Indian Government considered the project a symbol of modernization, and advertised its importance for irrigation, drinking water, and hydroelectric power. The

World Bank's discourse emphasized the underuse of the river's water that "could be used for the benefit of the region" (quoted in Elkins [1992: 89]).

Both the structure of power and the communication strategy were crucial for the campaign's successes. The campaign managed to build a powerful anti-dam network, involving local peasants, women, youth and environmental groups, and transnational groups, including Greenpeace International, Friends of the Earth and the US-based Environmental Defense Fund. The adverse publicity forced the World Bank to withdraw its funding in 1994, leaving the government with no option but to put the project on hold (Haynes, 1999). The movement's ability to attract external allies was very crucial for the postponement of the project. However, the Indian Government would relaunch the project later in 2000 with alternative funding sources.

In this section, I demonstrated how governments in the Global South claim the monopoly of science, and neglect other forms of knowledge, particularly local knowledge, driving social movements to contest the governments' studies. I also showed the way activists and experts collaborate and develop communicative claims, and the importance of the public's assertion of these claims. Finally, the cases in India and Brazil show that the building of powerful networks at local, national and international scales is crucial the movements' success.

Using the review of the literature, this thesis will be framed according to the four dimensions of social movements identified by Dellaporta and Diani (2020): ideas, individuals, events and organizations, and how they are linked to each other and integrated in the broader processes of collective action. It will also incorporate the dimensions of symbols and emotions discussed by Gusfield (1963), Jasper (1997) and Deluca (1999). I will also relate my analysis to the ideas developed by advocacy planners

and the global struggles for justice discussed earlier, especially the need to approach local conflicts from a global scale (Harvey, 2008), namely in relation to radical environmental movements and anti-dam movements.

CHAPTER III

WATER POLICIES, DAMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTESTATION IN LEBANON

The objective of this chapter is to understand the historical, political and institutional context of Lebanon's water policies in general and the Bisri Dam project in particular. The chapter explores why and how environmental contestation against dam projects has emerged, and the reasons why the Bisri Dam project has stirred extensive controversy. I start by presenting an overview of the history and politics of water management in Lebanon. I move to outlining the different shortcomings, failures and negative impacts of dam projects. Then, I document environmental movements in Lebanon and the rise of activism against several dam projects since 2013. Finally, I illustrate the characteristics of the Bisri Valley, and present a profile the Bisri Dam project and the potential threats it poses to the valley and its surroundings.

A. Overview of History and Politics

Large-scale engineering projects have dominated the water policy in Lebanon since the French Mandate. During the national institutional construction phase (1943-1975) that was characterized by the import of international development models (Verdeil, 2003), dams were regarded as a building block of the efforts towards modernizing the country (Riachi, 2012). Yet, the adopted water policies could not guarantee sufficient water provision for agriculture and domestic use, and during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) the number of private wells, mostly illegal, significantly increased as citizens needed to compensate for the deficient public network (Ghiotti et al. 2014).

Illegal well drilling continued after the war, with the latest official estimations indicating a total of 60,000 illegal wells across the country (UNDP, 2014). In 2000, the Lebanese Parliament enacted Law 221 that restructures the country's water authorities. Service provision has since been legally consolidated in the financially autonomous regional Water Establishments (WEs), preparing the ground for public-private partnerships and adapting the institutional framework to the International Financial Institutions' conditions (Allès, 2012; Verdeil, 2008). However, the reforms deepened the conflicts between legal and de facto responsibilities, created institutional uncertainty and weakened the accountability line between the policy-maker and service providers (MoEW, 2012). As a result, many wastewater treatment plants were built but are not functioning, resulting in extensive pollution of the aquifers. Moreover, the reforms did not include groundwater management among the core responsibilities of the WEs, leading to the mismanagement of the groundwater resources (Riachi, 2016).

The narrative surrounding dams expanded after the civil war, this time encouraged by the influx of international loans for reconstruction and by the emergence of a discourse of water crisis driven by '*urban growth*' and '*climate change*' as indicated in the Decennial Plan of the water sector (MoEW, 2000). Surface water storage through large dams has since been portrayed as a necessity for the fulfillment of the domestic and agricultural water needs, and subsequently a manifestation of the efficiency and power of the state. For example, then-President Emile Lahoud inaugurated the Chabrouh Dam (Keserwan) in 2007 describing it as the culmination of his tenure's achievements (Al-Akhbar, 2007). In 2009, the Free Patriotic Movement, entering the government for the first time, took charge of the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) and set an agenda for the water sector. The Ministry compiled existing studies, renewed the decennial plan

for surface water storage (2000-2009), and pushed towards a dam-based National Water Sector Strategy that was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2012. Accordingly, dam construction resumed at an unprecedented pace: two new dams were built in Qasimiya (Baabda District) and Yammouneh (Baalbek District), and six others, in Mesilha, Bekaata, Balaa, Janna, Ain Dara and Bisri, are currently under construction or at the final phase of commissioning. Given the power-sharing system of Lebanon, most political parties have included dams in their agendas seeking to exert territorial power and to benefit the construction businesses that are either owned by policymakers or closely connected to them (Riachi, 2016).

1. Policy Shortcomings

The Ministry of Energy and Water's discourse about dams stems from the claim that the renewable water resources are already slightly below scarcity threshold (1000 m³/capita/year), with an expected decrease in the coming years due to population growth (MoEW, 2012). The Ministry's National Water Sector Strategy (MoEW, 2012) states that a significant stress is currently put on groundwater because of the private wells leading to a 200 million m³ deficit in the groundwater budget, and that dam storage is currently very limited (6% of total water resources) compared to other countries in the region (ex. Egypt: 295%). The NWSS notes that Lebanon can potentially store up to 1 billion m³ of water if an additional 40 dams and hill lakes are built (MoEW, 2012, p. 50). Hence, it proposes to limit the extraction of groundwater, described as a 'strategic reserve', and to build more dams in order to counter the growing deficit. The strategy also foresees projects of artificial recharge of aquifers, and the improvement of wastewater collection (80% by 2015 and 95% in 2020) and treatment (30% by end 2012, 80% by 2015 and 95%

in 2020). It envisions the rehabilitation of the water network currently deteriorated and resulting in 48% of unaccounted-for water (UFW). In addition, the NWSS proposes to conduct a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to ensure environmental concerns are *“fully included addressed appropriately at the earliest possible stage of decision making on par with economic and social considerations”* (MoEW, 2012, p. 75).

However, several researchers and experts believe that the water balance at the basis of the NWSS lacks the necessary evidence. Indeed, MoEW has neither monitored rainfall nor surveyed the springs and aquifers since the 1960s (MoEW, 2012), and has not conducted the required surveying and monitoring of groundwater extraction since 1970 (UNDP, 2014) leaving large gaps of information that are subject to political manipulation. The German Federal Institute for Natural Sciences and Resources (BGR) confirmed that the MoEW’s strategy for water is based on erroneous water balance figures and outdated studies (BGR, 2013). The Assessment of the Groundwater Resources conducted by the UNDP shows that Lebanon is not suffering from water deficit as claimed by MoEW. Instead, the water budget shows clear surpluses, with groundwater being the main water resource in Lebanon averaging 53% of yearly precipitation (UNDP, 2014).

While the NWSS considers large scale projects as the main solution to counter water shortages, it does not address the root problem of the perceived shortages in Lebanon: neoliberal water politics have long allowed for conflicting, multi-territorial interests maintained by an intricate structure of power, one that is characterized by sectarianism and informality (Verdeil, 2008). The groundwater resources have been dedicated to private extraction, with more than 60,000 wells operating illegally across the country and leading to the depletion of several aquifers and the intrusion of saltwater in

others (UNDP, 2014). This *laissez-faire* approach is associated to institutional dysfunctions due to conflicting responsibilities and lack of coordination, especially between MoEW, CDR, and the Water Authorities, in addition to a severe shortage of staff (MoEW, 2012; Riachi, 2016). Yet, NWSS adopts a rather passive approach to groundwater that is limited to reducing extraction by proposing new eligibility rules and higher application fees for well drilling. These rules have been reported to be unfeasible especially that the condition that "the distance between the well and any water source must be at least 1km "(decree 14438/2010) could not be applied ("Greenarea", 2015). Moreover, many applicants for well permits could not afford to pay the requested fees ("Greenarea", 2015). This has encouraged many citizens to resort to illegal ways to build their wells. It also created more exceptions, deepened informality and stimulated monopoly of water. Water shortage and pollution continue to be compensated with private water delivery trucks, returnable water containers, and bottled water (Eid-Sabbagh, 2016).

Furthermore, the World Bank-funded Strategic Environmental Assessment ([SEIA](#)) of the NWSS was published in 2015 recommending the scaling-back of the dams' program considering its social, economic, and environmental constraints. For instance, the report describes the Bisri Dam, as "land greedy," (SEIA, 2014; p.47) and criticizes its unrealistic amount of resource exploitation. While the assessment classifies the proposed dams as a "highest-regret" measure, it suggests less risky and more efficient alternatives to large dams such as submarine springs².

² Qualitative and quantitative analysis of some of these springs have already been conducted by the NCSR and yielded very positive results. An estimated 650 Mm³/yr of fresh water (six times the capacity of the Bisri Dam) can help ensure water security for many years to come.

Studies show that the current experience in dam building and management in Lebanon are inefficient and costly (Ecodit, 2015). The Brissa Dam in Donniyye, completed in 2013, failed to collect water due to its location on karstic limestone surface allowing for water infiltration (Al-Modon, 2015; Annahar, 2013). The dam of Qaisamani inaugurated two years ago hasn't reached its full capacity yet even after the heaviest rain season Lebanon has known in a decade. The Balaa Dam, still under construction, is placed on top of sinkholes and chasms, which delayed the works and caused additional costs for grouting and isolation ("Lebanon Debate", 2017). Likewise, the Chabrouh Dam in Keserwan leaks more than 30,000 m³ per day (Bou Jaoude, 2010) and costs the Government millions of dollars yearly for maintenance and repair. Finally, the Qaraoun Dam is extremely contaminated with heavy metals and Cyanobacteria, which makes its water unsuitable either for irrigation or for domestic use (LRA, 2019).

2. Environmental Contestation

a. Historical Background and Current Situation

Environmental initiatives in Lebanon gained momentum in the early 1970s when pioneer environmental Ricardus Haber founded one of the first environmental NGOs in Lebanon, Friends of Nature which raised environmental awareness through walks, expeditions and lectures. In the late 1980s, Haber and his colleagues lobbied with notables to preserve natural wild areas from development. They cooperated with politicians in Zghorta and Tripoli to protect the natural areas of Horsh Ehden and Palm Island, which became legally protected as natural reserves in 1992 (Makdisi, 2012).

However, it wasn't until the 1990s that environmental activism grew and took more confrontational aspects after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 (Kingston,

2001). In 1991, a group of experts from the American University of Beirut founded the Green Line NGO that aimed to expose environmental threats, raise awareness and contribute towards a scientific framework for a sustainable environmental management policy (Greenline, 2019). Green Line led several campaigns, notably the campaign against the dumping of toxic waste and the campaign to protect Tyre's coast. In 1993, following the emergence of Green line and other NGOs like Al Minbar-Alakhdar, AFDC and others, the Ministry of the Environment was founded. In the same year, Greenpeace established a local office in Beirut, and a network of local environmental NGOs, the Lebanese Environmental Forum, was created (Kingston, 2001, p.66). In 1995, another network of environmental NGOs was formed under the name of Green Forum. It initiated a number of collective actions against quarries in the Metn region (Green Forum, 2019). In 1997, a campaign against the waste incinerator in Hey Al -Sollum succeeded in ending the incineration works (Kingston, 2001).

However, the influx of international funds in 1996 led several NGOs to redefine their goals and become less militant and more institutionalized, focusing on projects such as conservation, reforestation and awareness campaigns, which restricted the groups' field of action and independence (Kingston, 2001, p.65). Moreover, the success of the environmental movements was most often dependent on the clientelist network and sectarian dynamics, and the efforts to transcend sectarian boundaries through coalitions and networks remained weak and ineffective. Accordingly, the success stories of the environmental movements are scattered and limited in time and space (Karam, 2006; Kingston, 2001). In his analysis of social movements in the post-war Lebanon, Karam (2006) argues that the power-sharing system and sectarianism are the main challenges to collective action, including that of environmental movements. The

condition for the success of any social movement is to mobilize wide-ranging support beyond the groups who initiated the movements (Karam, 2006, p.256).

