

WORKING PAPER

POLITICS OF COINCIDENCE:

The Harak Confronts its “Peoples”

Carole Kerbage



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Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs

Published by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs,
American University of Beirut.

This report can be obtained from the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and
International Affairs office at the American University of Beirut or can be downloaded
from the following website: www.aub.edu.lb/ifi.

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WORKING PAPER #41

***POLITICS OF
COINCIDENCE:
THE HARAK CONFRONTS
ITS “PEOPLES”***

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“Since the civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon had not witnessed mass mobilizations against cross-sectarian livelihood issues as massive as the August 29 demonstrations”.

CONTENTS

04

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

05

INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Summer Protests 5

Research Introduction 6

08

1. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and its Theoretical Justification 8

Data Collection 9

Coding and Data Analysis 11

13

2. “POLITICS OF COINCIDENCE”: POLITICAL IMPROVISATION BEYOND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Refusing Hierarchy, Monopolizing Decisions 14

Fragile Populism 16

Theatrical Mobilization/ and its “Symbolic” Victories 19

23

3. THE PEOPLES OF THE HARAK PROTESTED... AND WERE NOT LIBERATED

A Political Opportunity on the Pretext of Garbage 23

Mass Mobilization and its Sectarian, Regional and Class Channels 25

“I have no interest.” 29

32

CONCLUSION

24

APPENDIX

Pivotal moments of the protest wave (July – Oct., 2015) 34

Table 1 37

Table 2 38

39

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Rima Majed for her dedicated and thorough follow-up of the fieldwork methodology and her detail-oriented feedback on the first draft of the research. I would also like to thank Dr. Fawwaz Traboulsi, Mr. Mohamad Zbib, Mr. Nabil Abdo and Ms. Cynthia Kreichati for the ongoing discussions about the research's hypotheses and its preliminary findings.

I am grateful to all those who contributed their critical feedback on the preliminary findings of the research, which were presented at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut: Dr. Ziad Abu-Rish, Dr. Samer Franjeh, Dr. Mona Fawaz, Dr. Karam Karam, Ms. Leen Hashem and Mr. Rayan El-Amine.

I also would like to thank the Issam Fares Institute for initiating, supporting and embracing this research project, in particular the Social Justice and Development Policy Program team: Mr. Rami Khouri, Ms. Leila Kabalan and Ms. Sarah Al-Jamal.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank the interns at the Issam Fares Institute: Mr. Rahim Mikhael, who helped me gather articles from newspaper archives; Ms. Joumana Talhouk, Ms. Batoul Sukkar, Ms. Lama Nakhal, Ms. Rim Kalfayan and Ms. Chaza Chouman, who helped me transcribe the testimonies of the participants during the live media coverage of the protests; and Ms. Dina Abdel-Nabi, who documented the statements of the political forces and responses to the *Harak*.

Note: This paper is an English translation of the original Arabic version.

INTRODUCTION

“We are from the so and so area and from the so and so party and from the so and so sect. We are going to protest against the authorities,” this discourse was reiterated by many protestors during the August 2015 demonstrations, specifically between August 19 and 29.¹ This was accompanied by the use of excessive force, which activists and secular groups had not been accustomed to. Some participants’ insistence on flauntingly declaring their partisan and sectarian affiliations baffled both authorities and civil society activists. The former turned violent, while the latter found themselves incapable of handling the momentum of demonstrations with all its complexities.

The 2015 Summer Protests

A wave of protests swept Lebanon in August 2015, a few weeks after the closure of the Naameh (southeast of Beirut) landfill which received Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s waste since 1998. The closure was enforced by around forty protestors who used their bodies as human shield to prevent the garbage trucks from accessing the landfill (The Daily Star, 2015). This also happened by the expiration date of Sukleen’s contract, the company responsible for waste management in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Within a couple of days, garbage started piling up along roads and bridges at the height of the summer’s heat and humidity. At the sight of this scene, which Beirut residents – or at least most of them – were not accustomed to, a group of civil society activists launched the “You Stink” campaign in an attempt to politicize the garbage crisis and link it to the corruption of authorities. After August 19, the campaign gradually transformed into popular protests that went beyond demanding a solution for the garbage crisis to expressing broader grievances about unemployment, precarity of livelihoods, and the commodification of public services.²

In this sense, the *Harak*³ transcended, albeit for a limited period of time, the prevalent traditional sectarian politics at that time. Since the civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon had not witnessed mass mobilizations against cross-sectarian livelihood issues as massive as the August 29 demonstrations (Harb, 2016).

The *Harak* can be divided into three main phases: 1) before August 19, 2015; 2) from August 19 to August 29, 2015; 3) from September 1, 2015 to October 8, 2015. The second phase saw the highest rates of new protestors, mass mobilizations,⁴ and intensive live media coverage. The repression and arrest campaigns (especially between August 19 and August 25) were associated with conflicting statements by various political forces,⁵ which reflected the authorities’ confusion. The second and third phases were dominated by activists, as the number of protestors dwindled after August 29. Thus, organizers resorted to direct and symbolic actions rather than mass protests.

While political forces exchanged accusations and tried to contain and co-opt the protest wave in its second phase,⁶ they managed to contain and defame the *Harak* in the third stage,⁷ accusing it of turning into riots. These three stages reflect changes in the power balance between protestors and the authorities with

³ *The media used the term Harak (movement in Arabic) to refer to the protest wave that erupted in August 2015. It was called the “civil Harak” by some and “popular Harak” by others in reference to its grassroots masses so that it would not be reduced to civil society campaigns. The research will use the term Harak (in italics) to refer to the protest wave from August 19 up to the last major event of October 8, 2015.*

⁴ *The demonstration on August 29, 2015 was considered the largest during the Harak, where an estimated 80,000-100,000 participants showed up according to the “You Stink” campaign or tens of thousands according to various press reports.*

⁵ *For example, the Progressive Socialist Party leader, Walid Jumblatt, tweeted on August 22 that he supported the Harak and that the political class was history. He held the Minister of Interior, Nohad Machnouk, responsible for the violence used by security forces against the protestors; Machnouk responded by confirming that he had not given such orders and that Parliament security forces were behind these violent acts.*

⁶ *The Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri, for example, called on the leaders of parliamentary blocs to join the dialogue roundtable.*

⁷ *For example, on September 8, 2015, Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk said: “The right to demonstrate is enshrined in the constitution, however, I will not hesitate to stop the demonization of internal security forces and any attack on their members. I will not hesitate to protect peaceful protestors.” On September 1, 2015, General Michel Aoun said: “Destabilizing the people’s confidence in everything including the institutions is a prelude to chaos. Are they preparing for creative chaos and an Arab spring in Lebanon?”*

¹ *The Harak’s most pivotal moments (from July 17 to October 8) can be found in Appendix 1.*

² *In her analysis of 170 TV interviews with protestors in around 20 hours of live coverage on Al-Jadeed TV channel, Cynthia Kreichati showed that the demonstrators’ demands did not revolve around the garbage crisis, as they were mainly focused on protesting the lack or shortage of public services such as water, electricity, housing, education, health care, unemployment and precarity of livelihoods (Kreichati, 2015).*

regards to the momentum of participation, the nature of participants, media coverage, the state's reaction, and the political forces' containment.⁸

It is difficult to read the *Harak* without looking at previous civil society campaigns and activities, such as the 'gathering for the municipal elections', the 'campaign for the disappeared', the 'civil marriage campaign', the 'campaign against domestic violence', and the 'bringing down of the sectarian regime' campaign (Karam 2006, Bahlawan, 2014), to name a few. The same applies to the Union Coordination Committee (UCC) protests in support of a new salary scale and wage increase,⁹ which lasted three years, beginning in 2011. Although the *Harak* was a continuation of previous labor and civil struggles,¹⁰ it went further, specifically when it comes to the mass August 2015 demonstrations. It expanded the demands, recruited new social groups, and raised the stakes of the political discourse against the predominant March 8 and March 14 political poles. Paradoxically, the new faces in the protest squares, which gave demonstrations their popular momentum, be they independent or from the "parties' sympathizers", were actually the most marginalized groups in articles and studies that addressed the *Harak*.

Research Introduction

The research seeks to analyze the dynamics of contestation in relation to the various social groups involved, particularly people who joined the protest squares for the first time during the *Harak*. First-timers refer to the people who participated in the *Harak* in cross-sectarian demonstrations, raising civil and livelihood issues for the first time. This definition includes people who previously participated in political demonstrations or protests organized by political sectarian parties. In other words, first-timers are people who were mobilized for the first time in 2015 beyond traditional sectarian politics, i.e., without being mobilized by their sectarian parties.

What factors explain the mobilization of thousands of first-time protestors in the Harak, and their subsequent demobilization after the August 29 turning point?

This was the main research question that drove the entire research. The first-timers' approach allows a distance from activists, who were the main focus of the

⁸ For more details about the *Harak*'s narrative, please check Ziad Abu-Rish's article, which addressed the institutional factors that led to the eruption of the "waste crisis", the political forces' tactics to contain the protests and the dilemmas that the protest wave faced (Abu-Rish, 2015).

⁹ The Union Coordination Committee organized over 50 strike days and 150 demonstrations or gatherings, including three mass demonstrations (Bou Khater, 2015).

¹⁰ Many activists from previous civil society and labor campaigns took part in the *Harak* on an individual and collective level.

media and academia, in order to analyze the regional/sectarian and class factors in the protests.

Most contributions methodologically focused on the testimonies of activists during the *Harak* (AbiYaghi, Catusse, & Youn, 2017; Kraidy, 2016; Kassir, 2015; Herzog, 2016). Thus, they often generalized the activists' framework, while at other times reduced the *Harak* to the activists' narratives. Hence, most of these references framed the *Harak* as a secular or non-sectarian movement.¹¹ However, TV interviews with protestors refute the "non-sectarian" or "secular" framing: out of 594 live TV interviews on Al-Jadeed and LBC, only two protestors called for a "secular state" and another five for a "civil state". The majority of those who protested against sectarianism/sectarian regime did so from a standpoint that rejects clientelism and nepotism, which deprives them from their social rights. Therefore, not focusing on the testimonies of activists, specifically the leaders and media figures, allowed for a deconstruction of the prevailing academic and media framing, and consequently studying this protest wave's regional, sectarian and class dynamics.

Changing the focus of attention, however, did not stop me from studying activists as well, but from the perspective of first-timers. This research explores the organizational structure of the various groups in addition to their discourse, activities, decision-making and coordination mechanisms, in order to identify the extent of their influence on the mobilization/demobilization of first-timers.

In this paper, I argue that the "*Harak* groups" confronted the "*Harak* peoples" by adopting what I called "politics of coincidence". I define *politics of coincidence* as spontaneous organizational forms that fall outside traditional political organizations.¹² Their structure is flexible, their discourse is emotional, their demands are loose,¹³ their acts are exhibitionistic and their victories are "symbolic". These groups rely on "coincidence", i.e., political improvisation,

¹¹ There is a distinction between describing the *Harak* as a cross-sectarian protest wave (as stated in the introduction) and describing it as a non-sectarian or secular protest wave. The latter postulates that the participants' demands focused on the abolishment of sectarian politics, bringing down the sectarian regime or demanding a secular or civil state, whereas the former is confined to the presence of protestors from different sects that share livelihood and other demands.

¹² I define traditional political organizations as membership-based organizations, whose funding primarily depends on the subscriptions of their members, within an organizational structure that is elected by their members.

¹³ "Politics of coincidence" has common characteristics with new social movements (Melucci, 1980), not by necessarily focusing on identity politics, but in their organizational characteristics (Abdelrahman, 2013).

as a means to compensate for the lack of political organization and vision. “Politics of coincidence” derives its inspiration from the tools and terminology of NGOs to build a populist discourse that transcends contradictions by identifying a common adversary. Therefore, it distances itself from stirring political problems, by randomly referring to the prevailing discourse, albeit in its “technical” and “apolitical” form, in order to build its loose discourse. “Politics of coincidence” relies on a public that acts as a recipient and not as a partner. The public’s participation is reduced to answering calls for protests without actively participating in the decision-making process.

This “politics” possesses the ability to mobilize the street in unexpected ways. It exploits political opportunities, attracts the media, and recruits new participants through creative means. It creates a protest energy that traditional organizations are no longer able to trigger as they still rely on an economic infrastructure that no longer exists and because they have lost political credibility on many occasions.

However, “politics of coincidence” does not transcend the ability to mobilize or to express resentment or discontent. It is incapable of transforming the protestors’ demands into a unified political program. It can generate impressive and attractive protest moments, but it cannot exercise pressure that threatens the interests of the ruling class. “Politics of coincidence” waves start and end with activists. Political experimentation, which is a prerequisite for “politics of coincidence”, is a ‘luxury’ that most participants cannot afford. Just like its actions, its victories remain “symbolic” and do not affect the political, economic and social structures of the regime.

This paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter One explains the methodology used to collect and analyze field data. Chapter Two focuses on the “politics of coincidence” adopted by the *Harak* groups with regards to their discourse, organizational frameworks, and forms of actions. Chapter Three studies the reasons that led first-timers to mobilize and demobilize in the *Harak*, and to what extent “politics of coincidence” affected their mobilization/demobilization.

1. METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to analyze the factors and dynamics that led protestors to the street for the first time in the *Harak* and their subsequent withdrawal. Since the factors for mobilization/demobilization seemed interconnected and complicated, a qualitative research approach was the most suitable. This research is based on in-depth interviews with first-timers, non-participants, and activists from newly established and already-existing groups. This type of interviews makes it possible to link the individuals' experiences and their (changing) behaviors during the protests with socio-political contexts and structural economic changes.

Research Design and its Theoretical Justification

The dynamics of first-time protestors' participation have not received much attention from scholars. Social movement theories mainly revolve around activists, while first-timers have remained marginalized in literature. Whittier contended that the importance of studying this category is not confined to understanding the expansion of the movements in numbers, but also informs the ways in which "the entry of new cohorts contributes to movement transformation" (Whittier, 1997, p. 761).

In their study of first-time participants in eighteen separate demonstrations in eight countries, Verhulst and Walgrave (2009) compare "new" and "veteran" protestors. They argue that "first-time activists, due to their unfamiliarity with protest participation, have barriers to overcome between willingness to participate and effective participation" (2009, p. 456). Thus, the number of people agreeing with the cause of a specific protest is by far larger than the number of people who actually manage to overcome the practical, psychological, and circumstantial barriers before taking to the streets (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987 in Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009, p. 458).

In this context, "events of random and senseless violence" (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2006, p. 275) or "suddenly imposed major grievance" (Walsh 1981, p. 18) that are covered by the media may attract more first-timers than new social movements. Verhulst and Walgrave challenge the old and new social

movements' dichotomy¹⁴ and suggest a new type of social movement and mobilization, referred to as 'new emotional movements' (2006, p. 275). The latter consist of a loosely organized movement which is compensated for by emotional shock and mass media support. Through mobilizing a heterogeneous public, and thus attracting a large number of first-timers, these movements remain more or less "without specific demands" (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2006, p. 275) and do not usually forge enduring bonds between the "new" and "old" protestors (2009, p. 480).

Rudig and Karyotis (2013) reconsider Verhulst and Walgrave's (2009) framework both methodologically and conceptually. According to them, the absence of data on non-protestors poses a serious limitation to studying the recruitment of people without previous involvement. Focusing on the 2010 anti-austerity protests in Greece, they argue that "new protestors are more similar to the general population than they are to established protestors" (Rudig & Karyotis, 2013, p. 314). Thus, they underline the necessity of comparing the newly mobilized protestors with non-protestors on the methodological level to answer Verhulst and Walgrave's key questions: the socio-economic backgrounds of new-timers (who), their motivations (why), and the ways they participate in protests (how).

In the Lebanese context, the participation of first-time protestors in cross-sectarian protests, and their comparison to non-protestors, takes further significance. While taking into consideration the complex heterogeneity of first-time protestors and non-protestors, conducting interviews with them added more value on the theoretical and methodological levels. It contributes to linking the recent protests with the channels of power and wealth-sharing on a sectarian basis, or what is known as sectarian quotas. In fact, the control of state institutions and revenues by an alliance between the sectarian/political elite and the commercial/financial oligarchy (Traboulsi, 2016)) "consecrates a sectarian institutional set-up and lubricates sophisticated clientelist networks that co-opt large segments of the population" (Salloukh et al., 2015, p. 2). Hence, the political economy of sectarianism makes it difficult for

¹⁴ *Old Social Movements (OSMs) refer to "traditional" actors – trade unions and leftist political parties – mainly dealing with social justice issues. In contrast, New Social Movements (NSMs) focus on middle-class concerns related to human rights, identity politics and personal freedoms.*

most people to engage in non-sectarian contentious politics. Resisting sectarian forms of subjectification might generate “political, economic, and symbolic forms of punishment”, i.e., exclusion of “rebels” from clientelist, political awards, and social protection (Salloukh et al., 2015, p. 7).

Therefore, the definition of first-time participants in this research is different from the definition adopted in the aforementioned academic references. Their socio-economic background (*who*), motives (*why*) and means of participation (*how*) were linked to their intersection with the prevailing clientelist and sectarian relationships. I induced the quasi-methodological questions to first-time protestors and non-participants from the hypotheses of the research, which in turn were based on comparative studies, contextual references (mentioned above), and exploratory interviews. I also added a few hypotheses whose importance became apparent during field interviews (such as “cost and benefit” factors/rational choice and “protest energy”).

Accordingly, the survey questions for first-time participants/non-participants focused on their demands and priorities (structural factors), motives for their mobilization/demobilization (including “political opportunity”, emergence or fragmentation of collective identities, and “sectarian penalties”), and how they were recruited (the role of the media, the authorities’ violence, private peer networks, etc.).

This research also explored activist groups’ potential to influence the participation/non-participation or withdrawal of participants and their recruitment methods. To study this point, I conducted in-depth interviews with activists (leaders, members and volunteers) in the most prominent emerging groups and associations that contributed to the decision-making process within the *Harak’s* Coordination Committee. From this perspective, I studied various groups’ organizational structure, as well as discourse, actions, and decision-making and coordination mechanisms, in order to understand their effect on the participation of new participants (or non-participation) or their subsequent withdrawal.

Moreover, this methodology explores the extent to which the interests, values, and biases of participants were aligned with the demands, slogans, and actions put forth by the various groups, i.e., “the framing alignment processes” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464). The “frame” concept originated in Goffman’s theoretical work to denote schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large to organize, experience, and guide action (Snow

& Benford, 2000). According to Snow & Benford, frames help to render relevant events or occurrences meaningful in order to mobilize potential sympathizers and participants, and gain the support of the public (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). Hence, successful mobilization necessitates interpretive framing alignment with a common and hegemonic framework that is open and consistent with the social and cultural environment (Snow & Benford, 1988).

Data Collection

The sample was purposely chosen based on the main research question and hypotheses. Choosing participants on the socio-economic and regional/sectarian levels entailed specifying which neighborhoods to sample. For logistical and practical reasons, the neighborhoods were restricted to Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates.¹⁵ Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with participants and non-participants in the following areas: (5) in Khandaq Ghamiq¹⁶, (2) in Chiyah, (1) in Bourj Al-Barajneh, (1) in Hay Al-Selom neighborhood, (1) in Al-Jnah and (1) in Al-Rouways – *predominantly Shiite*; (4) in Tariq Al-Jadideh and (1) in Corniche Al-Mazraa – *predominantly Sunni*, (1) in Raouche and (1) in Salim Salem – mixed (Sunni, Shiite and Druze), (1) in Ashrafieh, (2) in Broumana and (1) in Naqqash – *predominantly Christian*, (3) in Bourj Hammoud – *predominantly Christian Armenians*. It is worth noting that these areas are diverse on the sectarian and class levels. Finally, I tried as much as possible to select participants from different age groups, gender, political and partisan affiliations/biases (Table 1).

Snowball and convenience sampling were used as the recruitment methods. However, the network effect – where participants belong to the same social network – which can sometimes limit the diversity of the sample, especially when the number of participants is small, proved to be a challenge. To overcome it, I relied on the research methods used by Scacco in her study of violence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria (Scacco, 2008, p. 11). Scacco’s technique involves asking each participant to recruit one person who participated in violent acts and another who did

¹⁵ *Knowing that many protestors came from the South, Bekaa and the North (Kreichati, 2015), conducting interviews with them required analyzing the context and specificities of their participation, which falls beyond the scope of this research.*

¹⁶ *Khandaq Ghamiq was given exceptional attention (five interviews): first, because it played a crucial role during the protests due to its proximity to down-town Beirut; second, because of the infiltrators and “Khandaqjeh” (residents of the Khandaq) discourse which was pejoratively used by certain people to refer to the residents of this popular neighborhood (Wehbe, Forthcoming, 2017); and third, because the power dynamics within this neighborhood seemed more complex. That’s why I found myself compelled to conduct additional interviews in order to better understand the situation.*

not. However, I only succeeded in convincing eight participants in recruiting non-participants from their families, neighbors, friends, or colleagues at work (not necessarily from the same area). The others' refusal was related to their desire to keep their participation in protests confidential, or because non-participants were unwilling to take part in the interview.

In addition to Scacco's technique, I made an effort not to choose more than three participants from the same source or gatekeeper, be they individuals or a group/association. In other words, the recruitment method was based on a multitude of various uncorrelated sources that take into consideration the diversity of the interpretative variables: the socio-economic and employment background, neighborhood/sect, gender, age, and political and partisan background.

I was able to reach participating popular categories through first-time protestors who were arrested during the demonstration¹⁷ with the help of some lawyers and activists. As for Khandaq Ghamiq neighborhood, which has its own particularities, I was able to befriend a local restaurant owner that facilitated my contacts with one of his customers who connected me with other participants. As for first-time protestors from other neighborhoods, I reached them through previous acquaintances: friends who are activists, journalists and academics from various social and cultural circles. Through daily discussions I had about the *Harak* with taxi drivers, I was able to recruit two of them: one is from Bourj Al-Barajneh, and the other is from Tariq Al-Jadideh. I got their phone numbers and met them at their own discretion.

Selecting the activist sample was less complex, as I conducted 15 interviews with leaders (spokespersons and members of political committees), members (members who did not appear on media, i.e., low-profile people) and volunteers from the most prominent groups (Table 2). Given that the leaders' interviews reiterated their discourse and media statements, I resorted to members and volunteers who presented a different and critical perspective from the leaders' testimonies. In addition to emerging groups, I conducted interviews with representatives from the "Lebanese Ecological Movement", "Lawyers' Committee to Defend Protestors", "Independent Trade Union Assembly", and independent members in the Coordination Committee, who influenced the events in different ways.

¹⁷ Most of the detainees, especially during the first wave of arrests (August 22 to September 1) were from working-class and poor areas (according to a lawyer from the "Lawyer's Committee to Defend Protestors").

I carried out all the interviews in Arabic, except for two: in the first, the interviewee preferred to use French, in the second, the interviewee spoke in English. All the interviews took place in a venue chosen by the participants: their house, private office, or a public place they found convenient. When they did not suggest a particular venue, I offered to meet them at my office at the American University of Beirut. After clarifying the details of the study, I asked all the participants to sign a consent form in Arabic (with different forms for ex-detainees) and keep their copy, in accordance with the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Approved Research Study at the American University of Beirut. All the participants signed the form, while a number of them declined to keep their copy, saying that "they don't care about such formalities." To ensure the privacy of research participants, I refrained from mentioning their real names and only referred to their personal details. All names mentioned in the research are aliases.

The survey of first-time participants/non-participants is based on questions which emerged from the aforementioned hypotheses, whereas questions for activists mainly addressed topics related to the organizational structure, discourse, actions, and decision-making and coordination mechanisms.

I attempted to ask the participants the same questions in order to compare the answers afterwards. However, some topics seemed to be more relevant to some participants than others. This made the comparison process more difficult in the coding and data analysis phase. It is worth noting that the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 3 hours.

The interviews were akin to a conversation or open discussion to allow the participants to address issues not covered by the survey. This helped create additional hypotheses, the significance of which became clear during the fieldwork. I occasionally changed the sequence of questions/topics according to the answers of the participants in order to maintain the flow of the interview and to elicit spontaneous and honest answers. When I would notice that some participants who agreed to have the interview audio-recorded were not comfortable talking about sensitive situations or information, I would offer to stop the recording. When I obtained rhetorical or generic/standardized answers, I asked questions about certain issues and events.

In addition to field interviews with activists and first-time participants/non-participants, I sometimes used the testimonies of first-time protestors on the live TV coverage of the major demonstrations between August 19 and October 8, 2015 (by transcribing the testimonies of the protestors: 200 protestors from Al-Jadeed TV and 400 from LBC). Using a keyword search, these testimonies allowed me to verify the facts I could not capture during field interviews, but without undertaking content analysis.

Coding and Data Analysis

I transcribed and analyzed all the interviews (for the activists and first-time participants) based on the Grounded Theory. This theory involves identifying the research question, hypotheses, and theoretical perspective based on field data. The Grounded Theory does not disprove the deductive approach, which relies on hypotheses derived from research and theoretical references – such as relying on comparative studies of first-time participants. It does, however, give more significance to the inductive approach (Berg, 2001, p. 246). The Grounded Theory regards the research in general, and coding in particular, as a continuous process that develops, takes shape, and changes gradually during data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 6-12).

The preliminary coding was based on the survey themes, which in turn were formulated based on the hypotheses, i.e., theoretical concepts and literature review. The deductive approach was complemented by an inductive approach through incorporating new codes that appeared while reading and interpreting the interviews, such as the cost-benefit factor, which seemed to play a crucial role in the withdrawal or the non-participation of some of the people. “There’s no advantage for us in being here.” “Nothing will change.” Such statements motivated me to add a new category of codes. I also added the “protest energy” category, which motivated numerous people to participate in demonstrations. This category covers the state of enjoying demonstrations and their “creative” energy.