In 2012, a group of environmental NGOs from different regions in Lebanon founded the Lebanon Eco Movement (LEM), a network led by activist Paul Abi Rached aiming to face the growing environmental challenges (LEM, 2019). In 2013, LEM supported the efforts of the local community in Naame to close the landfill they considered unsustainable (NNA, 2013). The domestic solid waste of Beirut and Mount-Lebanon was being dumped in this landfill for over 15 years, exceeding its original capacity. Following several protests, the campaign managed to close the landfill by blocking the roads for the garbage trucks and, consequently, a severe waste crisis emerged in the country, deepening the already-growing anger against the dysfunctional government (Kontar, 2015). Dozens of small coalitions, NGOs and independent activists protested in downtown Beirut and asked for a solution to the garbage crisis, the resignation of the Minister of the Environment, a new election law, etc. Some of the demands focused on more fundamental issues, asking for accountability of all sectarian political leaders (Harb, 2018, 87). The movement witnessed the crossing of environmental demands with broader radical demands. It was led by the You Stink group who relied heavily on social media, particularly Facebook. However, the protests were rapidly silenced by the police's excessive use of force.

Yet, the movement gave more visibility to issue-based movements and campaigns (Harb, 2018, 88), like the campaign to re-open the city's largest park, Horsh Beirut, the campaign to protect the Dalieh coastal area threatened with the construction of a private resort project, and the Stop the Highway campaign that aimed to protect a neighborhood rich in architectural heritage from a highway project. All three campaigns

achieved partial or complete successes. According to Harb (2018), these campaigns had five distinctive features: (1) they were mostly non-structured, open-ended and flexible; (2) they rejected hierarchical structures and did not have a specific leader; (3) they relied on academic research; (4) they relied extensively on social media; (5) they used diverse strategies and tools, including lobbying, negotiation, media, protests, litigation, exhibitions, design competitions etc. However, these same characteristics could not guarantee success for other similar campaigns, like the campaign to save Beirut's last public beach against the construction of the private Eden Bay Resort. Despite extensive efforts of litigation, media outreach and protests, the power of privatization and market-oriented policies remains a great challenge to the environment and public spheres.

Other environmental campaigns in the post-2015 period included the campaigns to stop the quarries in Koura, Ain Dara, Tannourine and Akoura, the campaign to stop the construction of the Adloun port, the campaign to protect Ras Al Natour in Enfeh, and others. In Tannourine, grassroots mobilization coupled with the active involvement of the Lebanon Eco Movement brought national attention to the cause and managed to stop of the quarries (Abi Rached, 2019). However, in cases where sectarian party leaders and powerful construction companies are involved, environmental campaigns were failing to achieve their goals, as in the case of the Nabih Berri Port in Adloun (Battah, 2016).

The 2015 movement also prepared the ground for an active participation of the civil society activists, including environmental activists, in the 2016 municipal elections. In Beirut, a group of activists, including environmentalists, ran for elections under the name of "Beirut Madinati" (Beirut My City). They called for a just, equitable, and accessible city, and integrated progressive environmental concerns in their policy and planning proposals. Although the sectarian political parties were able to maintain control

over the capital's municipality, Beirut Madinati achieved promising results and challenged the traditional sectarian parties in power (Harb, 2018, 89).

b. The Rise of the Anti-Dam Activism

The first time an environmental NGO opposed a dam project was in 2010 when the “Tabia Bila Houdoud” NGO along with local residents contested the Ain Dara dam project and its Environmental Impact Assessment, criticizing the project's negative impact on the environment and the fact that Ain Dara would not benefit from the project in any way (Abou Cham, 2013). Opposition to dam projects in Lebanon grew after the approval of the NNWSS in 2012 which recommended the construction of multiple dams across the Lebanese territories. In 2013, members of the local community in Hammana mobilized against the construction of the Qaysamani Dam that would affect the water quality from the Shaghour Spring, since the dam was to be built on top of the spring's catchment area (Mousharrafieh, 2015). The project, however, was pursued and finished in 2017 despite opposition. In March 2014, The Lebanon Eco Movement (LEM) mobilized against the construction of a large hydro-electric dam in Janna - Nahr Ibrahim, a valley that holds one of the richest ecosystems in the Middle East (Haber, 2012). These NGOs argued that the dam will cause extensive and irreversible damage to the environment and cultural heritage (Aljazeera, 2016). For the first time in the history of water policy in Lebanon, these NGOs tried to challenge the deep-rooted paradigm that large dams are indispensable for the country's water security.

The Lebanon Eco Movement organized small protests and filed a lawsuit to the Shoura Council (Elnshara, 2015). They collaborated with experts in environment and geology and led a campaign on social media. Although they could temporarily delay the

construction works (Annahar, 2016), they were unable to stop the government from pursuing the project which is still ongoing. This may be due to the powerful corporate interests intertwined with the intricate dynamics of sectarianism and power sharing in the government. For instance, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) advertised the dam as an achievement for the Christian community and the caza of Jbeil. FPM leaders publicly threatened to shut off Beirut's water supply from the Jeita Spring if the Future Movement opposes the construction of the Janna dam (OTV, 2015). The Janna Dam's construction works started despite the EIA's recommendation to abort the project (Gicome, 2015). Other dams currently under construction include the dams of Balaa and Mseilha, both of which received little and ineffective opposition.

This section showed the emergence of activist efforts against dam projects in Lebanon. These efforts failed to achieve direct results, but they prepared the ground for the rise of the anti-dam movement in Lebanon, with the emergence of to stop the Bisri Dam, the largest dam project proposed by the NWSS. The next section will present the case of the Bisri Dam.

B. The Bisri Valley and the Dam Project

1. Overview

The Bisri Valley is situated between the regions of Chouf and Jezzine in Lebanon, and holds important natural, historical, and cultural significance. Located in the direct hinterland of Saida, the valley has known human settlement since the Bronze Age and is abundant with archeological and historical vestiges (Jakubiak et al., 2005). This is due to the valley's location on the historical routes between the coast, the Beqaa and Syria, and to the fertility of the land which made it very suitable for agriculture (Khalil,

2009). The valley between the village of Bisri to the South and the intersection of the valleys of Barouk and Bhannine to the North. The river of Bisri, also called Awwali, flows at the bottom of this valley, originating at the confluence of the Bhannine and Barouk rivers.

The river finds its way toughly through the wide plain, coming out of its bed and taking several courses during spring and winter, resulting in a unique landscape unparalleled in Mount-Lebanon (Atallah, 2017). The valley's geological characteristics are diverse: steep limestone cliffs, sandstone slopes and a plain of alluvial silt. This geological diversity gave birth to an equally diverse vegetation (Khalil, 2009; Atallah, 2017). It is the only valley in Mount Lebanon that is deep yet wide and flat enough to house an extremely fertile agricultural plain. Dry northern slopes contrast with a lush southern side covered in oak trees and tall pine groves. Fields and orchards cover the fertile bottom of the valley on both sides of the river whose banks are lined with reeds and poplar trees (Atallah, 2017). The Bisri Valley is thus a hotspot of biodiversity and a major resting spot for migrating birds (Jaradi, 2018). This ecological importance was officially acknowledged when it was classified as part of a protected natural area by the Ministry of Environment in 1998 and recognized as an exceptional natural landscape in the National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory (CDR, 2009).

The World Bank-funded Bisri Dam is planned by the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) in Lebanon and situated on the Awwali River in a valley of high ecological, cultural and archaeological significance. It was originally conceived in the 1950s as part of the Greater Beirut Water Supply Project (GBWSP), it aims to funnel water to Beirut and its suburbs from the Bisri reservoir through water transmission lines³.

³ The project was postponed due to technical problems that emerged during the construction of the conveyance tunnel in the 1950s (Sneddon and Fox, 2011).

The GBWSP is currently part of the National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS) approved by the Lebanese Government in 2012. The Bisri Dam will necessitate the construction of a 73m high structure and the expropriation of 570 ha of mostly agricultural and natural lands from around 10 municipalities of the Chouf and Jezzine districts. The dam is currently in the phase of commissioning.

2. The Bisri Dam's Environmental Threats

i. Threats to Natural Habitats and Cultural Heritage

The Bisri Dam project will result in the complete destruction of the Bisri Valley's plain and adjacent slopes and the obstruction of the free-flowing river. Destruction will affect a variety of natural habitats, notably the oak and pine woods and the riparian vegetation. In fact, the valley hosts more than 180 plant species (Mores, 2019) including *Ricotia lunaria* (L.) DC. being endemic at the national scale, *Orchis anatolica* Boiss., *Orchis morio* L., *Orchis papilionaceae* L., *Orchis pyramidalis* M. Bieb., *Orchis romana* subsp. *libanotica* Mt., *Orchis tridentata* Scop., *Ornithogalum umbellatum* L. and *Fritillaria libanotica* (Dar, 2014). According to the project's EIA, a total number of 110,814 trees will be cut. Moreover, the destruction of the valley will cause the loss of an important roosting area for migrating birds. With its strategic location on the African-Eurasian flyway and its widespread shallow water, the valley is an important habitat for migratory birds, especially the Black Stork, the Sparrow White, the Crane, the White Swan, and the White Pelican, all protected by the AEWA Agreement signed by Lebanon, and the Dalmatian Pelican, a near threatened species according to IUCN (Jaradi, 2018). Fish populations will also be affected. The project's biodiversity surveys show five fish species and one crab species in the Awali River, out of which three deserve special

attention: The Freshwater blenny, the European eel, and the Middle Eastern Green carp (Dar, 2014). 17 mammal species were identified, of which 5 are rare species: the hedgehog, the European free-tailed Bat, the Eurasian Badger, the Wild Cat and the Common Otter.

The construction of the dam will result in the destruction and dismantling of archaeological and historical sites that date back to the Bronze Age, the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Mameluke and Ottoman Periods (Jakubiak et al., 2005). Studies conducted by a Polish-Lebanese team of archaeologists in 2004, 2005 and 2008 identified a total of 78 archaeological sites, of which 27 sites fall within the dam's area of expropriation, 10 sites within 100 m of the expropriation boundary, 30 sites within less than 1km from the proposed reservoir, and 10 further than 1 km (Dar, 2014). The surveys show that the valley prospered during Roman era, when the site was a major route between cities of Tyr and Sidon and Damascus. Traces of the historical routes still exist (Khalil, 2009) and will be completely destroyed if the dam is constructed. Among the important archeological features is the roman temple, still under-investigated. The temple's visible part shows four rare granite columns believed to be imported from Egypt (Khalil, 2009). Tens of other archeological sites to be dismantled or destroyed include the Mar Moussa Church dating to 13th century, the Saint Sophia monastery dating to the Byzantine period, settlements and pottery, houses, bridges, tombs (Jakubiak et al., 2005) and pavements of old roads (Khalil, 2009).

ii. Threats to Agriculture and Livelihoods, and Safety Risks

The Bisri Valley is the only valley in Mount Lebanon that is deep yet wide and flat enough to house an extremely fertile agricultural plain (Atallah, 2017). Agricultural

production in the valley includes fruit orchards and open fields variously tilled, cropped, lying fallow or under poly-tunnels (Dar, 2014). The Bisri Dam's reservoir inundates 150 ha of productive land, resulting in external costs to Lebanon's soil fertility bank (Dar, 2014). The project's EIA stated that "this loss of land for agriculture cannot be compensated for on the steep adjacent slopes that are relatively of low quality as regards soil fertility" (Dar, 2014, Page 178 of 255). Moreover, the reduced flow of the Awwali River, as a result of the dam, can potentially affect the availability of water for the irrigation of downstream agricultural land, especially near Saida, and may halt the rehabilitation project of the Sidon Aqueduct that used to funnel water from the river to Saida ("Lilmadina", 2018). Reducing the river flow can also lead to higher concentration of wastewater pollutants in the river below the dam, and therefore impact the quality of irrigated crops downstream (Dar, 2014).

The Bisri dam and reservoir directly overlays an active fault, the Bisri fault, believed to be the source of the destructive 1956's earthquake (Nemer, 2019). The dam's water infiltration through the fault and the reservoir's massive weight can potentially affect the delicate stress regime of the fault and induce a major earthquake similar to those reported in the historical record of Lebanon (Nemer, 2019). The project also has a sizeable potential for liquefaction around the dam foundations and mass movements near the dam site (Nemer, 2019). In fact, the project's EIA acknowledges the high seismic risks emerging from the dam construction (Dar, 2014, Page xviii of xciv). The National Council for Scientific Research stated that the impoundment of dam reservoirs in Mount-Lebanon produces an entirely new seismic activity on the area (NCSR, 2015).

The dam-based water strategy in Lebanon continues to damage many of the country's remaining natural valleys, agricultural land and historical sites, while

threatening the livelihoods of local communities and putting them under serious safety risks. The economic efficiency and technical feasibility of the dam projects is highly questionable as well. However, collective actions aiming to alter water policies and stop dam projects have failed to achieve their goals, especially that large dams constitute an integral part of the neoliberal economic system in Lebanon and serve the interests of sectarian power sharing.

As the chapter shows, the neoliberal economic policies, the confessional political-sharing system as well as the unrevised modernist planning approaches are the basis of the dam-based water strategies in Lebanon. Currently, water resources are subject to extensive losses in the distribution system, mismanagement of water extraction from springs and aquifers, pollution, and other problems. Yet, instead of addressing these core issues with appropriate reform measures, the government prioritizes large-scale dam projects that generate profits for the elite but are usually inefficient and environmentally unsound. The National Water Sector Strategy approved in 2012 accelerated dam construction in Lebanon and prompted activists to campaign against these projects, the largest of which being the Bisri Dam project. To frame my discussion of environmental contestation,

CHAPTER IV

THE SAVE THE BISRI VALLEY CAMPAIGN: EMERGENCE AND STRATEGIES

This chapter tells the story of the Save the Bisri Valley Campaign, how it grew from individual activist efforts into a movement that challenged the feasibility of the Bisri Dam project and - perhaps more importantly - shook the foundations of the deep-rooted paradigm of large dam projects in Lebanon. I start by documenting the emergence of the campaign in 2017 in relation to the structure of power and opportunity at that time. Then I examine the campaign's different strategies and challenges revolving around three main targets: the public opinion, the government and the World Bank. This chapter shows that the environmental movements in contexts where development policies are deeply rooted in neoliberal and power sharing systems must engage in the global struggle towards radical change at the national level in order to achieve results. Such movements must articulate their discourses around social and economic issues and enlarge their support networks, seeking paradigm shifts in development policies and resource management. I also argue that mobilization at the international level and the creation of adverse publicity against IFIs can force them to withdraw financing and subsequently hinder large-scale infrastructure projects.

A. Emergence and Power Map

The efforts to stop the Bisri Dam project started in 2017 following the attempts to stop the Janna Dam and the Qaysamani Dam⁴. I had been helping the Lebanon Eco Movement (LEM), a coalition of 60 environmental NGOs led by activist Paul Abi Rached on the issues of dams in Lebanon, building scientific arguments and assisting with social media. On the World Water Day in March 2017, we organized a seminar titled “The Politics of Dams in Lebanon: Threats to the Environment and Water Security” in the Antonine University in Baabda with experts in different fields, representatives of municipalities, residents of areas affected by dam projects, university students, and others. It was one of the first instances where such an event is organized to shift the terms of the debate in Dams in Lebanon.

The discussions involving both expert and lay knowledge were very encouraging, and the overall attitude was radically critical of the dams underway. The attendees considered these projects as unsuitable for Lebanon’s environment, given the karstic geological features that allow for excessive water infiltration, and the availability of better alternatives like groundwater. The seminar also helped cast light on the problems of the Bisri Dam project in particular, since people from the affected villages around the Bisri Valley attended the event and voiced their concerns. As the dam project and its financing were already approved since 2015 and expropriation processes started, the attendees emphasized the necessity to mobilize against this dam as fast as possible. This event laid the ground for the emergence of the campaign against the Bisri Dam.

Paul and I started contacting local residents and building our arguments against the Bisri Dam with the help of a few academic experts that we asked to review the project

⁴ The Qaysamani dam was completed in 2017 and the Janna remains is currently under construction after we gave up the fight to stop it in 2016.

and provide us with written comments. These experts were either involved in our previous campaigns to stop other dams or were approached for first time through Paul's connections. Given the disappointments with the Government's response to previous concerns regarding other dams as explained in chapter 2, we decided to reach out directly to the main financier, the World Bank, to convince them to withdraw their support for the project. A series of meetings was conducted with the Bank's management team in Beirut following email exchanges between the Lebanon Eco Movement and the Bank, until we concluded that these meetings are inconclusive because the World Bank management was very committed to the project. In a nutshell, the Bank defended dams as clean and sustainable solutions for water collection and management, and promoted ideas such as ecological compensation to justify the excessive destruction of land, and utilized international panels of experts legitimizing the Lebanese government's water strategy. Thus, we quickly realized we were not dealing only with local political and economic dynamics, but also – and perhaps more importantly – with hegemonic worldviews of development endorsed by gigantic financial institutions. As Van Der Heijden (1999) argues, the ability of social and environmental movements to present alternatives and create change depends on their readiness to challenge the social order at the root of environmental degradation. Given the fact that the Bisri Dam project is an epitome of the sectarian power sharing system in Lebanon, we understood we could only stop the project by seeking a systemic change, shifting paradigms in water management and renegotiating what the public good means in Lebanon. Indeed, we decided we needed to upscale our contestation and articulate our struggle against the dam as a struggle against the political system. Our success would depend on the opportunity structure (Van Der Heijden, 1999) in Lebanon and the diversity and efficiency of our tools of action (Haynes, 1999).

The power map in 2018 (fig. 1) was significantly in favor of the dam: the project had secured consensus among all the political parties represented in the government and parliament except for the Kataeb party. The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) controlled the Ministry of Energy and Water, the project’s main stakeholder, and the Ministry of Environment in charge of approving and monitoring the Environmental Impact Assessment studies. The FPM along with the Future Movement, Amal Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) share control of the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR)⁵, the project’s implementing agency that operates autonomously and receives funds directly from the World Bank. Reports show that CDR employs

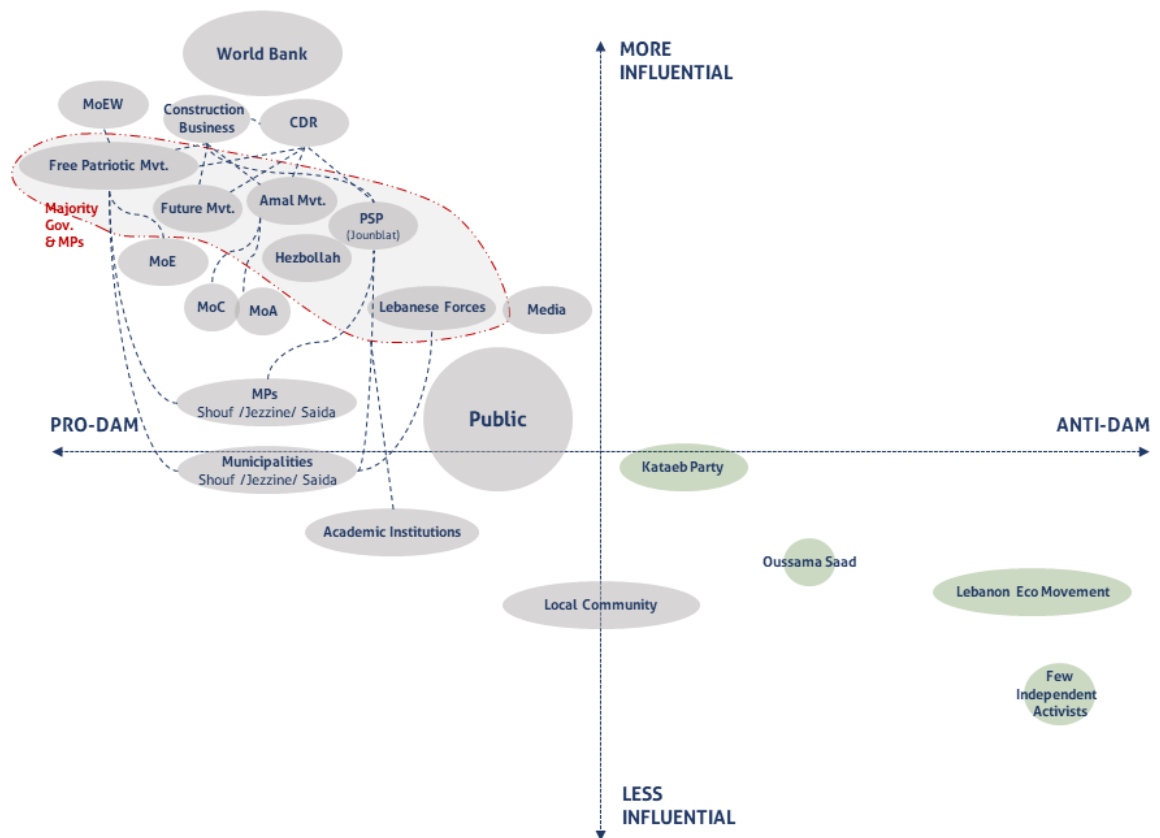


Figure 1: Power map 2018
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⁵ <https://www.aljournhouria.com/ar/news/457279/>

contractors and consultants who are affiliated with these sectarian political parties⁶, allowing for substantive financial returns as well as redistribution of benefits to each party's constituency, further enabling the power-sharing clientelistic system. At the local level, the municipalities of the Bisri valley, controlled by pro-dam political parties, approved the project, as documented in the project's environmental impact assessment (Dar, 2014). As for Hezbollah, Amal and the Future Movement, their leaders had been promising their constituents in Beirut and Dahiya with improved water supply through the Bisri dam project^{7,8}. Those critical of the project were a few activist groups (including LEM and myself), a part of the local community, and a few politicians. Dam projects in general had not yet been subjected to public discussion in Lebanon (Abou Cham, 2013).

Despite the oligarchic political system and the limited opportunities for contestation in general within Lebanon, new forms of political action were emerging since the 2015's HIRAK, and even earlier. These new forms relied on issue-based campaigns, including environmental campaigns, and prepared the ground for an activist infrastructure characterized by loose organizational systems, progressive demands, and innovative tools of activism (Harb, 2018). The efforts to save the Bisri Valley learned from this growing activist infrastructure, simultaneously feeding and benefiting from the broader struggle for system change.

The activists against Bisri identified another opportunity that could form the cornerstone of their contestation, and that was the World Bank's financing of the dam. Indeed, the project would have not seen the light without the Bank's support. The involvement of such a highly visible, international financial institution that claims

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/03/world/middleeast/lebanon-protests-corruption.html>

⁷ <https://www.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=11253&cid=109>

⁸ <https://www.annahar.com/article/278864>

commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development presented us with a new territory for contestation.

B. Strategies of Organizing, Mobilizing, and Direct Action

The Bisri Valley Campaign was launched in mid-2018 by the collaborative initiative of Paul Abi Rashed and myself. It started with a virtual campaign on social media and grew into a movement with thousands of volunteers on the ground. Although the campaign does not have a clear structure or hierarchy, Paul and I continue to guide it and, in my case, to coordinate its activities. While many environmental campaigns led by traditional NGOs tend to adopt a sociological approach that prioritizes organizations and resources, we primarily framed the Save the Bisri Valley campaign using tactics of language and rhetoric. Paul comes from traditional NGO background and has accumulated experience and knowledge in the field throughout the years, and established connections with diverse stakeholders and groups. On the other hand, I wasn't member of any NGO. I have a background in design and has been pursuing studies in Urban Planning and Policy at the American University of Beirut focusing on issues of sustainability and resource management. While my interest in saving the valley stems primarily from environmental concern, the qualities of a generalist planner provided me with tools to address the complex and cross-disciplinary aspects of the Bisri Dam project. Additionally, I have been very interested in tackling the underlying political aspects of the project and challenging the power structure maintaining the dam-based water policies. Our different but complementary profiles set the ground for a campaign that builds on the accumulated experience of environmental activism while adopting a progressive, politicized discourse and new ways of actions. I took charge of coordinating the

campaign, developing the scientific dossier, setting the communication strategy, managing social media, writing the statements, initiating action on the ground and communicating with international stakeholders. Paul, on the other hand, took charge of communicating with the local communities and organizing meetings with key stakeholders and politicians. Over time, thousands of volunteers started joining us in our efforts and began assisting with specific tasks either individually or collectively. Some groups and parties also benefited from the momentum we created and the growing visibility of the Bisri Valley's case and initiated their own campaigns against the dam.

Our campaign aimed to boost the Bisri valley's cause to the national level and make it a public opinion case. We adopted a three-fold strategy: 1) mobilizing public opinion, 2) putting pressure on the government to abort the project, and 3) putting pressure on the World Bank to withdraw their financing for the project.

1. Forming Public Opinion at a National Scale: A Facebook-based Communication Strategy

To start the campaign, we relaunched a Facebook Page, "Stop the Bisri Dam", created in April 2017 that had been managed by Paul. Starting August 2018, I took charge of the page, and proposed a new name: Save the Bisri Valley (أنقذوا مرج بسري). The new Slogan reflected our vision for a positive and constructive campaign focusing on the *valley* rather than the *dam*. The prevailing paradigm for water was that building as more dams as possible is necessary to mitigate water shortage since they prevent water from being wasted to the sea, though little attention had been given to these projects' environmental and social costs as well as their long-term efficiency in securing water supply (Abou Cham, 2013). To challenge the government's modernist claims that take

advantage of the basic human need for water, we thought of crafting an alternative narrative using languages and symbols outside the system's hegemonic grid of intelligibility (De Lucia, 1999). Accordingly, we defined the pillars of our new communication strategy as follows: 1) highlighting the environmental and social assets of the Bisri Valley, 2) denouncing the dam's negative impacts, 3) framing the problems of water in Lebanon in relation to mismanagement and corruption, and 4) suggesting available alternative solutions for water collection.