Coding was based on themes and concepts as the basic units of analysis (Berg, 2001, p. 246-8). Correlated themes and concepts were grouped into common categories, which in turn helped develop the theoretical classes. Content analysis involved both axial coding and selective coding. The former denotes identifying concepts and categories independently, while allowing for the discovery of arising new concepts. The latter is based on one concept through which the remaining classes, categories and codes are discovered. It seemed more adequate to adopt both axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 13-5) as I relied on hypotheses in order to continuously compare them with field data.



2. “POLITICS OF COINCIDENCE”: POLITICAL IMPROVISATION BEYOND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

In this chapter, I will clarify what I theoretically call *politics of coincidence* by deconstructing the discourse, organizational frameworks, and actions adopted by activist groups during the *Harak*. This will pave the way for an in-depth study in Chapter Three concerning the impact of *politics of coincidence* on first-time participants.

The “You Stink” Campaign started as a hashtag launched by civil society activists to protest the accumulation of trash on the streets following the closure of the Naameh Landfill. The hashtag quickly turned into a Facebook page, and later into a campaign, after a series of organized sit-ins started in July 2015 in Riad Al Solh Square. After the August 22 and 23 mass protests, a dispute arose between activists from the “You Stink” campaign and other activists after the former used the term “infiltrators” to describe non-peaceful protestors which was considered as a form of “discrimination against the poor” (Al-Zein, 2016, p. 29). Moreover, the fact that “You Stink” unilaterally decided to postpone demonstrations until August 29, 2015 refusing to coordinate with other activists, political movements, and associations created even more tensions.¹⁸

Consequently, the *Badna Nhasseb* Campaign (“We Want Accountability”) emerged, which included independents and members of the “The People’s Movement”, “Syrian Social Nationalist Party – *Al-Nahdha* Faction”, “Socialist Arab Lebanon Vanguard Party” and *Shabab Dod Al-Nizam* (“Youth Against the Regime”). In addition to the two most prominent campaigns, “You Stink” and “We Want Accountability”, other campaigns were established during the same period by individuals (who were mostly affiliated with parties) such as *Jayi Taghyir* (“Change is Coming”) (which included members from the “Democratic Youth Union”, which in turn emerged from the “Lebanese Communist Party”) and *Aal Chere’aa* (“To the Street”), which is a group that included previous members of the “Democratic Leftist Movement”. *Sha’eb Yourid* (“The People Want”) included independents and members of the “Socialist Forum”, “Feminist Social Justice” and student clubs such as the “Red Oak Club” at the American University of Beirut, and the “Radical

Club” at the Lebanese University. Other small groups were also established such as the *Shabab 22 A’b* (“August 22 Youth”) and *Hellou A’ana* (“Go Away”).

In addition to emerging groups, civil and environmental non-governmental organizations engaged in the *Harak* (such as The Lebanese Ecological Movement, Legal Agenda, Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, and *Farah Al-Ataa* (“The Joy of Giving”)¹⁹, as well as the “Independent Trade Union Assembly”, which is a pressure group within the Union Coordination Committee.

Contradictions soon emerged between these organizations and the newly established campaigns. These contradictions could easily be seen in the tense Coordination Committee meetings, in social media posts, activists’ media statements, and on the street in direct demonstrations and actions. While “You Stink” directly addressed the middle-class, educated youth,²⁰ nationalist and leftist groups’ discourse ranged between the focus areas of “We Want Accountability” with its judicial-institutional orientation and the discourse of “People Want” and “August 22 Youth”. The latter promotes intersectionality by creating a link between broader social justice causes by focusing on women’s rights and marginalized groups’ causes. The “Lebanese Ecological Movement’s” discourse was confined to the technical aspect of the waste management “crisis”. It revolved around advocating for solutions, such as sorting from the source and recycling. Regional campaigns focused on the “our area is not a dustbin” discourse, i.e., closure of current landfills or refusal of the establishment of new ones in other areas: “The Campaign to Close the Naameh Landfill”, “Akkar is not a Landfill”, “Youth for a Better Barja” and the “Baalbek *Harak*”.

¹⁹ More information about the background of the emerging groups and NGOs who were represented in the so-called Coordination Committee can be found in the following references: AbiYaghi, Catusse, & Younes, 2016; Lebanon Support, 2015; Bergmeijer, 2015; Hamzeh, 2015; Issam, 2015.

²⁰ For example, the “You Stink” campaign stated in a press conference on October 26, 2015 that “we” is confined to “university students, teachers, activists, employees, employers, artists and awlad byout”. *Awlad byout* is an Arabic term that literally translates into home children with its polar opposite being *awlad shaware’* meaning street children. However, this term is used as an attribution of connotation to elite segments of society, those who come from “good households”. Choosing the word “employees” denotes the exclusion of workers, whereas *awlad byout* proves the exclusionary attitude of the campaign towards what it called “street children”, “hooligans” or “infiltrators”.

¹⁸ Field interviews and other references (Issa, 2015; Al-Zein, 2016, p. 22-29).

Despite their ideological and political differences, one can still study the discourse of the *Harak* as a whole. In fact, the *Harak* identity was, in many ways, dominated by the “You Stink” campaign. This was partially due to the fact that their campaign received the most media coverage, and as such its discourse was a leading source of information on this topic. On the other hand, partisan and leftist groups adopted an organizational structure similar to that of “You Stink”, which perhaps prevented them from recruiting the marginalized communities that they ideologically support.

Refusing Hierarchy, Monopolizing Decisions

Discourse analysis shows a dominance of statements along the lines of “We are a movement without leadership; we are a horizontal movement”. The media also adopted those statements in its own description and characterization of the *Harak*.²¹

Chalcraft, whose analysis is based on a study of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, defines the “horizontalism” of protest movements, as a “networked form of organizing; leaderless protest movements; the eschewal of top–down command (...); the emphasis on participation, creativity and consensus; and the opposition to dogma and sectarianism, often associated with older generations” (Chalcraft, 2012, p.6). Although this definition holds true in many occasions, it obliterates the dynamics of invisible forces that could take place in the horizontal forms of organization.

Organizing concerns were reiterated in field interviews with various activists. A volunteer in “You Stink” talked about his reluctance to organize: “We don’t want to present ourselves like the current parties. We are better off without organizing,” whereas a member in “August 22 Youth” characterized the organizing issue as the following:

“There is an entire generation that is afraid of words such as politics and party. These two words now possess a negative connotation, mostly related to corruption. I didn’t join ‘You Stink’ because I didn’t want to be part of an organization. I don’t want to be organized. ‘August 22 Youth’ is a group of youth who know each other. We decided to become a group of our own when we felt that ‘You Stink’ was imposing a certain discourse against the ‘infiltrators’. We see these people as oppressed people just like us and they are expressing their anger in their own way.”

²¹ In an article entitled “The leaders of a leaderless movement”, activist leaders – especially Assaad Thebian (“You Stink”), Mahmoud Abou Zeid (“August 22 Youth”) and Ibrahim Dsouki (“Go Away”) – unanimously stated that there was an absence of hierarchy in the *Harak*’s campaigns (Bergmeijer, 2015).

This organizational concern may explain why a certain number of traditional, secular parties joined the *Harak* under the umbrella of campaigns (“We Want Accountability” and “Change is Coming”). However, this choice is not only a logistical move. A leader within the “Change is Coming” campaign explained that when they “asked the ‘You Stink’ Campaign if the ‘Democratic Youth Union’, the ‘People’s Movement’ and other secular and leftist political organizations could join the Coordination Committee, ‘You Stink’ refused. So, we had to participate under the umbrella of a campaign.”

In this context, Freeman considers that “contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structure-less group.” According to her experience in the women’s liberation movement in the 60s, she states that “any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion” (Freeman 2013, p. 232). According to Freeman, the aspiration for a structure-less group is similar to the *laissez-faire* economy. In theory, the *laissez-faire* economy argues for non-interventionism by all parties equally. However, in practice, *laissez-faire* economies limited government interventions without limiting the powers of the economic elites from controlling wages, prices, and the distribution of goods. In that sense, the absence of organizational structures did not prevent the formation of informal, parallel structures, but merely masked the power dynamics within it.

In the case of the *Harak*, it is vital to understand how the various groups organized themselves in the absence of a formal structure. The two main groups “You Stink” and “We Want Accountability” established the “core committee” and the “volunteer committee”. The former had around ten to twenty participants distributed among committees for politics, media, coordination, fundraising, volunteering, and other tasks. The volunteer committees did not have a specific number of participants but ranged between 50 to 200 depending on the nature of direct actions and protests. Volunteers were not allowed to take part in the previously mentioned task committees or attend their meetings. Their role was restricted to providing logistical field support during the demonstrations.

Thus, to further understand the organizational dynamics, one needs to question the basis on which an activist becomes a member of the core committee or joins the rank-and-file volunteers committee. Leaders in “You Stink” stated that members of the core committee were individuals who had participated in the first sit-in of the campaign. On the other hand, a

member of “We Want Accountability” pointed out that “the partisan groups in the ‘We Want Accountability’ alliance appointed their representatives in committees, in addition to independents who were trusted by the rest of the partisan members.” When I asked a “You Stink” volunteer who participated in the July 21 sit-in why she was not a member of the Core Committee, she answered that: “Nobody knows. This issue caused numerous problems. Volunteers did not do anything except logistics. We were never informed about issues pertaining to political positions and statements.” Another volunteer said that he was not invited to the Core Committee meetings and thus did not want to impose himself by asking to attend. This was also what another “You Stink” volunteer confirmed:

“Several volunteers felt alienated because of this segregation. They would ask themselves ‘Why am I not in the Core Committee? Why am I not entitled to participate in its meetings? Why am I not a part of the decision-making process? Why did we have to implement decisions that were taken by a handful of the same individuals only? All these reasons led to the departure of many volunteers. We, as volunteers, would be informed of our political statements and learn of our activities through the media!’”

While the leaders/members did not deny the segregation between members and volunteers, they justified it in different terms: “The nature of our work is secretive, thus it doesn’t allow for the inclusion of others in the meetings,” a “We Want Accountability” member said. “The Core Committee didn’t want to enlarge (its meetings) because we needed people who possess a minimum level of political awareness. You can’t just get anybody and ask her/him to make a decision. At a certain point, matters must be controlled in this manner,” a “You Stink” member said. In both cases, the question remains: Who actually determines “the nature of the work” or who has “enough political awareness” to participate in the decision-making process? This tension also reached the Core Committee itself. Members of “We Want Accountability” and “You Stink” confirmed that despite the multiple committees, power remained centralized in the political committee. The members of other small groups were not divided into a core committee and a volunteer committee, as most of them distributed tasks among members of various committees. However, the hegemony of the political committee was common among “You Stink”, “We Want Accountability”, as well as the other smaller groups.

These contradictory responses regarding the organizational form of the campaigns - denying the hierarchical structure (by leaders and members) or sharing a feeling of exclusion and inferiority (volunteers), reflect the arbitrary power possessed by some at the expense of others, in the name of horizontalism. “Organizational flexibility” consolidated ambiguous and hidden rules to identify who was “entitled or not entitled” to attend meetings and take decisions. By the same token, this ambiguity guaranteed a de facto leadership without a mechanism for accountability. When it suited them, decision-makers would shift to a narrative that can be summarized in the repeated phrase: “We’re just like everybody else.” This phrase, used by some leaders, contradicts their previous rhetoric on the tactics used for taking decisions.²² In the words of one interviewee, this can be summed up as follows:

“The problem is that they didn’t present themselves as leaders. They monopolized the decision-making process, but they did not want to bear any of the responsibility.” (Member in “August 22 Youth”)

This organizational flexibility turned into a repressive framework that was clearly reflected in the work of the Coordination Committee. As voiced by an “August 22 Youth” member, the crisis of the Coordination Committee was similar to the crisis of the *Harak* itself. The Coordination Committee adopted a consensual approach whereby discussions continued indefinitely until there was a unanimous agreement. As such, the meetings would sometimes go on for eight hours without necessarily reaching any decision. It was enough for one member to reject a decision that was agreed upon by the rest of the attendees for them to veto a decision.

The Lebanese Ecological Movement took the initiative to hold a two-day retreat in order to develop an organizational structure for the Coordination Committee (including bylaws) and to answer some of the urgent structural questions pertaining to the decision-making mechanisms, the mandate of the Coordination Committee, and the expected commitments to the decisions taken. However, the retreat was boycotted by “You Stink” and “We Want Accountability”. “You Stink” justified the boycott with its commitment towards a horizontal, non-hierarchical, and flexible form of organizing, while “We Want Accountability” said that organizational issues could not be discussed before agreeing on the political vision and objectives.

²² For example, a member in “You Stink” confirmed that “We (You Stink) were merely catalysts. We were part of the people and nothing more [...] Our decision to withdraw from the street (on August 23) was to avoid further violence on the street.”

Regardless of the motives for refusing “organizing”, this “flexibility” produced hidden power dynamics centered on influential individuals. In fact, most of the Coordination Committee’s decisions were made outside its official meetings. The external informal meetings had a greater impact than the internal meetings, which were rendered semi-inoperative.