The Facebook page has been the main instrument for communicating this strategy, for publicizing the campaign's latest news and activities and calling followers for action. I started managing the page on a daily basis, designing the posts very carefully and publishing them at specific times of the day in order to reach the widest audience possible. Details such as the length of the texts, their direct and hidden connotations, the choice, size and layout of pictures became essential components of the strategy. My skills in design, my experience in photo/video editing, my fluency in standard Arabic writing, and my understanding of the campaign's scientific dossier were key in allowing me to create diverse sets of contents that catch people's attention on a regular basis. The posts included scenic footage of Bisri, videos of experts explaining the project's risks, videos of locals expressing their disapproval of the project and stirring the viewers' affect, diagrams, maps and infographics visualizing the dam's impacts on the valley and project's alternatives. The page also exposed the historical failures of the government's water policies, in order to generate doubts regarding the public institutions' credibility. Additionally, we highlighted dam removal movements around the world and reported success stories of river protection. The page also revealed the valley's rich natural and cultural heritage as opportunities for ecological tourism, inciting the interest of many

nature lovers, and seeking to make the valley a coveted destination. For example, the video of the valley's "secret waterfalls" went viral on social media and were followed up by special TV reports. Hikers from distant regions came to discover the site. Ensuring a variety of content and form in the page was key to engage followers of different backgrounds and interests. Moreover, our messaging adopted a flexible "tone of voice" avoiding continuous drama or monotonous information, and adapting to the daily political developments. The page's posts were not restricted to the issue of the Bisri Valley only. The page also campaigned for the protection of other natural and historical areas. For example, the campaign against Dany Khoury, the Bisri Dam's contractor, denounced his involvement in other controversial projects, such as the construction of the Free Patriotic Movement's Headquarters in the historical area of Nahr El Kalb. The video on the Nahr el Kalb project went viral and triggered activists to initiate a new campaign, the Save Nahr El Kalb Campaign. In return, we generated benefits for the Bisri Valley, as the media started pointing out to Dany Khoury's involvement in several other shady projects, the biggest of which being the Bisri Dam. The page generally advocated the protection of the environment in general and kept up with different environmental challenges in Lebanon and the World, including the fires of Lebanon in 2019, the fires of Australia in 2019-2020, the Climate Crisis, the controversy of the Ilisu Dam in Turkey, etc. The page also tackled issues of water management in general promoting sustainable water management practices.

The page did not shy from exposing and criticizing the role of sectarianism, power sharing and corruption in the Bisri dam project. Politicizing our messages and keeping an eye on the day-to-day political developments helped garner support of the growing civil society movement against the political system in Lebanon. This approach

later payed off during the October 17, 2019 uprisings, during which many groups demanded the protection of the Bisri Valley. The page's posts and statements received the endorsement of many nascent political groups opposing the system in Lebanon. The page also exposed the World Bank's financing for destructive projects in the Global South countries and its support to corrupt governments around the world.

Over time, the page became one of the top leading social media platforms engaged in social and political mobilization in Lebanon, gathering the support of millions of people locally and internationally. Posts reached a total of 1.5 million people in October 2019 alone. The page became a reference for people who wanted to know about the Bisri Dam's controversy. Residents of Jezzine and Shouf who had long given up the hope of saving the valley before 2018, started interacting on the page, writing comments or sending messages with suggestions and questions. People from all over Lebanon and from abroad sent us messages of support and offered to help in their field of expertise. Local and international media referred to the page to access news or to request interviews from us. For example, a group of journalists from TV5Monde who were following our page's activity came to Lebanon to make a report on Bisri. The page's posts also triggered many people to visit the valley, take pictures and post them on social media.

Another online tool to build public opinion was the petition addressed to the World Bank's Board of Directors asking them to withdraw the financing of the Bisri Dam project. We posted the petition on our Facebook pages, twitter and Instagram account as well as on the different WhatsApp groups, and in a few days, it had gathered thousands of signatures. We sent it, alongside individual email letters, to the Directors and included it in our complaints to the Inspection Panel (see section 2). However, the main benefit from the petition was that it allowed people to read more about the arguments against the

dam and made them feel engaged in the campaign through signing, sharing, and using information from the petition's description. Additionally, journalists and bloggers referred to the petition's arguments in their articles about the case⁹.

Evidently, the growing visibility and expansion of our campaign was annoying the project's proponents, who elaborated sever counter strategies to limit our impact. First, they used Facebook to counterattack and defame. Following the growing reach of the Save the Bisri Valley Facebook page, the World Bank and the CDR hired communication officers to counter what they called "false allegations". The CDR created social media platforms titled "Bisri Dam and Lake" to promote the project. This was the first time the CDR used social media for one of its projects, and it seems it was prompted by a World Bank request. Despite the paid advertisements for the CDR's page, it failed to have an impact, and, worse, many critics used the page to denounce the project. Another form of attack entailed creating Facebook pages with similar names to trick followers and reduce our page's impact.

Second, they resorted to threats, tried to restrict and prosecute. Indeed, the page received threats from partisans of political parties, and was subject to restriction attempts and prosecution. The Director of the Bisri Dam project, Elie Mousalli, complained to the Cyber Crime Bureau about a post that criticized his statements about the removal of the archaeological remains. 17 followers who commented on our posts were summoned for investigation at the Cyber Crime Bureau. Furthermore, the fact that residents of Shouf and Jezzine with allegiance to the FPM or PSP were irritated by posts that critiqued their leaders, was used against us. Political parties accused us of being "strangers with political agendas and suspicious financing," and contributed to raising the doubts of local dwellers.

⁹ <https://blogbaladi.com/the-case-against-the-bisri-dam/>

We also had our share of internal challenges, like many activist groups. Several members did not agree with the politicization of the campaign. NGOs in the Lebanon Eco Movement pressured the coalition's president, Paul Abi Rashed, to tone down the page's political statements. We worked to mitigate these challenges through dialogue and communication, but insisted on keeping our political positioning.

Another internal challenge was the limited human resources, and the sole reliance on one person to manage our social media presence. The work on the page is detail oriented, requires daily activity and rapid responsiveness to political developments. It involved a synergy of design skills, scientific knowledge and political language. It also required devotion and the willingness to work at any time, and any day. In fact, in hindsight, the most successful and viral posts were not planned beforehand but were the result of spontaneous intuition, which demanded quick brainstorming and production. This could not have been achieved through conventional teamwork where different individuals need to discuss and agree on a post. However, there are risks to this individualist approach. In addition to burnout, I became easily identifiable, and was the victim of threats and attacks, one of which sent me to the hospital. During the time of my recovery, the page's reach and performance dropped down, indicating a too high dependency on one person's efforts. To mitigate this problem, a group volunteers is currently managing our different platforms on Facebook, Instagram and twitter to ensure the continuity of the virtual campaign.

2. Stirring Local Mobilization: Personal Connections and WhatsApp Groups

Though our campaign aimed at creating a nation-wide political movement that transcends the limited boundary of Shouf and Jezzine, it was still important to establish

strong collaborations with the local community. Our experience with the Janna Dam project had showed us that, without the mobilization of residents, it would be very difficult to challenge a large dam project.

During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the Bisri valley was a demarcation line between the groups in conflict. Until today, the various villages surrounding the valley comprise different political parties and are divided according to sectarian-based territorialities. As they witnessed the rise of the campaign, local politicians tried to reignite old group rivalries, deflecting their own responsibility and blaming the “other” for the dam project. They used sectarian and even racist arguments to try to defame the campaign. One narrative we heard during our visits and meetings with the locals claimed that the valley has become a no man’s land, a place where the Syrians come and go freely. Another narrative accused the campaign of wanting to use the valley to host Palestinian settlements in the future. However, these sectarian claims did not have much echoes and the campaign’s unifying message was more impactful: many residents from different sectarian backgrounds came together for the protection of the valley.

With the launching of the campaign in August 2018, we started visiting the valley more frequently as we wanted to better capture the social life in Bisri. We attended some of the region’s cultural events, like the annual celebration of Mar Moussa Day. Every year, the community of Mazraat El Daher gathers at the historical church of Mar Moussa on the last Sunday of August to celebrate their intercessor. That day of 2018 was expected to be the last annual mass in this shrine threatened by destruction to allow for the dam’s construction. We could feel the sorrow in the atmosphere as the bell was supposedly ringing for the last time. Still, we were there, two strangers, Paul and I, believing the dam will be stopped. People at the mass were astonished at our confidence.

Our conversations with some of the locals encouraged them to mobilize against the project and gave them hope in the prospects of preserving their church.

Paul Abi Rashed took charge of initiating coordination with the locals, as he knew some of them since 2016. Several meetings with the locals were held in Bisri, with Paul introducing me to the locals as “the expert” in charge of the scientific dossier. The discussions involved emotional stories of the valley, discussions on the project’s impacts and safety risks, stories of the area’s history of destructive earthquakes and landslides, ideas for the ways to move forward with the campaign. The meetings were a good opportunity to explore the intersections between the expert studies and the locals’ views. For instance, the earthquake threats appeared to be an argument that would affect the locals and trigger further opposition to the project.

Additionally, Paul created and managed WhatsApp groups for coordination and updates. The geographical extent of the Bisri Valley incorporates many villages, grouping thousands of people across Shouf, Jezzine and Saida. The WhatsApp groups became platforms bringing together “neighbors” who had never met before. The groups were also an opportunity to get more familiar with the diverse stories of the people and their relationship with the land. In addition, WhatsApp became an essential tool for mobilization, particularly during the times when CDR initiated the first works on the ground. We got immediately news of what was happening on the ground, which allowed us to strategize and mobilize quickly.

However, WhatsApp groups are also venues for disputes and misunderstandings. Some locals took advantage of the loosely organized structure of the campaign and used the platform to try to dominate and impose their ideas. Moreover, historical tensions between families or villages was also reflected in the groups’

discussions. As much as the groups were helpful for the campaign, they were also a burden to manage. Tens groups were closed down, and new ones were created, some with limited number of members, others with hundreds. After much trials-and-errors, region-specific groups were avoided and new ones comprising citizens from all over Lebanon, including locals, were created. Smaller task-based groups were created, such as a group for financial issues, a group for liaising with public officials, etc.

3. Organizing and Collective Action: Claiming Back the Valley

In order for people to identify with the Save the Bisri Valley's cause, and own it as their own, we thought it was important they visit the valley and discover its spectacular landscape closely. To this end, we started organizing events in the valley. On October 6, 2018, we organized a long hike from Mazraat el Shouf to the valley through the old roman paths and stairs, to which came around 300 people. At that time, the Bisri Dam project was still divisive, and it was important that the event remains recreational and does not appear like a protest, as it could have caused serious problems with some politically affiliated participants, particularly those with allegiance to Walid Joumblat. However, many hikers spoke up against the dam project, and several media channels covered the event. I prepared a large banner with the text "Save the Bisri Valley" that was carried by the hikers and we shot the event using a drone camera, to use the footage in our campaign.

In February 2019, the CDR blocked roads that lead to the valley and installed barriers and checkpoints. By then, the campaign had achieved substantial reach on social media and received good coverage on TV and in the press. We had also established communication channels with a group of locals. The blocking of the roads was as much

a challenge as an opportunity to manifest the growing contestation on the ground, beyond our virtual platforms, and organize an impactful action that could help us upscale the mobilization. We decided to organize a protest at the CDR's checkpoint, and invited many people, particularly the locals, to join. The protest was staged in a way to create a "shock image" that durably marks the public's consciousness. Though most of the protestors did not own lands in the valley, the image of people, especially old men and women, blocked from entering the valley, was indeed shocking. We encouraged protestors to voice their concerns against the project, using the scientific knowledge we had all acquired after months of meetings and discussions, and to also express their frustrations and emotions. Strong statements were voiced such as: *"Israel could not displace us. Will we allow the state to displace us?"*. I broadcasted the event live on Facebook, and the coverage went viral. The protest was also covered by MTV and the report gained considerable attention from the public.

We decided to further escalate matters, and to organize more protests. On March 4, 2019, we organized a big protest in front of the World Bank's regional headquarters in Beirut. Protesting in the capital city attracted more attention from the local and international TV and press. In addition to the posters in Arabic, I designed and printed posters in English in order to have impact at the international level. Images of people holding these posters were distributed later by the AFP international news agency. The slogans ranged from specific demands about Bisri to broader and more radical demands: "we don't want your loans" or "stop funding big dams". It was the first and largest protest in front of the World Bank offices in Lebanon. The event was the first indicator of the growing support for the campaign among civil society groups in Lebanon, particularly among the opposition's political groups, as many of them participated in the protest. A

World Bank representative came out to talk to us and to receive the petition that had gathered more than 22,000 signatories online.

A few days later, on March 10, 2019, we organized yet another protest in Bisri. This time, due to growing visibility, many more supporters joined us. The sense of enthusiasm and possibility was very strong that day, and we forced our way through the CDR barriers despite all security measures. Again, we reported this story live on Facebook as an achievement, which was received with renewed hope and trust in the campaign. On March 24, 2019, as we returned again on site to protest the project, we were faced with more than 100 members of the Army and the Internal Security Forces blocking the way to the valley. Again, we used this measure as an opportunity to influence public opinion and incite further mobilization. We published a photo of the security troops entering the valley, with the following caption: *“Military troops entering the Bisri Valley now, in anticipation of the anger of the people. The region has not witnessed such moves since the Israeli withdrawal from the South”*. This post went viral on social media and the support for the campaign grew substantially.

We kept the pressure on, and, on May 11, 2019, we organized a Human Chain in the valley. The idea was inspired from a jingle a local used to chant regularly: *nehna el sadd bi wejj el sadd* (we are the dam against the dam). The peaceful and joyful aspect of the collective action attracted more people than ever before, who came from all over Lebanon. Some politicians joined us (Oussama Saada, Paula Yacoubian, and Ghada Eid).

On June 9, 2019, I helped LiHakki group organize an event in Bisri that aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the Bisri Valley. During the event, and while I was guiding a group of participants into the Roman Temple, I was severely attacked by a group of people claiming that I don't have any right to enter the valley. The

assault caused permanent damage to my ear and I was taken to the hospital. Safety concerns and psychological pressure resulted in the diminishing of the campaign's activity between June and September.

In September 2019, we resumed our protests as we heard that a sub-contractor started cutting trees in the valley. The CDR had allocated the different works of the project to several contractors each affiliated with a different sectarian political party. On Sunday, September 15, 2019, we organized a protest on the bridge of Bisri. A couple of protestors wore shrouds on which they wrote poems expressing their willingness to die for the land. One of the inscriptions read: *"We wore the shroud of martyrdom. No to the Dam. No to the World Bank and partners. No to the destruction of the environment of Jezzine, Shouf and Iqlim"*. A few days later, on September 19th, we organized a bigger protest in Riyad El Solh Square in Beirut, next to the offices of the CDR. We wrote on a large banner: "The Council for Destruction", mocking the name of the CDR, changing the "R" of "Reconstruction". We marked the banner with bloody hands, alluding to CDR's crimes against the environment and society. We read a provocative statement openly accusing the government and CDR of corruption and sectarianism. The CDR rapidly released a statement claiming that the current cutting of trees is limited to one part of the valley, trying to absorb people's anger. Some media channels like LBCI disseminated the CDR's statement, and refrained from broadcasting the campaign's statement—probably because they had received directives not to, given media in Lebanon is also aligned on sectarian politics' interests.

Throughout the Fall of 2019, the campaign organized several protests in the Bisri Valley, in front of CDR's offices and the World Bank's regional headquarters. In October 17th, as the people took to the streets, the campaign's activists joined along and actively

participated in the uprising against the sectarian system and the financial policies that led to the country's collapse. We considered the struggle to save the valley as an integral part of the collective organizing demanding a secular state that must prioritize people's interests, and developmental policies that are economically and environmentally sound. We installed a tent in the Martyrs' Square in Beirut and held banners advocating the protection of the valley. Our official page also accompanied the revolution and invited our followers to participate in the protests. Consequently, the Bisri Valey's cause quickly became one of the main demands of the revolution: slogans and jingles for Bisri were being voiced in the squares and streets of Beirut, Jal El Dib, Shouf, Saida, and others. On November 9th, 2019, we organized a protest in the valley and invited protestors from all over Lebanon to join us. Strong in arms, we opened the gates that had been closing the valley for the past months, and announced the end of the project. We requested the CDR and the contractor to withdraw all their equipment within 72 hours, and starting a camp-in action in the valley. The next day, the contractor started removing machinery from the site.

The camp went on for more than 40 days. It was manned by a new group of activists, from the south and Shouf, who had joined our action, ensuring uninterrupted presence on site. Since I live in Beirut and couldn't be in Bisri all the time, my colleague Amani Beaini who's from the Shouf area took the lead of the camp. Her leadership competence and public speech skills were crucial for maintaining the momentum on the ground. The presence of another spokesperson also helped reflecting diversity and teamwork to the public. We organized events during the weekends, and our presence attracted the media which came frequently to report about us, portraying the Bisri Valley as "one of the uprisings' main squares"¹⁰. On Sunday, November 17th, 2020, we organized

¹⁰ Sky News report, 2019

a recreation and breakfast event, “Saj Bisri”, in collaboration with the Legal Agenda organization. We went afterwards towards the Mar Moussa Church and broke the barriers that were blocking its way. This action was broadcasted live on TV and social media. A few days later, the contractor filed a complaint against nine activists, including me, who were involved in breaking-in and destroying a barrier, a CCTV camera and a signpost¹¹. On November 25th, we testified at the police station in Joun, showing no regret for opening a public road. Our colleagues waged a protest outside the police station during our investigation, and the media was covering the event live, which helped put pressure on the judges to release us the same day.

On November 22, 2019, on Independence Day, we invited all people in Lebanon to come visit and hike in the Bisri Valley as it was now freed from CDR’s barriers and machines. Around 3,000 people came, including celebrities and influencers who shared photos and videos of the valley’s beauty and the destruction caused by the CDR. The image of a gigantic 600-years-old tree got extensive attention and went viral. Local and international media covered the action and portrayed the Save the Bisri Valley campaign and the environmentalist movement as a vital part of the Lebanese uprising.

The camp slowly ended in the winter because of the extreme weather condition, in parallel with the uprising’s dwindled down after months of intense protests. The economic collapse and pandemic crisis worsened the situation. Yet, the project’s works did not resume as the campaign’s pressure continued on other levels as well see in the next sections.

¹¹ <https://afalebanon.com/?p=3453>

4. Networking and Lobbying with MPs and Key Stakeholders

In October 2018, we decided to build support among politicians and key decision-makers in Lebanon to help further advance our cause. We thus initiated a series of meetings with the few stakeholders who were not part of the ruling political parties that had approved the project in the Council of Ministers in 2014 and in the Parliament in 2015. Indeed, the political consensus between the FPM and the Future Movement which resulted in the election of Michel Aoun as President made it very difficult to change the power equation. The campaign refrained from direct communication with the governmental institutions in charge of the project, namely the MoEW and the CDR, as the water policies they put forward were the clear outcomes of ruling political parties' decisions that leave no room for discussion. Additionally, Cesar Abi Khalil, the Minister of Energy and Water, openly accused us of being enemies and threatening "national security", stating in a tweet on November 2018: "the opponents of the Bisri dam are involved in the plans of Lebanon's enemies against the national security"¹².

Originally, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) led by Walid Jounblat strongly endorsed the project in 2015. Jumblatt repeatedly spoke about the importance of the project to provide water for Beirut. The PSP is very influential in the Shouf area, and has power inside the government, especially over the CDR. Despite meeting with groups of locals opposing the dam, and the messages and documents we sent to him in 2018, he remained supportive of the project. In June 2019, following the attack I was subjected to, Jounblat posted on Twitter that he condemned the attack and that the Bisri Dam project might need reexamination. We knew from our observation of national politics that this statement reflected the tension between him and Hariri over other issues, and that Bisri

¹² <https://twitter.com/CesarAbiKhalil/status/1066638317448556544>

was a playing card he was using in negotiation—we thus did not fully trust it but we knew this could reveal some flexibility in Joumblat’s position towards the Bisri dam project. As the support for the Bisri campaign in Shouf was growing, especially in the aftermath of the uprising of October 17, 2019 as we discussed above, we decided to lobby Joumblatt for support one more time—sensing the time was more opportune now. A group from the campaign thus met with Taymour Joumblat, Walid Joumblat’s son who is currently the head of the PSP, and with Wael Abu Faour, one of the Joumblat’s closest advisors. They listened to our concerns with interest and promised to follow up on them.

In late 2018, we met with MPs who were openly opposed to the government’s policies. We discussed the project and our campaign with Saida’s MP Oussama Saada who owns a land in Bisri, and MPs Samy Gemayel and Elias Hankash from the Kataeb Party, who had expressed concerns about the project. We also met with MP Paula Yacoubian who was close to several civil society groups. We provided the MPs with a brief document about the Bisri case. These MPs gradually became aware of the different aspects of the project and more vocal about their opposition to the dam.

We also attempted to break ranks within the FPM, and met with MP Ziad Assouad from Jezzine, who is an active FPM member we knew was unsympathetic to the dam’s godfather, FPM’s leader Gebran Bassil. We used the fact that the project was endorsed by Hariri and Joumblat, both of whom Assouad considers existential threats to the Christians in Jezzine. We used the religious card of the Bisri valley being a site where Jesus possibly walked in to further awaken his sensibilities against the project—underscoring how this historical religious valley was going to be carelessly destroyed by a dam that won’t even gather water. Although Assouad expressed in private his opposition

to the project, he did not take any action in this regard, possibly to avoid clash with his party.

Similarly, as the campaign grew, several Jezzine and Shouf MPs became careful about defending the dam project. Some were even relatively collaborative with us despite their parties' position. We also got closer to Jezzine's MP Ibrahim Azar, who was part of the Amal's parliamentary block, another project proponent. Azar was receiving several messages from locals who had voted for him in 2018, now asking him to take action against the project. He thus helped the campaign by discussing this issue with the Amal movement, the CDR and the MoEW—but to not much avail.

We also met with officials in the Lebanese Forces (LF)—the main Christian party opposing the FPM. We knew that the head of the environmental committee in the LF was working in the water projects' business, and that he was going to be an obstacle for us to convince the party to oppose the project. Nevertheless, the increased tension between LF and FPM later pushed him to support the campaign. On July 12, 2019, LF's MP Georges Adwan, the head of the Administration and Justice Committee in Parliament, called for the immediate postponement of the Bisri Dam project given its violation of the decree number 8633 on the principles of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Adwan further pledged to rally his committee against the Bisri Dam project.

We also worked with the MPs from the main opposition groups to the FPM: Future Movement's MP Nazih Najem, the head of the Committee of Public Works, Transport, Energy and Water in the Parliament, PSP's MP Marwan Hamade, the head of the environmental committee, and with MP Haykal El Khazen who is a fierce opponent to Gebran Bassil—given FPM's growing power threatens El Khazen's political legacy in Keserwan.

On April 4th, 2019, after a series of efforts by MPs Oussama Saad, Ibrahim Azar and Nazih Najim, the Parliament held a meeting about the Bisri Dam, with representatives of the MoEW, the CDR, and the civil society, including us. The meeting was disappointing as it didn't allow for a serious discussion of the issues. Yet, we managed with the help of MPs Azar and Saad to push the committee to recommend that the CDR must provide and publish the geological and financial studies that were not available to us, and to consider alternative solutions for water. On June 14th, following the continued pressure from local communities, activists, and members of Parliament, the CDR finally published the long-awaited studies—mostly related to the geological and seismological aspects of the project—that were unreachable since 2014. However, the studies became available only for reading online without the possibility to download them. Yet, we reviewed the studies and concluded that they lack of a comprehensive analysis of alternatives, a complete biodiversity assessment, a complete economic feasibility assessment, and a Reservoir-Triggered Earthquake study. Paradoxically, all previous geological and seismological reports conducted by local and international firms (Dar Al-Handasa Nazih and Taleb, Dar Al-Handasa Shair and Partners, NOVEC, ECI, and others) which now became accessible confirmed the existence of an active fault under the Bisri Dam site. Only the reports conducted lately by the CDR claim the opposite¹³.

On November 18, 2019, in the second month of the uprisings, MP Paula Yacoubian submitted a law proposal to the Parliament aiming to cancel all works related to Bisri Dam and Lake and their annexes in order to avoid the damages that will result from the project. Yacoubian said: "The reason behind this proposal is that the destruction of the Bisri Valley, its forests and environmental wealth, and its effects, far outweighs the

¹³ <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=5696>

claimed benefits of this project”. She continued that “the project lost any justification for its pursuit, according to what all the neutral scientific studies have concluded”.

The day when protestors broke through the barriers of the project on November 9, 2019 marks a major shift in the position of Joumblatt vis-à-vis the project. The security company in charge of closing the roads to the Bisri valley is affiliated with Joumblat¹⁴. The shrewd politician clearly saw this shift of power on the ground. A few months later, his marginalization from the formation new government in January 2020 was another signal. Additionally, conflicts were being reported between Joumblatt and the Bisri dam’s contractor Dani Khoury, a close affiliate to Bassil¹⁵. All these elements contributed to Joumblat’s decision to shift position regarding the project and declare his opposition to it. On February 19th, 2020, the PSP’s board released a statement with a list of six reform actions to deal with the economic situation, the last of which stated the following: “A series of meetings with specialists and a review of the various reports that were placed in the custody of the party regarding the Bisri Dam project and its environmental and ecological impacts, [led] the party to decide to reconsider its position on it”¹⁶. This statement was received with great relief by many locals, who believed that Joumblat is capable of stopping the project if he wanted to. Later, Joumblat’s parliamentary block submitted a proposal to create a Natural Reserve in the Bisri Valley¹⁷. Though the proposal is quickly written and includes many discrepancies like the proposal of penalties on grazing which is impractical as grazing is widely prevalent in the area, through its submission, the PSP wanted to let the public and the political parties know that their

¹⁴ <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/279217>

¹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/03/world/middleeast/lebanon-protests-corruption.html>

¹⁶ <https://anbaaonline.com/news/49827/>

¹⁷ <https://anbaaonline.com/news/51061/>

decision was final. In March 2020, Joumblat said that the Bisri Dam project is over, and that government needs to allocate the loan to helping the families in need after the spread of the coronavirus¹⁸. Shortly afterwards, in April 2020, four PSP-affiliated municipalities in the Bisri valley announced in official statements the withdrawal of their support to the dam¹⁹. These four municipalities cover around 60% of the valley's surface area, and their decision represents additional challenges to the dam project. These decisions were communicated to the World Bank's offices in Beirut by Bilal Abdallah, an MP in the PSP bloc, and to the World Bank's board of directors in Washington DC by us and the Arab Watch Coalition.