“We would meet at the campaign for two hours and prepare for an action that would shake the country the following day. However, at the Coordination Committee, we would meet for eight hours without taking any decisions.” (“You Stink” member)

“There wasn’t a decision-making mechanism in the Coordination Committee. The situation was random, chaotic, and exhausting. I stopped attending coordination meetings and started to coordinate with individuals. Meetings became useless anyway. We started to meet as a group of four or five people from larger groups. We would then make a decision and impose it at the Coordination Committee meeting.” (“August 22 Youth” member)

Moreover, consensus (and sometimes veto) mechanisms rendered the discourse politically meaningless. “Due to the lack of an organizational structure, decisions were being made by consensus just like in the national dialogue roundtable,” an independent member in the Coordination Committee said. “So it was enough for one individual to object for the decision to be vetoed. We ended up with unanimous but loose decisions like collecting garbage from the street.” When he criticized the Coordination Committee’s inability to formulate any political position, a “You Stink” member justified the right to veto with the fact that the campaign was apolitical:

“‘You Stink’ does not have a political background and agendas like other traditional political parties. So we imposed our political positions because we did not have a political history and background. We used to tell them that when you participate in a demonstration we organize, you should abide by our rules.” (“You Stink” member)

An analysis of the above shows that the *Harak* reproduced a two-track power dynamic. Under the guise of “organizational flexibility”, the *Harak*’s campaigns were a mere replica of traditional politics by pulling out decision-making tools (veto and consensus) from the traditional toolbox. Simultaneously, the organizational structure created was similar to that of an NGO in the sense that it was centered on rights-based advocacy campaigning dominated by self-appointed representatives, who mostly hailed from an educated, middle-class demographic. This form of organization is not

surprising as most of the activists’ political experience is limited to civil society campaigns. In other words, they used the tools that they were familiar with. Intriguingly, groups with political affiliations such as “We Want Accountability” and “Change is Coming” also opted for civil society strategies and techniques as well. For instance, they sought out and recruited volunteers for logistical support through their Facebook pages instead of organizing and mobilizing their own rank and file members.

“We didn’t establish a recruitment committee, but rather a committee for volunteers only. Unfortunately, the latter wasn’t active enough although a lot of people expressed their willingness to join. We received about 200 volunteer forms, but we didn’t really follow-up and communicate with them.” (A “We Want Accountability” leader)

Hence, the “horizontalism” and “organizational flexibility” discourse was effectively accompanied by an imposed semi-closed leadership of the *Harak*. This does not necessarily mean that the development of a democratic organizational structure was easy or feasible within a context of mass mobilization and a limited timeframe. However, it led to the alienation of some activists and “volunteers” who felt excluded from the decision-making process. More importantly, it made the framing alignment process between activists and participants more difficult, as we will see in Chapter Three.

Fragile Populism

The *Harak* groups, even the partisans, did not focus on traditional recruitment means to attract new participants. Instead, they opted for using the media as a form of recruitment. Perhaps this reliance on the media was the result of the weakness and fragmentation of (independent) political parties and labor unions. However, as I stated in the previous chapter, these groups did not actually recruit protestors, but rather focused to a great extent on “open mobilization.”

In the context of weak organizations, mass media can take over the mobilizing role and urge people to take to the streets even without them being integrated into networks (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009, p. 462). In this sense, “open mobilization” (Walgrave & Klandermans, 2010) targets heterogeneous groups and individuals who carry uncorrelated, and sometimes contradictory, demands, and who are mobilized through mass media and social media platforms. Although open mobilization helps in recruiting new participants, it limits the potential of developing strong ties between these participants and activists (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009).

During the *Harak*, TV channels (especially LBC and Al-Jadeed) contributed to the recruitment of new participants (see Chapter Three). Media channels allowed protestors to express their grievances and demands on live TV in what seemed like an open “Hyde Park”. The interviews showed that many of the protestors took to the streets “because the protest is not just about garbage, it’s about everything.” They also reported that demands ranged from “taking the garbage off the streets (only)” to demands related to unemployment, jobs, and lack of public services (Kreichati, 2015).

The testimonies were more of a spontaneous and emotional personal “venting sessions” about the discontent and anger towards “leaders who should step down and leave us alone”. To a great extent, the demands remained individual, fragmented, and simplified. They consolidated a loose discourse in regards to the state’s impotence and corruption. Kreichati argues, based on Laclau’s theory of empty signifiers (Laclau, 1996), that many of the slogans created by the participants remained meaningless (Kreichati, 2015); the *Harak* groups did not frame, politically translate, or clarify their meanings. Thus, new participants took to the streets and protested; some vented to the media, and then everybody went back home. At the same time, the activists were meeting daily within their groups or in the Coordination Committee to determine the discourse and demands of the *Harak*. The question remains: how was this taking place in the absence of a structure?

“There is a point that people have not paid attention to. They (‘You Stink’) made people take to the street in order to have a mass demonstration, while they were working behind closed doors. People were demanding one thing, while doing something entirely different, as if the two were not connected.” (“You Stink” volunteer)

“When demands and slogans started to become numerous, we felt that we needed to specify the demands and solutions and what we wanted. We decided to focus on the garbage crisis to avoid a fragmentation of the demands. We considered it the main battle, the main engine.” (“You Stink” member)

The “we” in this instance specifically refers to middle classes. “We” is consistent with the definition put forth by “You Stink” for their class and social identity: “University students, teachers, activists, employees, business owners, artists ... and awlad byout” (according to an aforementioned campaign statement), and consistent with the class and social background of activists. Most influential members in groups, i.e., members of the core committees who

imposed the priorities and course of action either worked for NGOs or were self-employed, and therefore flexible in terms of their schedules.²³ They were capable of attending long, daily meetings, be they within their groups or in the Coordination Committee.

“I was allowed to attend meetings of the Core Committee after a lot of back and forth discussions. Afterwards however, I couldn’t attend meetings anymore because I found a job and I had to work for 10 hours a day. Most of the meetings happened during the day. Generally speaking, those who attended the meetings were financially secure and in control of their schedules.” (“You Stink” volunteer)

“Coordination Committee meetings were held between 12:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Most of the attendees were unemployed or self-employed. That’s why I couldn’t participate in these meetings.” (“The People Want” member)

This created a rift not only between the activists and participants from marginalized neighborhoods (as discussed later), but also between the members of the Core Committee and volunteers. Mazen, a “You Stink” volunteer, told me about an incident that happened with him during the occupation of the Ministry of Environment on September 1, 2015. “Colonel, we are all university students here,” said a “You Stink” member during the negotiations with the head of the police department of Beirut, Colonel Mohammed Al-Ayoubi, to avoid the use of violence against them. Mazen angrily retorted: “No, Colonel. We’re not all university students. I’m a car electrician myself.”

Mass mobilization, in addition to the semi-closed leadership of the *Harak*, led to the imposition of demands in line with the activists’ social class, priorities, career and political experiences, or ideological biases. A temporary “framing alignment process” was established at the beginning when many protestors identified with the “You Stink” slogan with its direct opposition to the ruling class. When the need to set a political agenda emerged, the frame started to fall apart. At that point, there was a clear contradiction between the protestors’ interests, values and beliefs and the demands, slogans, and actions taken by the *Harak*’s organizers.

²³ “You Stink” was characterized by its members’ backgrounds, which mainly included young activists from educated middle classes who have experience working in NGOs, media, film-directing, cinema, computer programming, and marketing (Halabi, 2015).

“Members of the Coordination Committee were middle class activists, including myself and members of 'The People Want'. This was the background of the people making decisions. Some of them claimed that they ‘knew what people wanted,’ others would say ‘what they want is not important.’ I used to argue with them and say that we don’t know what they want, so let’s ask ourselves how we can really understand what they want. We surely didn’t accomplish anything in this regard. Practically, liberal and leftist slogans were imposed. Unfortunately, the Coordination Committee didn’t allow for serious discussions, such as thinking who we, as a movement, should form alliances with and which classes we should target.” (“The People Want” member)

Therefore, political biases were brushed off and compensated for by an emotional, populist discourse. Laclau conceptually defended “populism as a way of constructing the political.” According to the researcher, the ability to articulate heterogeneous and contradictory demands and present them as a unified whole to a certain established order helps in the formation of collective identities (Laclau, 2005), i.e., “framing alignment.” The *Harak* identified a common adversary: the rule of “Crooks” and Zu’ama.²⁴ This paved the way for the emergence of a populist discourse that transcends class, political, and social contradictions.²⁵ However, addressing citizens in an emotional language prevented the creation of a political movement with clear objectives. This was exacerbated after the August 29 demonstration, where the *Harak* groups were required to specify their demands and priorities.

“There was a prevailing tendency not to raise controversial issues in order to win public support. For example, we wanted elections, but we shouldn’t set an electoral law, or else we would lose public support.” (An independent member of the Coordination Committee)

Specific demands were articulated in a purely scientific and technical language and were confined to providing various environmental solutions to the trash crisis. Kreichati indicates that the knowledge production advocacy was always dominated by a discourse of technicality and scientific expertise, distancing itself from social and economic demands

²⁴ Zu’ama: Powerful political leaders that oversee informal patronage systems.

²⁵ Columnist Khaled Saghieh discussed the populist discourse used by the *Harak* in a presentation entitled “The Civil *Harak* against the Rule of the Crook,” which was organized by Ashkal Alwan, during “Home Works 7” on November 14, 2015. Full recording is available here: <http://racing-thoughts.com/2015/12/28/khaled-saghieh-the-youstink-movement-against-the-rule-of-the-crook/>

emerging from the protestors. Kreichati argues that “the expert model of engagement with knowledge seeking to tackle environmental issues in Lebanon is part and parcel of the very system it seeks to address” (Kreichati, 2016). The positions of the Coordination Committee did not generally tackle political problems and conflicts of interests related to the trash crisis. When the Coordination Committee’s statements partially went beyond the “technical” aspect and took a political or ideological form, they did so randomly, and as a result of purely circumstantial factors.

Although the same demands were reiterated in almost all statements,²⁶ the tone of the statement would change according to the party drafting it. The modifications in political positions and discourses did not necessarily come as a result of a political revision of a strategy and vision, but were sometimes related to internal dynamics between individuals and groups, or simply put, as a result of “coincidence”. For example, the Coordination Committee surprisingly adopted the statement of “The People Want” on September 16, which was characterized by its leftist tone, to an extent that it ended with the phrase “power, authority, and wealth to the people,” whereas the term “social justice” was omitted from the first statement of the Coordination Committee due to pressure exercised by “You Stink”.

“We were surprised when the Coordination Committee (especially ‘You Stink’) adopted the statement. I think a series of circumstantial factors contributed to this, including their refusal of our previous suggestions, the detention of Nidal Ayoub (a member of ‘The People Want’), and time constraints” (“The People Want” member).

Media outlets, including those who supported the *Harak*, had a role in diluting the demands. They imposed certain limits on the act of protesting (manifested perhaps in the “protesting etiquette”²⁷), filtered demonstrators into “civilized” and “uncivilized” categories, and accused protestors from marginalized neighborhoods of rioting and being infiltrators. They also rendered the demonstrators’ demands meaningless by framing the protests as a “national celebration or carnival” (especially the August 29 demonstration). The supportive media shifted its

²⁶ The main demands issued by the *Harak*’s Coordination Committee: 1) The immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and the cessation of arbitrary arrest campaigns; 2) The resignation of the Minister of Environment Mohamad Mashnouk and accountability (or resignation) of the Minister of Interior Nohad Mashnouk; 3) Finding an environmental and sustainable solution for the waste crisis; 4) Holding immediate parliamentary elections.

²⁷ The Lebanese TV channel MTV aired a special segment within its daily programs to discuss “protesting etiquette”, i.e., raising the awareness of demonstrators regarding the “dos and don’ts” of demonstrations.

position on October 8 and adopted the authorities’ discourse in defaming demonstrators, accusing them of damaging public and private property, and exaggerating the losses of Solidere and Le Gray Hotel in downtown Beirut (Nayel & Moghnieh, 2015).

The reliance on mass media and social media in the recruitment process (during mass mobilization) contributes to the de-radicalization of the discourse, especially when a movement still did not fully materialize. For the *Harak*, this reliance proved unsustainable once the media changed their agendas.

Hence, although the populist slogan of “You Stink” (in Laclau’s sense) contributed to recruiting numerous first-time participants by identifying a common adversary, it could not frame and retain a narrative for the *Harak*. The slogan’s fragility manifested itself in the means (open mobilization) and the content (setting demands and objectives). In addition, imposing demands – according to activists’ interests, experience and ideological biases – exacerbated the fragmentation of the *Harak*. The strategy of compensating for the lack of political vision with media-centric actions and mobilizations, which would in turn, through the media, attract the public, proved its impotence in recruiting the “peoples” and scoring quick wins.