5. Pressuring the International Funding Agency (the World Bank)

As mentioned earlier, our discouraging experience with other dam projects in Lebanon made us abandon dialogue possibilities with the Lebanese Government, particularly the MoEW and the CDR. The campaign's focus instead aimed directed at the World Bank, which finances more than 70% of the Bisri Dam project's costs. We knew that if the Bank decided to withdraw its financing for the project, it would be very challenging for the Lebanese Government to pursue the construction of the dam. As such, the campaign's actions to put pressure on the World Bank included letters, expert meetings, lobbying with World Bank Member countries, complaints to the Inspection Panel, and more.

a. Phase I: Dialoguing

In 2012, following the government's approval of the National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS), the World Bank published the Country Water Sector Assistance

¹⁸ <https://anbaaonline.com/news/56065/>

¹⁹ <https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/episode/14-9-4-2020>

Strategy for Lebanon (2012). This report adopted the MoEW's pro-dam narrative: it considered Lebanon's water resources below the scarcity threshold, and stated that the groundwater budget suffers from deficit. The report regarded the NWSS's measures as "bold and comprehensive" and did not consider the lack of baseline data as an obstacle to its legitimacy. They thus endorsed the government's water policy. In 2014, the World Bank signed an agreement with the Lebanese Government to finance the Bisri Dam project, one of the building blocks of the NWSS.

In 2015, the World Bank Group funded the Strategic Environmental Assessment (2015)²⁰ of the National Water Sector Strategy (NWSS). The assessment recommended the scaling-back of the dams' program considering its social, economic, and environmental constraints. The study described the Bisri Dam as "land greedy" (Ecodit, 2015; p.47) and criticized its unrealistic resource exploitation. However, the World Bank's project team in Beirut neglected these recommendations, even though the Bank's environmental and social policy frameworks consider strategic environmental assessments crucial components in addressing national priorities (World Bank, 2016). The World Bank's team did not merely ignore those recommendations, they started promoting the Bisri Dam project. Indeed, the World Bank's VP for MENA, then-regional director in Lebanon, Farid Belhaj, started lobbying with Lebanese politicians to support the project.

In 2017 and early 2018, the Lebanon Eco Movement participated in a series of expert meetings with the World Bank management team in Beirut in an attempt to convince them to abort the project. Paul Abi Rached invited several experts in ecology, economics, geology to attend the meetings. However, the discussions with the World

²⁰ The report was prepared by ECODIT.

Bank were inconclusive, and the Bank team’s answers to our concerns were evasive and ambiguous. The Bank’s staff used the meetings to legitimize their participatory processes, and as a demonstration of inclusiveness and transparency: They informed the upper management that they are meeting with the civil society and explaining the project to them, stating on their official website that their team “is “engaged in an open and inclusive dialogue and organizes regular meetings with NGOs”²¹.

b. Phase II: Demanding Accountability from within

In June 2018, during a post-graduate short course on Climate Change I was taking in the Netherlands, a lecturer who had worked with the World Bank and with whom I discussed the campaign advised me to reach out to the WB’s Inspection Panel. I learned that the Panel was an independent accountability mechanism embedded within the Bank’s structure, in charge of reviewing complaints concerning World Bank-funded projects. After some research and discussion with Paul Abi Rashed, we decided to submit a Request for Inspection. I wrote the Request based on two criteria: 1) The project’s environmental and social harms and 2) the project’s violation of the World Bank’s safeguard policies and the Bank’s commitment to sustainable development and climate change mitigation. Despite the multiples gaps and flaws in the World Bank’s safeguard policies, particularly when it comes to environmental protection, we could identify some policy items that served our argument. For instance, the policies on Natural Habitats (OP 4.04) indicate that: “The Bank does not support projects involving the significant conversion of natural habitats unless there are no feasible alternatives for the project and its siting”. As many of the alternatives for water in the Greater Beirut Area were neglected

²¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/bisri-dam#civilsociety>

in the project's studies, we argued that the World Bank Management violated its own policies on Natural Habitats.

The Request for Inspection was the first comprehensive document we authored about the project's harms, and was an opportunity for me to deepen my review of key reports and studies, particularly the EIA study, the Assessment of the Groundwater Resources of Lebanon (MoEW, & UNDP, 2014), archeological studies, in addition to various notes written by the campaign's experts. The Request for Inspection was submitted on August 6th, 2018 and was signed by the Lebanon Eco Movement and 42 local inhabitants, workers and community representatives. The report expressed our deep concerns regarding the foreseen negative impacts of the dam, the absence of a comprehensive analysis of alternatives, and the lack of public participation and consultation with the local community. We also noted how direct communication with the World Bank's Management team in Beirut and the Environmental and Social Panel of Experts hired by the CDR was unsatisfactory.

The Panel registered the case on September 12, 2018, and the World Bank Management's team in Beirut submitted its Response on October 12, 2018. The response portrayed a situation of severe water supply shortages in Lebanon based on the MoEW's figures, and stated that "no single source can fulfill the water supply needs of the Greater Beirut Mount Lebanon area" and that "a combination of various dams and non-dam alternatives" is required. The Management's Response claimed that the project's Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) was prepared according to the Bank's policy, and that that an "extensive" analysis of alternatives had been undertaken as part of the ESIA, including dam options (Damour dam, Janna Dam, and others) and non-dam options (groundwater, desalination, and reduction of non-revenue water). The

ESIA concluded that all alternative solutions cannot meet the Greater Beirut area's water needs by 2035. Management further stated that a Dam Safety Panel (DSP), composed of world-class experts, was established for the Bisri Dam. Furthermore, the Management's Response stated that the Environmental and Social Panel (ESP), composed of "internationally recognized experts", reviewed in detail the environmental, social and archaeological aspects of the project. Management also stated that it will continue to monitor the implementation of the project and will maintain "open and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders".

The Panel conducted its eligibility visit to Lebanon from October 14 to 18, 2018, holding meetings in Beirut and visiting the project site in the Bisri Valley. The Panel's members and staff met with us and other NGO representatives, and local residents. They also met with the World Bank's Management, the CDR, MoEW, the National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR), and the Directorate General of Urban Planning (DGUP).

The Panel's goal mission was to issue a report to the World Bank's Board of Directors (formed of representatives of the different World Bank's Member Countries), recommending either to investigate or not to investigate the case. Waiting for the Inspection Panel's report, we met in Beirut with a member of the Bank Information Center (BIC), a non-governmental organization based in Washington DC that helps civil society in developing countries in monitoring and influencing the policies and operations of the World Bank Group and other international financial institutions (IFIs). The BIC thought our Request for Inspection has a great potential of success compared to previous cases presented to the Inspection Panel. However, they also knew, through their connections to inside sources, that pressure was being put on the Panel to abort the case. They clarified

that, even if the Panel recommends investigating the case, the Board of Directors may very well reject this recommendation under political pressure.

Accordingly, we decided to launch an online petition asking the Board of Directors to take urgent action to withdraw the financing of the Bisri Dam and to support a sustainable water management plan instead. We posted the petition on our Facebook pages, and, in a few days, it had gathered thousands of signatures. We sent it, alongside individual email letters, to the Directors. Additionally, given her position as a member of the World Bank Group's External Advisory Panel for Diversity and Inclusion we asked MP Paula Yacoubian for support. She sent a letter that we helped her draft to the World Bank's President to draw his attention to the project's negative impacts. The President referred Yacoubian's letter to the Vice President for MENA region, Ferid Belhaj, who was Regional Director in Beirut when the Bisri Dam deal was approved. Belhaj's response stated that the Bisri Dam is a very important project for Lebanon, as "it addresses the challenge of acute water scarcity faced by millions of people living in the Greater Beirut Mount Lebanon region, one that will only get worse as a result of climate change". Belhaj indicated that the Bank's decision to support the construction of the dam came after a very thorough analysis of a wide range of alternative dam and no-dam options, and the Bisri Dam was the one essential solution to provide the bulk water needed for the entire population by 2035.

The Panel's eligibility report to the Board did not recommend an investigation. The report noted "the many valid concerns of the community" (Inspection Panel, 2018), including regarding the analysis of alternatives and the concerns focusing on the undervaluation of biodiversity and archaeological values of the Bisri Valley. The Panel particularly took note of "the understandable serious concern that community

members have expressed regarding the uncertainty surrounding the safety of the planned dam, especially considering its location in an earthquake-prone area” (Inspection Panel, 2018). Nonetheless, the Panel adopted the management’s claims that “the dam has been designed according to state-of-art design requirements and has undergone vigorous seismic hazard assessments”. (Inspection Panel, 2018).

We received the Inspection Panel’s ruling with disappointment and shock. The Recommendation Report was focused on ensuring that the checklist of needed studies and measures is met, rather than giving weight to the grave social, environmental and economic harms the project posed. The Panel accepted the inaccurate information and the factual discrepancies provided by the Bank’s Management team in Beirut. For example, they claimed that the 2014 Assessment of Groundwater Resources of Lebanon confirmed “a groundwater deficit of about 150 million m³ in the Greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon (GBML) and an associated decline in groundwater quality there”. This reference is actually incorrect (UNDP, 2014) as the value of 150 m³ was attributed to the North Lebanon Cretaceous Basin (Basin 18) and not to the Greater Beirut Mount Lebanon (GBML) that is abundant with groundwater. This fallacy was simply a dishonest move to exclude groundwater as a viable alternative for the water supply. Yet, the Inspection Panel did not question the incorrect figures.

Furthermore, the Inspection Panel members relied on the support of public institutions they consulted with, who were all aligned on the project. The National Council for Scientific Research, that issued in 2015 a first report against the dam, was now suddenly in its favor, confirming “the need for water in the Greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon area and [saying] that the topology makes other alternatives difficult” (Inspection Panel, 2018). Originally, the NCSR’s first report recommended the

consideration of alternative solutions to supply Beirut with water given that the Karst-dominated Mount-Lebanon is geologically unsuitable for large dams (NCSR, 2015). We considered the NSCR's shift in position as a succumbing to political pressure. Likewise, Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) in the Ministry of Culture did not express any concern with the destruction of the cultural landscape because of the Bisri Dam (Inspection Panel, 2018). These positions certainly provided good help for the Panel to reject our Request for Inspection.

In May 2019, an activist in the campaign, Dania, who first contacted us through our Facebook page, helped initiate communication with members of the Arab Watch Coalition (AWC), a network based in Washington DC that includes representatives of civil society in the Arab region and works to monitor the programs and policies of international financing institutions and hold such institutions accountable. AWC expressed interest in supporting Save the Bisri Valley, and Lebanon Eco Movement joined the coalition. AWC is very active in Washington DC and collaborates with American and International NGOs such as International Rivers and Bank Information Center (BIC) on World Bank-funded projects.

Taking advantage of their close connections with the Inspection Panel members and staff, AWC inquired about the reasons our first Request for Inspection was rejected. They were told that the Request was "a strong case", but also that the Bank's Management was able to prove that they conducted all due diligence and presented opposite studies. Still, AWC members encouraged us to submit a new Request for Inspection, given the emergence of new evidence and circumstances, particularly the financial situation of Lebanon and the threats of total economic collapse that were looming then, which require a reconsideration of international loans. Despite the fact that, historically, the Panel had

never accepted a re-appeal, the AWC members encouraged us to proceed as they believed there was an opportunity and they pledged they would try to pressure the Panel and the Bank to go forward with it.

We submitted on June 24th, 2019, the request for re-appeal, which exposed the disinformation and alteration of scientific reports by the Bank's Management, providing thirty points of evidence, of which I'll highlight only four here for the sake of space. First, we highlighted how the Bank Management referred to the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD bulletin 137) stating:

“The increase of the energy potential due to the impounded reservoir is practically insignificant in view of the size of the actual seismic energy that would be released. Reservoir Triggered Earthquakes (RTE) have occurred on dams with heights over 100 m [Bisri Dam will be 70 m high] and are suspected to have occurred on reservoir capacity exceeding 1 billion m³ [more than 10 times larger than that of the Bisri Dam]”.