Theatrical Mobilization/ and its “Symbolic” Victories

“There was anger brewing inside me. There is an internal anger that won’t come out. I cannot scream like the rest of the demonstrators. When the authorities put up the wall and people started drawing on it, I wondered: Should I go or not? Should I draw or not? I was watching TV when I heard some painters talking. One of them said, ‘Everyone expresses their anger and demands in their own special way.’ This touched me. I drew a screaming face in front of the door of Nejme Square.” (Mary, a demonstrator from Bourj Hammoud)

Mary, like others, expressed what I later called the “protest energy”, the significance of which I was not aware of when I wrote the research hypotheses. This “energy”, which was referred to by many people in different ways, was a watershed moment after which people took to the street for the first time. Graffiti artist Ali Rafei mocked the security forces’ oppression in a graffiti stating, “from you, to you, and on you.” Visual artist/illustrator Jana Traboulsi identified the street battle in her *You Have, We Have* graphics, Al-Rahel Al-Kabir band turned the slogan “Everybody means everybody”²⁸ into a song, and rappers El-Rass and Al-Touffar sang “We and the Trash are neighbors”.²⁹

“Politics of coincidence” created a force of hope and confrontation that traditional organizations such as parties or trade unions were incapable of creating due to structural and political factors. This form of politics possesses the ability to unexpectedly mobilize the street. The *Harak* took advantage of this political opportunity that came with mass mobilization and media coverage. The occupation of public squares by a swath of protestors from diverse sects, regions, and classes caused temporary dissonance for the authorities. This is evident in the governments contradicting statements and use of violence to oppress protests. (Wansa & Franjeh, 2015).

Mass mobilization peaked from August 22 to 29 when Martyrs’ Square witnessed demonstrations and violent confrontations with security forces. Several groups opted to deconstruct and directly respond to the authorities’ discourse through several initiatives. “The People Want” created the Facebook page *Akhbar Alsaha* (“The Square’s News”)³⁰ to offer live and unfiltered news coverage of the events of the *Harak* and the “Daily Bulletin” sarcastically responded to statements by ruling political establishments. Another milestone was the creation of “*Souk Abou Rakhoussa*” (the ‘Cheap Market’) as a direct response to the statement by Nicolas Shammass, Chairman of the Beirut Traders Association, who cautioned that the protests were turning the high-end Beirut downtown into a “cheap market”.³¹ The market was set up in Riad Al-Solh Square on September 19 in defiance of Shammass’s statement and to take back the downtown area as a public place for all classes (Shoufi, 2015). Moreover, the “We Want Accountability” campaign removed the newly installed parking meters from the corniche that stretches from *Ain El-Mreisseh* to *Ramlet El-Bayda*. They successfully compelled the governor of Beirut to stop installing parking meters along that site (Mahdi & Farfour, 2015). After the August 29 demonstration, and because the campaigns failed to establish strong relations with first-time participants and to articulate a clear and coherent political discourse, the number of participants started dwindling. Hence, all actions and victories became “symbolic”.

“Activities were generally spontaneous. The “wherever you can hit, then you should hit” mentality produced positive results. However, we lacked tactics based on a long-term vision. Sometimes you would feel that political action was rather coincidental.” (“The People Want” member).

28 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3StogLz_ZU

29 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTdlfAkwpj0>

30 <https://www.facebook.com/akhbaralsaha/>

31 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub2nZ1JZ0ko>

Despite the “politics of coincidence’s” occasional successes, more often than not, it failed. It often set spontaneous and arbitrary plans. For example, “You Stink” set a 72-hour ultimatum for the government to implement its demands yet without any concrete plans of escalation (Shoufi, 2015). On the eve of the deadline, a group of activists in a social gathering decided to take some sort of action the following day. A suggestion to break into the Ministry of Environment was randomly approved and journalists were informed. Merely half an hour before they moved, volunteers were informed. The move was so spontaneous that volunteers “didn’t know if the minister was inside or what the offices looked like,” according to a “You Stink” member.

Activists resorted to the same “symbolic” protests, which were more of a spectacle seeking to attract the media’s attention: throwing trash in front of the houses of officials (“You Stink”) or poorly attended sit-ins in front of the Central Inspection (“We Want Accountability”). Most of these actions sought to attract the media’s attention rather than be politically effective. Some reporters learned about the groups’ actions before the members of the groups themselves (like the attack on the Ministry of Environment on September 1).

“We were trying to mobilize the street through “media flashes” and direct actions, in a prelude to central demonstrations. However, we didn’t effectively succeed in recruiting people.” (A leader in “We Want Accountability”)

This form of protests seeks to express demands and ideas, but not exercise pressure (or attempt to exercise pressure) to enforce them. Therefore, occupying the parliament square and other public squares becomes the objective in and of itself.³² This was evident in the responses many activists gave when interviewed on live TV by Al-Jadeed and LBC reporters about their motivations to take to the streets: “We want to enter the Square (of the Parliament)”. Nobody had a clear answer for what comes after “occupying the square.”

“Alright, we were enthusiastic and impulsive at the beginning but my problem is when we did not stop to ask ourselves: what are our plans now? The *Harak* was a genuine moment, but we didn’t know how to build on it. It was a great missed opportunity. At some point, people representing the *Harak* didn’t know what they wanted to do. Actions were not a result of a clear political strategy because we didn’t know what we were doing.” (August 22 Youth” member)

³² Author and academic researcher Fawwaz Traboulsi criticized the glorification of occupying public squares and spaces in the “Rethinking the Role of the Left” conference at the American University of Beirut, which was held as part of the series of symposia entitled “The Intersectionality of the *Harak*”: “Being in and attempting to reach a public square is a legitimate right. However, what purpose does this presence serve?”

Symbolic actions also included garbage collection (organized by “You Stink” and previously by “The Joy of Giving” campaigns). These actions sought to polish the image of the “activists” and affirm their good intentions at a time when there were talks about reopening the Naameh landfill, establishing new landfills, renewing Sukleen’s contract, and contracting other companies to ensure quota-sharing among all parties. The symbolic actions evolved as phrases such as “civil disobedience” and “general strike”, which are tools for disrupting the accumulation of profit and threatening authorities, also became “symbolic” and devoid of their meaning. Protests were reduced to wearing a white t-shirt or a white band (Shoufi, 2015), and civil disobedience was limited to partial road closures (Zeaiter, 2016).

“We were looking for victory at any cost, even if it were symbolic,” a “You Stink” member said. As such, the victories became symbolic as well, and included the negotiations between “You Stink” activists and the representative of the Minister of Interior Nohad Mashnouk about a ceremonial resignation, or handcuffing of activist Marwan Maalouf for show only. A videotaped conversation between Maalouf and General Ayoubi during the occupation of the Ministry of Environment showed him requesting to be handcuffed more than ten times so that it does not appear in the media that he surrendered and left the building voluntarily.³³ In this context, I argue that activists resort to symbolic actions when they are incapable of exerting real pressure and change. As such, activists compensate through theatrical protests or “media flashes” rendering accomplishments or victories “symbolic” as well. However, the failure of “politics of coincidence” to exercise pressure does not necessarily mean that traditional organizations would succeed in doing the same.

“The left (trade unions and leftist parties) gave everything to the *Harak*, but at the same time, it brought along its own baggage. Therefore, the left wasn’t able to form an incubator on the organizational level. As a result of this vacuum, you would see every party working unilaterally. Even the independent figures of the Union Coordination Committee, participated on an individual level.” (A leader in the “Independent Trade Union Assembly”)

Trade unions and (independent) leftist parties assume economic structures that no longer exist because of the change in the capitalist patterns of accumulation towards rentierism (Harvery, 2005). Exploitation, and the conflicts resulting from it, expanded beyond the production sphere to reach the commodification of

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUCG-v-0-rw>

subsistence (Dyer-Witherford, 2002). These economic-political changes, including the trend towards informal labor, undermined the ability to organize workers in their workplaces. As such, political parties’ co-optation of the traditional organizations was not only due to subjective and political factors, but also due to structural ones. In Lebanon, trade unions failed to establish a trade union movement, not only because of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers co-opting it, but also because of the “rentier nature of demands” of the trade union and labor movements.

“The nature of the demand is related to the status of its holder in the clientelist/rentier system, and not necessarily to the negotiation power or work productivity. Complying with this demand reinforces the rentier system by expanding the basis of beneficiaries and by not challenging it or breaking its patterns and its accumulation processes.” (Abdo, Fakhri & Kobeissi, 2016) Hence, the traditional organizations’ failure to integrate into wider social movements that target the accumulation of profits outside the workplace (Chang, 2012) contributed to making “symbolic protests” an alternative to exercising pressure on the ruling class by threatening its paths of accumulating profits. In the *Harak*, the demonstrators’ demands revolved around exploitation outside the production sphere, i.e., the commodification of subsistence: clean environment, water, electricity, housing, etc. However, they were not able to threaten the rents generated from the commodification of waste, water, electricity, and housing, because, on one hand, traditional organizations failed to champion these demands, and on the other, because the “politics of coincidence” dominated all the other potential alternative mobilizations.

Consequently, although the theatrical protests helped create a motivation for many people to stand up to their parties and leaders, it contributed to their withdrawal when they found out that the *Harak* did not go beyond what is “symbolic” to achieve “real” victories. The inability of “politics of coincidence” to improve their livelihoods caused many to retreat to their homes, or go back to their “sects.”



3. THE PEOPLES OF THE HARAK PROTESTED... AND WERE NOT LIBERATED

“The *Harak* is like a war. Each person participated for their own reasons, agendas and demands,” said Abbas, a former combatant in the Amal Movement from Khandaq Ghamiq, when asked about why he had joined the *Harak*. The motives behind first-time protestors’ participation and withdrawal varied and took on class, regional, and sectarian dimensions. This is what led me to use the term “peoples” (in plural) instead of “people” when referring to first-time protestors. They protested against their leaders and sectarian parties in August 2015, but were not necessarily liberated from their ties. They took to the streets, cheered against them and demanded their ousting, however, they quickly returned to them.

In this chapter, I seek to analyze the reasons for the participation and subsequent withdrawal of thousands of first-time protestors in the *Harak*, and the impact of “politics of coincidence”, which I addressed in the previous chapter, on the decision of the “peoples of the *Harak*” to take to the streets or go back to their homes.

A Political Opportunity on the Pretext of Garbage

“The priority is no longer for quotas and power sharing; it is now the demands of the citizens pertaining the garbage issue” (from the statement of the Coordination Committee on September 1). Field interviews with first-time participants (and non-participants) from various classes, regions, and sects refute this statement. The citizens were not a heterogeneous category with regards to their aspirations and concerns. Nor did they share a common demand. I mentioned earlier that the mass mobilization and the semi-closed leadership of the *Harak* led to activists imposing priorities according to their interests, dictated by their class and social priorities, their career and political experiences, or their ideological biases. In other words, the priorities did not necessarily materialize from the aspirations and demands of the participants. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves: Who were these participants and what were their demands and priorities?

Field interviews showed that the concerns of financially privileged participants focused generally on the issue of garbage collection, whereas it seemed that the discontent of middle-class and poor categories³⁴

³⁴ Participants’ class background was based on the area where they live, their monthly income, their career background and their social safety network.

went beyond the trash crisis. The only exception were two participants from Chiyah and Tariq Al-Jadideh who said that their entire household were affected by the polluted air. This conclusion is consistent with Kreichati’s research, in which she stated that most of the protests did not revolve around the trash crisis per se, but rather on the lack or shortage of public services like water, electricity, housing, education and health care, in addition to unemployment and job (in)security (Kreichati, 2015).

Thus, the disparity between protestors, at some points, reached a level of contradiction. For instance, Carla, a university professor from Broummana, participated “for pure environmental reasons. We were buried in trash. You couldn’t walk or breathe.” Bassem, an unemployed protestor from Chiyah, “participated to demand work, electricity, water and clean air.” Nawal, a woman from a financially well-established family residing in Raouche, stated that the reason for her participation was her annoyance by the traffic jams that Sukleen’s garbage trucks cause when collecting the garbage. Therefore, she did not demand the termination of the company’s contract, or that it be held accountable in court:

“We were never bothered by garbage in Raouche. Sukleen continued its work. The problem was less daunting here in comparison to other areas. I don’t have a problem with Sukleen; it cleans the neighborhood. My problem with it is that it causes traffic jams when it collects the garbage.”

In addition to the lack of public services such as electricity and water, many participants focused on the issue of the new rent law, which targets low/middle-income families and threatens to evict them from their residencies in different areas of Beirut.

“We, as the residents of Khandaq, have a special relationship with downtown Beirut. Solidere illegally acquired its property. We feel as if Solidere is ‘taking over’. They want to drive us out of our homes, the places where we grew up and lived.” (Ali, self-employed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

Despite the multiple priorities and agendas, the majority participated because they saw the “waste crisis” as a political opportunity to impose, or at least, vocalize their demands,. To them, the “crisis” showed the weakness of the ruling class that came

as a result of an internal conflict within its ranks.³⁵ Unlike previous civil society demonstrations, the latter sensed divisions within the ruling class,³⁶ as seen in hesitant and conflicting official statements, coupled with unprecedented use of force and brutality by security forces to suppress protests. Some even considered the violence an indicator of the seriousness of the protests and authorities' concern.