While the ICOLD bulletin 137 does indeed say that the probability of RTS occurrence increases with the increasing height of dams and the increasing size of the reservoirs, and that it needs to be considered “in the first place” for large dams with a height of over 100 m, the report continues to say that “there are no clearly defined limits in this respect” (p. 105). Furthermore, the Management's report skips the information in ICOLD bulletin 137 that confirms how a relatively large number of documented RTS cases led to a consensus that reservoir impounding is a realistic potential response, and how several of these cases occurred with dams way below 100m in depth and 1 billion m³ in volume (p.23). Such selective use of evidence by the World Bank management demonstrates a systematic pattern of obfuscation and omission which we had been facing since 2017, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Second, the Request underscored the conflict of interests in the EIA process: CDR had appointed the firm Dar al Handasah Shair and Partners both for the Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the Bisri Dam (Lebanon Water Supply Augmentation Project), *and* for the Construction Supervision Services in the Greater Beirut Water Supply Project (Tunnel and Pipeline Contract). This clearly violates item 4 of OP 4.01 that requires an independent expertise to conduct the Environmental Assessments for Category A projects, as per below:

“For Category A projects, the borrower retains independent EA experts not affiliated with the project to carry out the EA. [Footnote 7 states: The borrower ensures that when individuals or entities are engaged to carry out EA activities, any conflict of interest is avoided. For example, when an independent EA is required, it is *not* carried out by the consultants hired to prepare the engineering design (my emphasis)] (OP 4.01)”

Third, the Request further argued that the ESIA is more than 5 years old, which makes it invalid and even illegal according to decree 8633 (Item 13) on the Principles of Environmental Impact Assessment which states that the Ministry of Environment’s approval of the ESIA is valid for only two years.

Fourth, the Request also stated the data gaps in the project studies’ assessment of water demand in the Greater Beirut Area and provided the Panel with studies related to alternative solutions for water, including the augmentation of water provision from the Jeita Spring²², the reform of the groundwater sector²³, and others.

²² A study for the protection of the Jeita Spring was conducted by the Federal Institute for Geoscience and Natural Resources (BGR). It stated that the Jeita catchment can provide enough water for the Greater Beirut area and that the water at its source has an excellent quality (Margane, 2014).

²³ The Assessment of the Groundwater Resources conducted by the UNDP shows that Lebanon is not suffering from water deficit as claimed by MoEW. Instead, the water budget shows clear surpluses, with groundwater being the main water resource in Lebanon averaging 53% of yearly precipitation (UNDP, 2014).

Following our Request, the Panel conducted two phone calls with representatives of the Requesters on July 25, 2019 and met with the Bank's Management on August 5, 2019. We contacted members of the Lebanese Parliament asking them to sign a letter supporting our request. MPs Paula Yacoubian, Oussama Saad, Elias Hankach and Farid Haykal El Khazen signed the letter. The reason we reached to members of the Parliament is that they are, theoretically, representative of the Lebanese society and their position would possibly be taken more seriously by an international institution like the World Bank. Another letter coordinated by the Arab Watch Coalition was signed by 15 organizations in different parts of the world²⁴ urging the Panel to seriously address the concerns raised in the complaint.

Although the Inspection Panel's Policies and Procedure require it to issue a Notice of Registration or Non-Registration in a period of two weeks from the submission date, the Panel took more than a month to decide on registering the Request or not. According to the Panel's policy, if a Request raises similar matters as a previous Request for which the Panel has made a recommendation, then the new complaint must present new evidence or circumstances related to the Requesters' concerns. Inside sources told us that there were two conflicting opinions at the panel: one in favor of considering the Request eligible for registration, given the new evidence, and one against, claiming that the new evidence is inconsequential. On September 4th, 2019, the Panel issued a Notice of Non-Registration stating that the new information presented, "in the judgment of the

²⁴ The organizations that signed the letter: Bank Information Center, US; Bretton Woods Project, UK; Bank Information Center, Europe; Urgewald, Germany; International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination and Liberation; WoMin African Alliance; Bir Duino, Kyrgyzstan; Rivers Without Boundaries, Mongolia; Witness Radio Organization, Uganda; Phenix Center for Economic Studies, Jordan; GoAct (Tunisian Association for Governance and Social Accountability), Tunisia; Egyptian Center for Civic and Legislation Reform- Egypt; Abna'a Alnazehein Organization in Missan, Iraq; Women Affairs Organization, Iraq; Tabani Foundation for Active Youth, Iraq.

Panel, does not constitute new evidence or circumstances that warrant a registration of the Request”. The Panel used a loophole in its own policy and claimed that even if the new evidence was not presented in the previous request, the Panel “had access to these evidences”, which means that they don’t qualify as new.

c. Phase III: Denouncing and Allying with Member Countries

Following the failure to hold accountable the Bank from within its ranks, we resorted to denouncing its works through its allies. Although our requests for inspection were aborted, they caused ripples within the World Bank’s upper management. In July 2019, I participated in a regular meeting that the Arab Watch Coalition which we became member of holds with the US Treasury officials in charge of the World Bank projects. I explained to the US officials how the information based upon which the American Executive Director in the World Bank approved the project’s loan in 2014 was biased and inaccurate. For example, the US Treasury issued a statement in 2014 saying that “The United States welcomes the proposed \$474 million IBRD loan to the Republic of Lebanon for the Water Supply Augmentation Project, which is carefully designed to address critical water scarcity in the Greater Beirut/Mount Lebanon region in a responsible manner”. After I pointed to the inaccuracies in these statements and asked to the US to take action, the American officials promised to look into the case. Since then, the Arab Watch Coalition kept in touch with the US officials and brought up the subject on many occasions.

We also decided to focus on Germany as it is one of the most powerful shareholders in the World Bank. Thanks to the help of a Lebanese businessman from Jezzine who is well connected in Germany, we managed to contact officials from the

Green Party in August 2019, and sent a letter explaining the environmental destruction the project entails and the viable alternatives. Based on our letter, Green Party MPs Katrin Goering-Eckart and Uwe Kekeritz said in a letter they sent in November 2019 to the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, in the middle of the Lebanese uprisings, that the Bisri project in Lebanon was an example of the failed policy and corruption that Lebanese citizens have taken to the streets to protest against²⁵. The letter further warned that given “Lebanon’s ability to meet financial obligations is already in doubt, any default risk would be shouldered by the World Bank, which in turn would be paid by the German taxpayer”.

The Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development responded through a lengthy letter sent by State Secretary Norbert Barthle on the 16th of January 2020. Although the answer initially defends the World Bank’s support for the project, it includes two important statements: one stating that the German government has received Lebanese requests for financial support to prevent insolvency, and the second stating that the German government wants to discuss the whole project with other shareholders and the World Bank, in order to reconsider this project as part of a broader reform package for Lebanon. In particular, the last section points towards the German Government reconsidering their involvement in the Bisri dam project in light of the extreme financial and economic crisis the country is facing. This major development grabbed the interest of media in Lebanon and Germany, with headlines highlighting that “Germany is turning the table on the Bisri Dam project”. Interviews were also conducted with the German MPs who stated that:

²⁵ <https://beirut-today.com/2020/02/09/german-mps-reject-bisri-dam/>

“The Bisri Dam project of the Lebanese government and the World Bank is standing for everything that brought the country into its current troubles: It is a breeding ground for corruption. It is extremely expensive with uncertain ends. It is destroying the livelihoods of its rural population, creating even greater pressure on the greater Beirut area. And it has been pushed through without any local support. I call on the German government, the World Bank and the new government of Lebanon to immediately stop the construction of the dam. It is now the time to start a dialogue with the people from the valley and reconsider realistic projects such as those proposed by the BGR (German Federal Institute for Geoscience and Natural Resources).”

Katrin Göring-Eckard
Co-Chair of the Green Party’s caucus in the Parliament

The Arab Watch Coalition (AWC) took advantage of the dynamic happening in Germany and contacted the German Executive Director in the World Bank’s board in Washington DC and discussed with him the possibilities of further lobbying within the World Bank’s Board of Directors. Additionally, the AWC conducted meetings with other directors as well, especially the “progressive” ones who sympathized with our cause.

d. Phase IV: Back to Local Negotiations and Keeping the Pressure On

In parallel with putting pressure on the World Bank through its internal accountability modalities, and externally through its member countries, we decided to resume the communication with the Management team in Beirut, especially given the Mashreq Regional Director is a key decision maker regarding the Bisri Dam project. We thought that the time was now opportune to provide the Management in Beirut with possible “ways out” of the project. It was not easy given the project’s proponent Ferid

Belhaj who was the former regional director was currently the MENA Vice President, which means that the actual regional director, Saroj Kumar, would have to defy his immediate superior and abort what was his pet project for 5 years. A Lebanese expat in the US who had reached to us through Daleel Thawra group²⁶ helped organize these expert meetings through his connections. This time, given our acquired experience in negotiation, I insisted on giving a live presentation to the Bank staff and director showing the discrepancies in the Lebanese Government's assessment of the water needs and highlighting in detail the proposed project's inefficiency and alternatives. My presentation mentioned the misinformation tactics of the Management's team which directly implicated the project's leader, who was attending the meeting. The audience received the information with dismay, and the regional director requested copies of the documents which included updated numbers of the Awali River flow. Later, we knew through exchanged emails with the World Bank team that they officially requested the missing data from the Litani River Authority, and confirmed what we had presented, though they continued to justify the project's economic feasibility. For instance, we received an email from the project's leader in the World Bank, justifying the project's ability to provide Beirut with 60 MCM only, a volume that figured previously as *the minimal supply volume during dry years* (World Bank, 2018). In her response, the team leader chose to dismiss the original supply volumes promised by the Bank. Additionally, she refrained from giving any attention to the recent series and the impact of climate change. They neglected the fact that, according to the last 10-year flow rates (81.71 MCM/year), the Bisri Dam project wouldn't be able to provide more than 45 MCM/year, and that future river decline would make the project fail even worse. Indeed, we believed

²⁶ Daleel Thawra is an online directory of different initiatives, outlets and resources related to the October 17th uprising.

that the World Bank's evasive answers regarding water quantities proved a substantial progress in our scientific argument.

On April 16, 2020, the World Bank issued a statement calling on the Lebanese government to hold an "open public dialogue" to address concerns raised by campaigners against the plan, and announced that the Bank is open to reallocate the project's funds to mitigate the current economic situation and help the poor in Lebanon. Although the project is not officially canceled yet, the withdrawal of funding clearly impedes the possibility for the Bisri Dam project to continue in the foreseeable future. Amidst a pandemic and a financial collapse that's shattering Lebanon, The Save the Bisri Campaign demonstrated how systematic activism can indeed yield to change.

The announcement of the World Bank came after a decision by the Lebanese Council of Ministers on April 2, 2019 that it will resume its plans with the Bisri Dam project "due to its strategic importance in providing needed water to the greater Beirut area," and our response on April 8, 2019 with a letter to officials in countries that are influential in the World Bank, signed by more than one hundred Lebanese environmental and political groups, requesting the cancelation of the Dam project in light of the collapse of the economic situation in Lebanon. Our response was also coordinated with 18 Members of the Lebanese Parliament who also drafted another letter, with The Arab Watch Coalition who helped ensure the letters reach the Executive Directors of the Bank, and with Minteshreen, another group who also sent individual similar letters to the Executive Directors. We also orchestrated a campaign on social media where people from Lebanon and abroad sent messages to World Bank officials requesting to stop the Dam and save the Bisri valley.