"I was watching television and I saw people being beaten. So I decided to demonstrate with them. I was 'choking' and needed to bring out what's inside me, I needed to vent. I needed to scream. Violence encouraged me to demonstrate. I felt that a real thing was happening, but I demonstrated because I was already strangled." (Adnan, street vendor, Chiyah)

"I felt that the August 19 demonstration scared the regime. Their assault on a group that does not exceed 30 people indicates that they feel threatened." (Mary, student, Bourj Hammoud)

"Parties used their 'shabiha' (thugs) because they were worried about their interests in Beirut city center. What also scared parties is that their audience took to the streets against them." (Mohammed, employee, Khandaq Ghamiq)

"The authorities were afraid. They were suppressing defenseless demonstrators." (Afa, employee, Salim Slem)

The conclusions of the research are consistent with the "New Emotional Movements" theory, which considers that "random and senseless acts of violence" that are covered by the media, play a role in attracting first-time protestors (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2006, p. 275). There is no doubt that the suppression that occurred on August 19 motivated many first-time protestors to participate in subsequent protests. For some, the trash crisis constituted a political channel to express wider grievances.

"They should have focused on one common demand beyond the trash, because when trash was taken off the road, it didn't move people anymore. Trash was the spark, but they should have engaged the issue of electricity and water because it affects everybody." (Musa, self-employed, Rouways)

³⁵ "Divisions between the elite" is one of the indicators for "political opportunities," which can contribute to the eruption of demonstrations or conflict policies (Meyes, 2004:132).

³⁶ The leadership of the Progressive Socialist Party had an interest in the closure of the Naameh Landfill in order to negotiate better revenues with Sukleen (Wehbe, 2015).

While structural motives for participation varied, some people did not participate because the waste issue wasn't enough of a provocation to them. "Perhaps if the demonstrations expanded beyond the garbage, I would have participated," said Soha, a sixty-year-old woman whose only access to healthcare is through the local public health clinic near her house in Corniche al-Mazraa. Soha's main fear is the deterioration of her health to a point where she needs unaffordable hospitalization. "If they had demanded health care, health care for the elderly, water, and electricity," she explained, "I would have surely participated with them; we all would have. These demands are more important than garbage."

In addition to the concentration of structural motives for participation around the lack or shortage of public services, it seemed interesting that some people mentioned the dwindling clientelistic services that usually facilitated obtaining these services from within or outside state institutions (Cammett, 2014). Two testimonies from the post-war generation mentioned the clientelist privileges that their parents possessed, especially when it comes to employment in the public sector.

"My main concern was to get employed in the government because no one gets employed there unless they have connections. This is how my father got employed (with support from the Amal Movement). I cannot become a government employee like him. My hope was to get employed without connections. This is the personal thing that was inside me when I participated. If our parties had been helping and protecting us, we would definitely not have taken to the streets." (Hasan, unemployed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

Yousuf, from Tariq al-Jadideh, shares Hasan's concerns. Yousuf's father did not approve of his son breaking off with the "Future Movement" and his participation in the *Harak*. He was afraid that might cost him his administrative job at the Rafiq Hariri University. "Your stubbornness will leave me at home without a job," he said to Yousuf. However, the latter considered that whoever got a job for his father in the past is unable to find him a decent job today: "Personally, I'm not getting anything out of the movement (Future Movement)," he said.

The phrase "We're not benefitting from them [leaders and sectarian parties]" was frequently mentioned. Some expressed their discontent with the regression and restriction of services to a smaller network of patronage.

“Services are limited to certain people and periods. Those employed by their parties definitely didn’t take to the streets. As for the others, they did so because the aid they were receiving wasn’t enough to silence them anymore.” (Musa, self-employed, Rouways)

“Parties only help their people; just certain people and not everybody.” (Roy, bank employee, Naqqash)

“Many people participated from our area [Bourj el-Barajneh],” said the taxi driver before he asked me to stop recording the interview. He continued the discussion with ease after I obliged. “Services are provided for certain people, but not for us. There is an anger that has been building up for some time now. It did not begin with the garbage. The youth of the southern suburb don’t all support the ‘Movement’ and the ‘Party’. A lot of us supported the *Harak*. We took to the streets to protest against unemployment, nepotism, and thugs.”

Testimonies like “we’re not benefitting from them”, i.e., the regression of clientelistic networks were sometimes accompanied by “I participated at my own risk.” This last phrase translates into the implicit knowledge that one loses the parties’ protection network in case of arrest. This calculated risk prevented several individuals from participating in the *Harak*. Despite his discontent with the leadership of the Amal Movement “who are effectively ruling the area and are financially well-off”, Abbas did not participate in the *Harak*. Abbas, a worker who scavenges for metal scrap from around Khandaq Ghamiq, remembers the beginning of the demonstrations. “We would get phone calls forbidding us from participating in the demonstrations, warning us that whoever disobeys the orders will bear the responsibility of his/her decision,” Abbas said. His situation was critical, as he had previous arrest warrants that could be “unearthed” in case he disobeyed orders. “I was really sad when the demonstrations began because I wanted to participate in them but I couldn’t,” sighed Abbas.

Field data indicates a transformation in the clientelistic sectarian system when taking into consideration the plurality and diversity of clientelistic sectarian networks. They have not necessarily disappeared, but they are in crisis and are gradually transforming from supplying social services to providing a security cover. This (preliminary) field data intersects with the supposition raised by Fawwaz Traboulsi in which he asks whether:

“The nepotism (clientelist) system, in light of the centralization of leadership and power and as a result of the war and what came after it, has turned into a

mafia-like system, where the role of power, violence, and the balances resulting from them respectively in the production of economic interests or acquiring proceeds has turned into an alternative for exchanging services that are based on political influence on the one hand and political allegiance on the other” (Traboulsi, 2016, p. 196-197)

The assumption of undermining “traditional” clientelism and its transformation into a mafia-like network needs further research to be endorsed or refuted. However, what is certain is that the *Harak* shed light on the contradiction between sectarian leaderships and their “audiences”, which active groups did not capitalize on during the mass mobilizations.

Mass Mobilization and its Sectarian, Regional and Class Channels

Hasan was sitting in Abu Al-Fadel coffee shop, a meeting place for the unemployed in Khandaq Ghamiq, listening to the evening news with his friends: “I felt as if they were protesting on our behalf. When we saw the amount of violence and the number of protestors being beaten, we felt guilty watching it from behind the TV screen. We felt the need to be with them, and as such, we participated,” said the young man in his mid-twenties. However, Hasan did not participate on his own but rather as part of a group of youth from his neighborhood.

“We are a group of young men and we participate in all activities together. If there is a football match, a marathon, or a demonstration, we always go together. When the garbage started piling up and we saw the other young men and women in the sit-ins and strikes, we encouraged each other and took to the streets. We organized ourselves, brought a drum and went all together.”

Many researchers have addressed the role played by social networks as channels for participation in protests.³⁷ “People participate in protests because they are requested to do so or because they are encouraged by someone with whom they have a personal relationship” (Lim, 2008, p. 961). In the Lebanese context, social networks include family, religious, regional, and partisan/sectarian relationships, which often intersect.

A detailed look at the mobilization channels used by first-time protestors highlights the inaccuracy of labeling the *Harak* as a “non-sectarian or secular movement.” It is clear that many of those who participated did so through their secular and regional

³⁷ Krinsky and Crossley provide an extensive literature in this regard (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014).

channels. Dismantling the phrase “I saw people like me (on television)”, which was reiterated by some participants, shows that these “people” are nothing but “the others” who are similar to them. It is as if “I saw people like me” in terms of sect, region, and class, which paved the way or stipulated the emergence of a common “we”. This is how Adnan, a street vendor from Baalbek, who sells CDs of religious and Karbala chants in Chiyah, joined the demonstrations.

“When I heard someone on TV saying ‘we are from the Southern Suburb, come down and join us,’ I got really excited! There were a lot of people from our group [Shiite]. I felt as if the whole Southern Suburb was in Riad Al-Solh [Square]. I talked to the guys from the neighborhood and we all went together.” (Adnan, street vendor, Chiyah)

“We saw them on TV, and got really excited. We said to ourselves: ‘We want to participate. Why shouldn’t we participate?’ The whole family participated, about 10 people. What encouraged us is that all our friends in the neighborhood participated. You feel comfortable when you see people that you know. We are from one area; we all go together or we don’t go at all.” (Rasha, employee, Khandaq Ghamiq)

“We participated as a group of friends from the Apostolic Mariam Movement. We had some people who were members in the Lebanese Forces Party and the Free Patriotic Movement. We all went together knowing that there were clear orders from the parties not to participate.” (Henry, employee, Bourj Hammoud)

“I got excited when I learned that women from my neighborhood participated while raising the Lebanese flag. I felt that people on the streets were like us. I was touched by the scene of an Armenian lady who was cooking food for those who were on a hunger strike.” (Afaf, employee, Salim Slem)

Unlike Adnan and Rasha’s case, the last example shows that the scene of an Armenian lady from Bourj Hammoud was inspired by a Sunni middle-class lady from the Salim Slem area, although she did not participate for personal reasons. Therefore, we cannot reduce the process of recruitment in the *Harak* to sectarian and regional dynamics only. However, one cannot overlook that what alienated Afaf from the *Harak* is specifically the “not like us” people who joined the demonstrations.

“I didn’t feel comfortable endorsing some groups of infiltrators and vandals on the pretext that every person expresses themselves in their own way. Frankly, I distanced myself when people from Khandaq joined the demonstrations, especially the ones from the Amal Movement. We, the residents

of Salim Slem, have a bitter history of intimidation, extortion and threats with the Amal Movement and Hezbollah starting in the 80s up to the events of May 7, including the Memory of Ashura. We have a long history with them.”

Afaf’s testimony indicates how the overlap between class and sect is deeply rooted in historical and social experiences. This overlap does not necessarily deny the possibility of having a cross-sectarian protest movement, but rather points to the need of an in-depth understanding of these complex social relationships in order for such a movement to emerge. Contrary to what mass mobilization assumes in the homogenous identity of the “we” *the people* vs. “you” *the authorities* (in Laclau’s sense), field interviews show the fragility of this identity that shattered at its first test.

The “we and you” discourse identified a common adversary and contributed to attracting numerous first-time participants. It showed a clear collective identity: “we the people” and “they the authorities”. However, by blaming and condemning these groups for not participating due to their allegiance to their leaders, the “we” soon transformed into the activists and the “you” into the people.

“You can go on nagging... You can go on criticizing... You can go on staying at your home... You can go on criticizing the details that you don’t like... And you can be part of the big picture and you can be the change.” (A “You Stink” publication, date not available)

“We can understand if you don’t want to dream. If you don’t want us to dream, then it’s debatable. But you do not want to move out of the way for those who want to dream?” (Rachel Karam, TV reporter, “Defense – technical and media support for the *Harak*”)

Some people thought this discourse was condescending and reflected a detachment from and lack of understanding of the reality of “the parties’ audiences” and their complex relationships with their leaders. Mazen, a volunteer in “You Stink”, criticized his group’s discourse. In his view, excluding the audiences of parties effectively led to the exclusion of working classes: “Our discourse was condescending with regards to the characterization and categorization of people affiliated with parties. Instead, we should have tried to recruit them.” The anti “parties’ audience” played a role in the declining participation of popular groups in the August 29 demonstration (whereas they participated in larger numbers on August, 22, 23 & 25). “Deprived people did not participate in large numbers on August 29. The bourgeois were the majority.” (Basem, unemployed, Chiyah). This discourse also prevented others from participating:

“I’m from the Amal Movement, but I’m not a thug. On what basis are you labeling us? Do you know how much we have sacrificed so we won’t be submissive to anyone? A lot of the youth in the neighborhood challenged their leadership and took to the streets. They participated and were shown publicly on the media. I was wronged by the Amal Movement and I witnessed a lot of things that make me stand against them more than anyone else. But the problem is that they didn’t convince me that they could be a real alternative so I could participate. The poor people from the Southern Suburb who took to the streets were described as thugs. They are the people who suffered the most and they are the most oppressed. I was sorry for them because they paid the biggest price. They bet everything on this movement, which in turn treated them with condescension. They accused the president of the party and his social base of being corrupt and a thug. Then why do you include us with the very people we are criticizing?” (Mousa, self-employed, Rouways)

The “we and you” also turned into “we”, i.e., *well-raised, well-brought up children*, and “you”, i.e., *hooligans, thugs* (Kerbage, 2015). The “infiltrators discourse”, which asked the security forces to “clean” the square from infiltrators, excluded many participants who came from poor/marginalized neighborhoods on the pretext of defending the *awlad byout* from the violence of security forces. Hasan, a resident of Khandaq Ghamiq and a supporter of Hezbollah, participated in the demonstrations because the party did not provide him with a job. However, he received two “blows” as a result of his decision: “As far as the *Harak* people were concerned, I was an infiltrator,” Hasan said. “I also became ostracized in my neighborhood by the Movement and the Party. I received one blow from here and one blow from there.” Hasan stopped participating when he felt unwelcome in the demonstrations and because the *Harak* groups started to look like the parties he was protesting against. “They only checked on people they care about [in reference to the campaigns for solidarity with detained activists],” he said.³⁸

The “we and you” also splintered into competing and dissonant campaigns. First-time participants/

³⁸ Most detainees in the first phase of arrests (from August 22 to September 1) were from low/middle-income families with no experience in demonstrations and activism, whereas activists dominated the second phase (from September 16 to October 8). The detainees of the first phase served longer periods in prison compared to those of the second phase. They were not taken into consideration in the solidarity campaigns and media coverage which contributed to the immediate release of the activists (a lawyer in the Lawyers’ Committee to Defend the Harak Detainees).

non-participants, from all classes, regions and sects shared a common outlook towards the *Harak* groups: that they had become extremely exclusive.