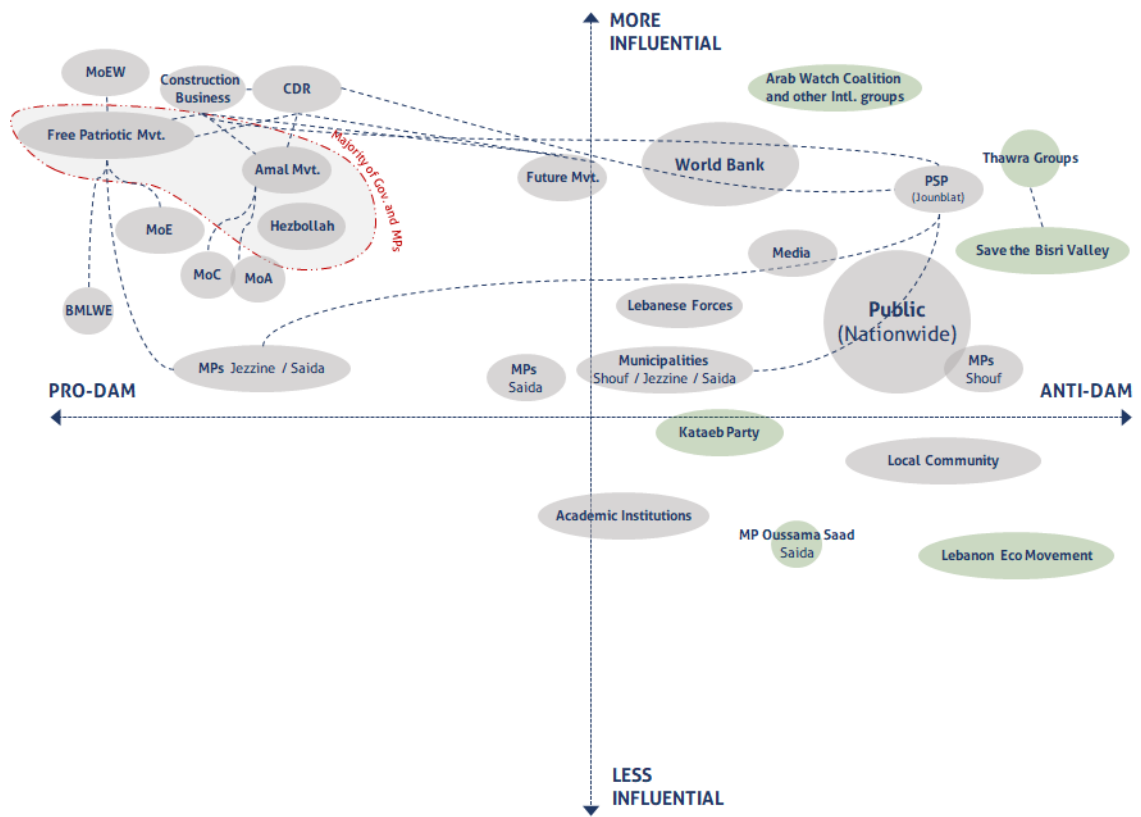


Figure 2: Power map 2020
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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A. Synthesis

As shown in the previous chapter, the Save the Bisri Valley campaign emerged from small-scale activism against different dam projects, and grew into a political movement that, for the time in Lebanon, was able to halt the construction of a large dam. The movement took advantage of a unique political opportunity structure consisting of the following: 1) The World Bank's financing for the project, which provided a new venue for contestation; 2) The cracks in the sectarian power-sharing system, particularly the conflicts between the PSP and the FPM; 3) The growing power of the civil society since 2015 and with the uprising in 2019; and 4) The economic crisis that weakened the system and its legitimacy. Such opportunities can be crucial for social movements in the Global South (Yip et al., 2019; Osa and Schock 2007; McAdam et al. 2001). Indeed, as William Gamson and David Meyer (1996) argue, the activists' perception and understanding of these structural availabilities are very important. My training as a planner and my activist experience helped me identify political power and important gaps and opportunities.

At the organizational level, the campaign is loosely organized, and doesn't have a clearly identifiable structure. Yet, as Della Porta and Diani (2018) would argue, the active involvement of environmental and political organizations in the campaign secured continuity of collective action and provided a basis for the creation of a collective identity.

The campaign diffused contention into different venues and targeted actors at multiple scales: the local, national, and transnational. Locally, the campaign stirred mobilization by forging connections with the Bisri Valley's residents, empowering them with expert knowledge and media exposure, providing them with a platform for discussions, and organizing regular events and protests. We defended the locals' rights to access their land and maintain their livelihoods, linking environmental risks to social, economic and safety concerns. Similar to the anti-dam movement in Brazil (McCormick, 2006) and India (Haynes, 1999) discussed earlier, the collaboration between locals, activists and experts was essential.

On the national level, we worked actively on forming public opinion and stirring public debates through the dissemination of alternative scientific knowledge using social media and by favoring a rhetoric that triggers emotions and builds collective identity. We promoted Bisri as a symbol of the natural and cultural heritage of Lebanon. We also sought to shift paradigms in the water sector and discredit the claim that large dams are viable solutions for water. Upscaling the discourse beyond environmental issues was key to challenge the modernist and industrial arguments that are intrinsically embedded in the system (Van Der Heijden, 1999). We shifted the discussion from focusing on a particular dam issue to tackling the inherent problems of water management, public policy and development strategies in Lebanon, as well as the problems with international financing. The use of a political language outside the government's grid of intelligibility (DeLuca, 1999) focusing on radical alternative solutions helped the campaign garner substantial public support at the national level.

In addition, the campaign built a powerful anti-dam network, involving environmental NGOs and political groups. It developed solidarity links with the October

17's uprising groups and integrated with the national struggle for political change and economic reform. The uprising provided the campaign with what Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (1999) describe as "discursive opportunities" meaning the dominant public discourse that influence the movement's intensity and potential of success. Stopping the Bisri Dam became one of the uprising's main demands, with thousands of people protesting in the valley and forcing the contractor to stop the works. The campaign involved different forms of on-the-ground actions, ranging from recreational events to intense protests, sit-ins, and confrontation with security forces. These actions took place in the Bisri Valley, in front of CDR's headquarters and World Bank's offices in Beirut, and in other places.

The campaign conducted advocacy based on communicating interregional dependencies, showing the Dam's threats to the Awali River in Saida, the corruption and mismanagement of the water sector in the Greater Beirut area, the Bisri Dam's connection with the Qaraoun Dam project in the Bekaa and its impact on the quality of water to be conveyed to the Beirut's suburbs. This approach, in line with the "Progressive Regionalist Approach" in planning (Pastor, Benner, and Matsouka, 2009) helped widen the range of opposition to the project.

On the international level, the campaign held a series of discussions with the World Bank, the main financier of the project, especially that the local governmental institutions are closed to participation and dialogue. Furthermore, we collaborated with experts in different fields on filing complaints to the independent Inspection Panel against the Bank Management. Given the disappointment by the World Bank's management and accountability mechanism, we lobbied officials in the Bank's member countries, especially Germany, and collaborated with international NGOs and parties to influence

the World Bank's decisions, and reached out to international media to pressure the Bank with adverse publicity.

My role as planner and coordinator in the campaign has involved promoting an alternative discourse in water management, leading the communication with the World Bank, conveying the locals' concerns, analyzing the Bank's internal policies, writing complaints, organizing petitions and developing the scientific, cross-disciplinary dossier in collaboration with experts, using new media tools and ensuring pressure over long periods of time by understanding the dynamics of power in the country. This role differs from the traditional, pluralist approach to advocacy planning whereby planners engage in deliberate discussions with governmental institutions, often failing to challenge the power imbalance between the elite and the marginalized groups. Instead, my role reflects a new approach to planning, operating outside the institutions and seeking to shift political power in a more conflictual manner.

B. Summary

To sum up, this thesis investigated the Save the Bisri Valley campaign aiming to understand how collective action and advocacy planning can function efficiently within a planning practice polarized between public planning agencies that are protecting the interest of the elite and urban activists without access to planning decision-making. The thesis reviewed social movement and advocacy planning theories and highlighted cases of anti-dam movements in the Global South. It then analyzed dam-based water policies and environmental contestation in Lebanon. Finally, this thesis documented the Save the Bisri Valley campaign, its tools and strategies, and highlighted its emergence from a virtual campaign on social media into a large movement that has been able to achieve

success. The thesis showed that the movement has identified and benefited from a specific structure of opportunity and has implemented three sets of interdependent tactics that allowed the halt of the project:

1) Shifting the public debate from purely technical terms to political terms, and operating within the political landscape, particularly identifying the cracks in the system that enable contestation and opposition.

2) Conducting systematic and sustained action that combines communication, mobilization, organizing, direct action, and negotiation, while prioritizing tactics of language and symbols over organizational structures.

3) Upscaling the problematic from a local issue into a national one, privileging multi-sited and multi-scalar modalities of action, and building networks at the local, national and international scales.

C. The Future of the Bisri Valley

As the Save the Bisri Valley campaign gets closer to stopping the dam, it is necessary to put forward an alternative plan for the Bisri Valley to ensure its long-term protection. The National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory (NPMPLT), approved in 2009 by the Council of Ministers, classifies the Bisri Valley as one of the major landscapes that constitute an integral part of the country's identity and an important factor of tourist attraction and quality of life. The plan identifies the Bisri Valley as one of the most remarkable valleys, with notable ecological, cultural and agricultural characteristics. It proposes the creation of the Regional Natural Park of Bisri and Barouk, among six different Regional Parks (RNP) across the Lebanese territory.

According to the NPMPLT, the creation of an RNP requires a group of municipalities to sign a charter that defines common development and conservation goals. The national government must approve the charter and award the region the title of a Regional Natural Park (RNP). The RNP would be managed by a committee that represents municipalities and governorates and works directly with the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and the General Directorate of Urban Planning (GDUP), and collaborates closely with the local community and civil society organizations.

The region of the Bisri Valley and the Shouf Cedar mountain is among the most prepared areas for the RNP classification in Lebanon. The Al-Awali river stream is classified as a natural site under the protection of the Ministry of Environment, according to Decision No. 131/1 dated 1/9/1998, while the Shouf Cedar mountain is protected by Law 532.

On the administrative level, the region is distinguished by the presence of local administrations with relatively good expertise in rural development and in the protection of natural resources like the Union of Jezzine Municipalities, in addition to the active role of non-governmental organizations like the Shouf Cedar Reserve Administration. These experiences, if developed and combined, can constitute a major impetus for the success of the RNP project.

The RNP is characterized by the fact that it does not have a binding authority in itself, but functions according to the agreement and cooperation between those concerned from local administrations and community groups, and this cooperation is translated through joint development projects and binding master plans. The concept of RNP differs from that of the Natural Reserve in its ability to balance between environmental protection and economic development, and often involves larger territories and includes human

settlements in addition to natural and agricultural area. Unlike natural reserves, RNPs allow for urban development, but in a moderate manner and within the framework of an integrated master plan that defines land uses and protection levels according to detailed assessments of resources. However, RNPs can include natural reserves within their geographical boundaries, as would be the case for the RNP of Bisri and Shouf.

However, the RNP classification still requires the approval of a Regional Natural Parks Law by the parliament. The NPMPLT recommends that the MoA, the MoE, and the DGUP should cooperate in preparing and approving a law for RNPs. However, the concerned departments are still ignoring this recommendation with the absence of a strategic planning in the country, while the different political parties in power prioritize policies and projects that often contradict the NPMPLT in general and the RNPs in particular. With regard to the status of the lands that the CDR has expropriated for the implementation of the dam project in accordance with Decree No. 2066 of May 27, 2015, the Expropriation Law provides a mechanism to deal with these land plots: Previous landowners have the right to request retrieval within a period of one year from the date they were notified of the project's official cancellation, once approved. If the one-year period expires and the owner does not submit a request for redemption, the government is entitled to register the land as its own. The extent to which the land ownerships constitute an obstacle to the establishment of the RNP is yet to be investigated.

D. Research Contribution

This thesis contributed to the literature on social movements and advocacy planning. It presented a case where the diffusion of contention from local to national and international scales has proven to be successful (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). By showing

how the Save the Bisri Valley campaign sought to shift paradigms in the water sector and participated in the efforts towards the change in the political system, this thesis contributed to expanding the concept of scale-shift - typical to the theoretical tradition of contentious politics - to include the activists' demands and discourses, as suggested by Ngai Min Yip (2019). The thesis further demonstrated how the building of multi-scalar and long-term coalitions (Oberschall, 1973) is crucial to ensure continuity and efficiency of collective action beyond one particular campaign or movement. Furthermore, the thesis contributed to the literature on political opportunities by presenting a variety of specific and contextual opportunities that the campaign exploited successfully. These opportunities include cracks in the sectarian political system, dominant public discourses, support from international organizations, etc. Furthermore, this thesis contributed to the discussions on the new forms of urban and regional planning operating outside the state's institutions and seeking to challenge the government's monopoly of knowledge and power (Grooms and Bromah, 2018; Parker and Street, 2018; Sger, 2016). Finally, this thesis contributed to the Progressive Regionalist Approach in planning (Reece, 2018) by showing how the campaign addressed environmental inequity through multidisciplinary and interregional collective action, and through promoting interregional dependencies.

E. Limitations

While this research documented and analyzed the different facets of the Save the Bisri Valley campaign, it doesn't sufficiently address the relations and dynamics between individual activists. The fact that the movement is still ongoing and that I am still deeply involved in it makes it difficult for me to unpack these relations. Indeed, understanding them can help further explain the campaign's successes and challenges. Additionally, the

thesis does not sufficiently investigate the campaign's production of scientific knowledge and the collaboration between activists and experts. For instance, the growing controversy around the Bisri dam has encouraged students and researchers to take the dam as case study in their work on water policy, environment, cultural heritage, ect., and consequently helped the campaign develop its scientific argument against the government. Finally, the thesis frames the campaign in general and my role in particular in relation to advocacy planning, though our work goes beyond advocacy. It would be interesting for future analysis of this campaign to emphasize more on the power structure and dynamics as discussed by Flyvbjerg' (2002), and on the importance of power maps as key tools in the hands of activists/planners who can reflect critically on their strategies.

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