“They became divided and started accusing and defaming each other. These people people [‘You Stink’] would light candles, and those people ‘We Want Accountability’ would hold sit-ins in front of the Central Inspection. When each group had its own Facebook page and slogans, and called for demonstrations, we stopped participating with either one of them. When the demonstrations were for all people, we went with them. By ‘the people’, I mean all people, not a certain class.” (Hasan, unemployed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

“I lost my enthusiasm when each group started working on its own. There was no coordination between them. I felt they were like the current parties.” (Henry, employee, Bourj Hammoud)

“The guys split up quickly. They split up even before accomplishing anything! They didn’t give us a chance to support them. We were the ‘couch party’.”³⁹ (Afaf, employee, Salim Slem)

“The guys were working as they pleased. They [‘You Stink’] stormed the building [of the Ministry of Environment] without informing anyone. Marwan Maalouf wanted to do a certain thing, so he did it. Assaad Thebian⁴⁰ wanted to do a certain thing, so he did it. It can’t be like this! We didn’t know what they wanted anymore. There wasn’t a unified decision.” (Nawal, economically inactive, Raouche)

However, was this fragmentation a result of the plurality of the “groups’ adversaries”, whether those adversaries were the “people” who were blamed for not protesting or the “hooligans” that were excluded? Participants’ testimonies show that it was more complicated than that. The exclusion of certain segments of the population was demanded by some social categories before “You Stink” transformed it into a political position. Roy, a bank employee from Naqqash who participated in the August 29 demonstration, withdrew from the September 9 demonstration. “The second time it was different,” he said. “I didn’t participate after that. I felt that there were people who didn’t participate in order to protest, but rather to cause trouble. You could tell from their

³⁹ “Couch party” is an expression borrowed from Egypt. It refers to the silent majority of social groups that are negatively affected by the political, and socioeconomic situation but is inactive politically. This majority only observes the political situation from its “couch” behind the TV screen and does not seek to change its reality.

⁴⁰ Marwan Maalouf and Assaad Thebian are leaders in “You Stink”. The former later withdrew from the campaign and established the “For the Republic” campaign.

looks.” Nawal, unemployed housewife from Raouche, shares his aversion to the “uncivilized people”. “The second time I participated, it was during the storm,” Nawal said. “I felt that there was a strange atmosphere that was different from the one on August 29. It was the last time I participated.” Carla’s testimony is not that much different from Roy’s and Nawal’s.

“The violence I saw on the ground was very different from the peaceful and civil demonstrations broadcast on TV. I felt that I had nothing in common with those trouble-makers. We don’t even share a common language of expression... a civilized one. They were unemployed people who had grudges against the security forces. They took to the streets just to vandalize. These people do not look like us. We have a lifestyle that’s different from theirs.” [translated from French] (Carla, university professor, Broummana).

In this sense, the campaign’s position to “clean” the square from the “infiltrators” or isolate them in Riad El-Solh Square did not only come as an emotional reaction, but also because the campaign was eager not to lose its followers. “We weren’t able to recruit all the classes simultaneously, so we decided to recruit the middle classes,” said a “You Stink” member. Although he did not personally blame the residents of Khandaq for their confrontations with security forces, he felt that defending them was not a strategic move and that it could lead to him losing the middle classes. The campaign’s targeting of a certain audience did not go beyond a tactical framework, which was adopted to market its image and materialize a homogenous political vision.

Just like the infiltrators discourse, the “Everybody Means Everybody” slogan comforted an audience and alienated another. While a woman from Salim Slem was attracted by this slogan, a resident of Chiyah was worried and considered it “a direct targeting of Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah and the resistance movement.” A similar logic applied to violence. While it was an attracting force for all groups before August 29, it contributed to the decline of some groups after “You Stink” members stormed the Ministry of Environment on September 1. It is worth noting that although violence was linked to the authorities’ oppression (and reflective of its weak position), it encouraged the “peoples” to participate. However, when violence became interlaced with authorities closing their ranks after August 29, and when the identity of the *Harak* broke into “peoples” and “movements”, violence contributed to the withdrawal of numerous people. To them, violence was related to the post-August 29 period, and they associated this violence with the division in the groups when they condemned the

Harak and justified their withdrawal. It seemed as if they were refusing the use of force by some groups as a tactic to compensate for the lack of vision.

“We wanted to go to the third demonstration, but none of the women wanted to go because of the turmoil. So I stopped participating and realized that they were right. There was one demonstration for ‘You Stink’, and another one for ‘We Want Accountability’, and another one for I don’t know who. People were initially rooting for them but they lost their support eventually.” (Nawal, unemployed housewife, Raouche)

“I lost my enthusiasm when there were violent acts. I was concerned because there was a lack of vision.” (Roy, bank employee, Naqqash)

The state of tension between the “peoples” and the “*Haraks*” sometimes went beyond circumstantial and subjective factors and took on a pure class dimension. In our conversation, Mousa, a self-employed man from Rouways, recalled watching an interview on live TV:

“How can you find a common demand between the people who participated when one of the participants said that the salary of her husband, an engineer, is about seven million and it’s not enough for her? And at the same time you have people who don’t have seven thousand to buy something to eat! ‘Seven million L.L. is not enough! (Sarcastically.) She has no worries!’ What’s certain is that a lot of people like her took to the streets. These kinds of people cannot bring about change. They get tired quickly and they always have interests that they’re afraid to lose!” (Mousa, self-employed, Rouways)

This data raises questions surrounding the emergence of a cross-class social movement: Can “everybody” be recruited by a loose discourse? If so, can “politics of coincidence” or the protest state itself transition into real change? Can an intellectual and organizational alternative materialize without establishing alliances and making enemies? The toughest question lies in identifying the classes that will bear the social change in light of the social transformation and fragmentation.⁴¹ This conceptual discussion, despite its importance, falls outside the scope of this research. What’s for certain in the participants’ testimonies, especially those with party affiliations, is that the lack of an alternative political vision for the *Harak* was crucial in their inability to transform from protesting against the leaders to being liberated from them.

⁴¹ *There are a lot of on-going academic discussions about class transformation around the world. For example, this issue was raised in the Socialist Register regarding the “Worker Classes, World Facts” (2001); “Registering Classes” (2014) and the “Transformation of Classes” (2015), in addition to the Labor and Development Journal regarding the “Issue of Work in Contemporary Capitalism” (2014).*

“I have no interest.”

“I have no interest” was the phrase most often used to justify non-participation or withdrawal. Despite “politics of coincidence’s” ability to motivate people to protest against their leaders, or at least to support that fact, it did not provide them with sufficient reasons to continue the confrontation. The ability to mobilize the streets in unexpected ways encouraged some people to join the protest movement, but that was not accompanied by an alternative vision that convinced people of the feasibility of cooperation, and convinced party members of the ability to break free from the clientelistic networks holding them down.

“You lose your excitement when you feel nothing is going to change. I felt like people quickly went back to their parties and sects. Everybody started calculating the risks and ended up doing what’s in their interest. There are people from the Movement and the Party who participated, but they went back to their parties when they felt that the *Harak* would not benefit them or change their reality. They would say ‘I prefer to stay within my party and sect. It’s better that way.’ Unfortunately, this is how matters went.” (Rasha, employee, Khandaq Ghamiq)

Blaming people for going back to or not leaving their homes reflects an “ignorance” of the reality of these people. “I have no interest” clearly expresses the inability of the “*Harak’s* peoples” to bear the luxury of political experimentation, which ‘politics of coincidence’ requires, and which was adopted by the “*Harak’s* groups”. Notwithstanding their support for the *Harak*, when someone justifies their non-participation in it, by stating: “I was afraid to bet on a matter that may let me down in the end. The *Harak* might break down and break me with it.” This means that they have “dreams” just like anyone else, but they were not convinced of the means available to achieve them.

Unlike activists, who mostly live in relatively safe, religiously diverse neighborhoods, the ones who violated their party’s decision paid a heavy price for their participation. Some of them were subjected to harassment and physical abuse at their work places, while others were threatened with their jobs and the services they received from their parties. For example, Basem (unemployed, Chiyah) was beaten up in his area by sympathizers of the Amal Movement after he criticized President Nabih Berri in the media. On the other hand, Mahmoud (unemployed, Chiyah) was only verbally reprimanded after his father intervened through a well-connected friend in the Amal Movement. However, when he went to pay his university tuition, he was surprised to learn that he

had to pay the full amount, as his party (he refused to state which one) refused to pay part of the tuition after he stopped attending party meetings and joined the demonstrations. Pressure and threats sometimes take an ambiguous or implicit form. Perhaps that is what scared sympathizers more than direct threats:

“A second-rank leader in the Amal Movement will not come out to threaten you directly. Threats come arbitrarily. For example, if someone said something offensive about Nabih Berri, then this second-rank leader, in order to gain approval from higher leadership, would teach him a lesson without necessarily obtaining a central decision.” (Mousa, self-employed, Rouways)

“Before August 29, I participated from a distance. I stayed invisible in the back so I would not clash with the guys from the Movement because frankly there is no one to protect me. If something happens, my family will tell me: ‘What made you participate? You don’t have to.’ In fact, threats can take many forms; they are not all direct. They might do something to my car, and the message would be delivered.” (Hussein, taxi driver, Bourj Al-Barajneh)

While Yousuf’s father was threatened by the Future Movement with losing his job at the Rafiq Hariri University if his son continued to demonstrate, a young man from Khandaq Ghamiq actually lost his job as a full-time party associate. This young man became unemployed and afterwards travelled to Germany illegally. The inclination towards a mafia-like system, which we referred to earlier, does not mean the end of clientelism in its traditional sense. However, we encountered many cases – especially in lower-class neighborhoods – where people voiced fear of the mafia-like nature of “sectarian punishments”.

“For example, some people don’t have the money to register their motorcycles. If they speak to someone in the Amal Movement, they will bring them back their motorcycles if they were confiscated. If they participated in the demonstrations, they would lose that privilege.” (Hasan, unemployed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

The pressure and intimidation, which some were subjected to, remained limited to certain neighborhoods and not central in explaining the decline in participation. The lack of a political vision coupled with the inability to exert pressure to achieve tangible results greatly affected the demobilization of some people and the non-participation of others. Even if people were not threatened with their livelihoods and personal safety, “You cannot go on taking to the streets without a result. At the end people will get bored. It’s not a pastime.” (Sandy, director, Broummana)

“I have a lot of friends who are affiliated with the Movement or the Forces who joined the demonstrations, but they refrained from participating after August 29. They went back to their parties, not only because their parties pressured them, but also because of the random nature of demands and the lack of vision. Maybe if the *Harak* had continued for a longer time and had been able to make some sort of an accomplishment, they would have resigned from their parties.” (Henry, employee, Bourj Hammoud)

Many participants from all class, regional, and sectarian groups shared the fear of a vacuum of power. “What is the alternative to 18 sects and 18 organizations who are all armed?” asks Ali, a self-employed man from Khadaq Ghamiq, while confirming that if the *Harak* had held its ground and put forward clear and homogenous demands, he would have submitted his resignation from the Amal Movement. Moreover, after the first two demonstrations, Mousa promised his daughter that he would join the protests if the groups held their ground on the streets. However, they were not able to convince him that their movement was actually serious:

“How can you threaten the authorities with escalation, if they don’t find a solution within 72 hours, and then you withdraw from the street at 8:00 in the evening? How can I believe you? They were not ready for a confrontation. They didn’t hold their ground. Confrontation doesn’t necessarily mean violence, but rather planning and exercising pressure. They carried a burden that was heavier than what they could bear. They refused to let anyone participate in the decision-making process. Demonstrations were like going to the cinema from 6:00pm to 8:00pm. They were not serious.” (Mousa, self-employed, Rouways)

Mousa thinks that the result was far worse than what was before the *Harak*, not because he doubts the independence of the organizers and their sincere desire for change, but because they did not plan their actions well. “Instead of raising pictures of the leaders and cursing them and alienating their bases from you, you should organize yourselves and engage these people in your movement,” he said. “Then you will see how you can really threaten their leaders. It’s not by raising pictures! These people are in pain just like you, if not more, but they don’t have alternatives.” When asked about the reason for his non-engagement in the *Harak* and not attempting to influence its discourse and work strategy, he said that it was clear that they monopolized decisions “and did not listen to anyone else.” However, there were moments he and other Amal Movement members did consider participating.

The position of Pierre, a Lebanese Forces Party sympathizer and university professor from Ashrafieh, was not different from Mousa’s. His daughter also encouraged him to participate but he was skeptical. “I was sure the *Harak* wasn’t going anywhere,” said Pierre, who believes the movement was not based on a deep understanding of the nature of the Lebanese regime. To him, the demand to change the regime was naive. It was not part of an alternative political vision for the state that seeks to threaten the sectarian interest networks. “Behind every livelihood issue there are villains. You cannot confront them with yapping,” he said emotionally. “As a Christian minority, I prefer the status quo over a change movement that has no political vision.”

Pierre’s skepticism is not directed at the independence of the protest group, but rather about the future leadership that would take over the party in light of the lack of organization and vision. This minority concern is shared by Roy who refrained from participating after September 9. He was scared by the “down with the regime” slogan. “So let’s say that we brought the government or the regime down, what comes after that?” he said. “I’m concerned that some party will exploit this vacuum. You have a country that has sectarian parties, arms, and militias. You cannot guarantee how things will develop afterwards.” He was not convinced of their ability to bring about change because they did not know in which direction they were heading.

“Nobody can just come and say ‘we want a civil state,’ out of the blue, while everything else is based on sectarianism: your upbringing, lifestyle, education, work, and health care. This political class keeps us in pain in order for us to stay under its control. You have to provide me with an alternative so I can set myself free from it.” (Roy, bank employee, Naqqash)

These concerns are not limited to sectarian minorities but are shared by various other groups. Some people expressed their concern over the domination of one sect over the others, if the regime fell apart without an alternative in sight.

“Nothing is going to change. What can we do? This is how this country is structured. We hold on to our leaders although they are corrupt because we are afraid of the other sects. We fear the domination of one sect over the other sects. We are afraid that we might become like Syria and Iraq. This is our situation unfortunately.” (Soha, bookstore owner, Corniche Al-Mazraa)

While some people expressed their concern over the absence of political organization and vision, others voiced lack of trust in the organizers. The lack of trust between activist groups themselves undermined their credibility among participants. For example, Sandy, a director from Broummana, was not reassured when positions were withdrawn or when some leaders were taken out of the scene ambiguously (such as Marwan Maalouf).

“Honestly, I didn’t trust them. They said one thing, and then the next day they would back down, like what happened in the ‘infiltrators’ issue. This made me doubt their independence. I felt that they raised slogans that were too much for them, and rendered them meaningless. They became a cliché, like ‘last warning’ or ‘civil disobedience’. They were not organized. Their slogans deflated.” (Sandy, director, Broummana)

Sandy thought that Shehayeb's plan further exacerbated “the confusion of the *Harak*.” “There was a lot of conflicting information. We even started to doubt the independence of the environmental experts. Each one of them had an opinion and a plan. I didn’t know why they negotiated or why they refused to negotiate. I didn’t feel I was part of the process,” she said explaining her withdrawal from the *Harak*.

Therefore, people did not have high expectations of this *Harak* and viewed it as a mere chance to vent. “I took to the streets because I needed to scream. I supported the demands but I was sure nothing was going to change because there was no organizing experience,” said Narmine (sales representative, Tariq Al-Jadideh). Walid, a taxi driver from Tariq Al-Jadideh who sympathized with but did not participate in the *Harak*, said the same thing: “I felt that participating in it was more for venting than it was a power to disrupt or exert pressure,” he said. Walid preferred to follow the demonstrations on TV, as if he was watching a football match or TV series.

“I didn’t join the protests but I followed them on TV. Sometimes, when I needed to get a glass of water, I wouldn’t get it until the commercials. I preferred to follow them from my home because TV channels were covering events from several locations. If I had participated, I would have only been able to see what was happening in one place. In my home, I see everything.” (Walid, taxi driver, Tariq Al-Jadideh)

Walid sympathized with the demands and was touched by the faces of the “angry people” who spoke to the media. However, his support for the *Harak* did not go beyond his house. “Maybe if I had felt that the matter was serious and the demonstrations were getting bigger and bigger, I would have participated. The organization was very weak and they were lost,” he said.

These concerns made some people cling to the status quo in fear of the awful unknown. The latter is not an abstract concept, but rather a collective memory of a past trauma that people have not yet liberated themselves from. The regional neighboring wars have not helped them, either. “We were afraid to become like Syria. We don’t want to ruin the country, the current situation could become worse.. They were a hope for us, but later we were afraid of them. We doubted their independence and we accepted reality.” (Afaf, employee, Salim Salem). It’s worth noting that Walid and Afaf, who did not participate in the *Harak*, voted for the “Beirut Madinati” electoral list in the municipality elections, which ran against the list of the political establishment. In this regard, the evaluation of the *Harak* as an instantaneous moment may differ from its evaluation as an accumulative process. However, this falls outside the scope of this research.

Moreover, the participants’ concerns and doubts, which contributed to their demobilization, do not mean that the authorities’ propaganda did not have an effect on them. The authorities’ media cannot be isolated from some participants’ positions towards the *Harak*, or their fear of the other sects. Social battles confuse the authorities and thus they resort to violence and intimidation to prevent social protests from expanding. They were able to distort and break the image of the *Harak* after August 29 through political tactics (dialogue table and Shehayeb’s Plan) and the media which promoted their discourse (Boumet Beirut, 2015). However, the importance of these testimonies lies in the ability to capture the influence of “politics of coincidence” on “the peoples of the *Harak*”. The failure to translate the wave of protests into a political program was one of the factors that left the activists alone in the street, and made those who “participated” from behind their TV screens more prone to the authorities’ propaganda.

CONCLUSION

“*Awlad byout* didn’t go to the streets and *awlad share’* went back home. Garbage was not taken off the streets and the regime is not worried anymore.”⁴²

In this research, I sought to analyze the factors that motivated *awlad share’* as well as *awlad byout* to mobilize and demobilize. I argued that the “*Harak’s* groups”, which adopted “politics of coincidence” confronted the “peoples of the *Harak*”, especially the “street children”. This confrontation did not stem solely from exclusion, but from challenging the assumption that the “peoples” should attend but not engage. The *Harak’s* confrontation with sectarian leaderships included their “audience” as well. It did not address their concerns about the symbolic protest, which does not guarantee an alternative. In this regard, first-time participants did not differentiate between the various *Haraks*, be they liberal or leftist. The *Harak* that confronted them was the group or groups whose discourse, actions and agenda dominated the streets and TV screens. Even the disputes between the “groups” were treated individually by the “peoples” by saying that “the *Harak* is lost and dispersed.”

The *Harak* encouraged first-time participants to protest against their leaders, thus they expressed their anger and discontent towards them. Priorities were different, but most of them considered that the waste problem constituted a political chance to impose their demands, or at least, express them publicly. The violence on the part of the security forces, which was accompanied by conflicting positions of the political forces, exposed the authorities’ distress. Thus, their weakness represented a chance to protest against them. The media coverage of violence as well as the loose slogan of “You Stink” contributed to the emergence of a binding frame of “we” and “you”. However, the frame’s fragility became apparent after the August 29 demonstration. The dominating frame shattered with the emergence of the need to define a political agenda.

Although open mobilization allowed for the establishment of de facto connections between long-time activists’ circles and first-time participants, those connections remained random and did

not crystalize in new forms of independent civil organizations. Unlike the activists’ civil and secular circles, gatherings of participants are dominated by regional and sectarian relations (even if they are not sectarian in essence). These people took to the streets with people “like them” in terms of sects, regions and classes, and most often withdrew from the streets due to similar dynamics. Thus, the process of identifying a political program seemed excessively complex in light of the “organizational flexibility” of a semi-closed leadership. The various interests, values and biases of the “peoples” were not consistent with the demands, slogans and activities put forward by the “*Haraks*”.

Although the theatrical protest created a momentum that motivated people to take to the streets, this energy also contributed to their withdrawal when the *Harak* could not go beyond “symbolic” activities. The inability of “politics of coincidence” to achieve “victories” made numerous people withdraw from the streets. Even the violence, which was a powerful attraction to most participants before August 29, contributed to their subsequent retreat afterwards. When violence was linked to the crack in the *Harak’s* identity and when it was used to compensate for the organizers’ confusion, it also contributed to the demobilization of some.

These results do not necessarily mean that materializing a political vision based on a democratic organizational structure was easy or feasible within a context of “open mobilization” and a limited timeframe. “I don’t want to be organized. I demonstrated and that’s more than enough” or “We will become just like the parties if we join groups” some said. Some participants refused to join the *Harak’s* groups, but at the same time they held them accountable for their organizational fragmentation and the ambiguity of their demands and political vision. Refusing political hierarchy yet demanding political organization and structure may seem contradictory at face value. However, it is not necessarily the case. It may indicate their rejection of corrupt traditional organizations that are impotent or coopted and their need for alternative organizational forms; forms that require political imagination based on certain experiences and contexts. However, it is these very forms that give hope for a remaining space between the impotent old and the instantaneous new. “Coincidence” alone is not enough to change the positions of some and threaten the interests of others.

⁴² These are some of the conclusions of the author and journalist Mohamed Zbib in a symposium entitled “The *Harak* and its Class Dimensions” at the American University of Beirut, as part of a series of symposia entitled “The *Harak* in its Intersectionality”. (November 10, 2015)

There is no doubt that the transformation from *protesting against* their leaders to *getting liberated from them* requires a change in social relationships that goes beyond the *moment* of the *Harak* and necessitates an accumulative process. However, this same approach, which is based on political improvisation as a means to compensate for political organization and vision, does not help in establishing similar processes. “Politics of coincidence” does not go beyond a state of protest and does not convince its “audience” in its efficiency. It keeps its victories “symbolic” even with the multiple *Haraks*.

APPENDIX 1

Pivotal moments of the protest wave (July – October, 2015)

July 17, 2015

- ▶ Both the “Campaign to Close Naameh Landfill” and “Enough Trash” Campaign call for an open sit-in demanding the permanent closure of the Naameh landfill and refusing Environment Minister Mohamad Mashnouk’s plan to extend operations in the landfill until late January 2016.

July 20, 2015

- ▶ Trash starts to pile up in garbage containers after waste-management company Sukleen stops collection operations, unable to store and process the trash in Amrousieh and Karantina.

July 21, 2015

- ▶ A number of activists throw trash in front of the Grand Serail, the Prime Minister’s official office, in protest of the trash pile-up on the streets. These activists later form the founding group of the “You Stink” campaign.

July 25, 2015

- ▶ The “You Stink” campaign holds a sit-in in downtown Beirut against the transportation of trash outside Beirut and demands the government find a sustainable solution for the waste crisis.

July 27, 2015

- ▶ Residents of Barja hold a sit-in during which they block waste trucks from accessing the site in an act of refusal of the Barja and Siblin landfills.

July 28, 2015

- ▶ A march from the Grand Serail to Hamra Street demands finding an environmentally friendly solution to the waste crisis. Trash is thrown at the car of Minister of Social Affairs Rashid Derbas which happened to pass near the march.
- ▶ The security forces arrested four protestors, including Tarek Al-Malah. This was the first arrest incident during the Harak.

August 8, 2015

- ▶ Three marches from Qasqas, Karm al-Zeitoun and Hamra simultaneously head for Martyrs’ Square in downtown Beirut calling for people to participate in the demonstrations. A dispute arises between within the “You Stink” campaign and a number of its adherents such as environmental associations, independent activists and youth groups over the politicization of the protest and thereby raising the demands.

August 13, 2015

- ▶ The Union of Beirut Port employees organizes a strike to protest the trash piling up at the entrance and surroundings of the port in Karantina.

August 19, 2015

- ▶ A number of “You Stink” campaigners hold a sit-in in front of the Grand Serail in Riad El-Solh Square, coinciding with the session held by the Council for Development and Reconstruction to announce the successful bids for trash disposal. Security forces use water hoses and batons for the first time.

August 22, 2015

- ▶ Thousands of citizens gather in Riad El-Solh Square. Security forces confront them with excessive force using water hoses, tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and live ammunition.
- ▶ Confrontations between protestors and security forces continue until after midnight. Sixty people are wounded and more than a hundred protestors are arrested by security forces.

August 23, 2015

- ▶ Thousands of citizens demonstrate in Martyrs’ Square, answering a call from the “You Stink” campaign to denounce the violence used by security forces against demonstrators on August 22.
- ▶ After the campaign suspends the sit-in, some demonstrators head towards Riad El-Solh Square where security forces again resort to excessive violence, beating demonstrators and using live ammunition. The confrontations continue until the early hours of the morning, leaving a large number of injuries, including Mohammed Al-Qassir who is critically injured.
- ▶ The “You Stink” campaign uses the term ‘infiltrators’ for the first time to refer to protestors in Riad El-Solh who engaged in the clashes, and calls for security forces to “clear the infiltrators from the square.”

August 24, 2015

- ▶ A wall is erected between the Riad El-Solh Square and the Grand Serail Government Palace to prevent demonstrators from getting close to the site. The wall is later called the “Wall of Shame”.

August 25, 2015

- ▶ The wall separating the Grand Serail from Riad El-Solh Square is removed, heeding Prime Minister Tammam Salam’s order.

- ▶ Groups made up of students and various parties hold a sit-in in Riad El-Solh Square under the slogan “Badna nhasseb” (“We Want Accountability”). They refuse the “You Stink” campaign’s decision to postpone the protest until August 29.
- ▶ After the media leaves the site and stops live coverage, security forces use force to disperse the sit-in in Riad El-Solh Square and arrest a large number of demonstrators. A great number of these demonstrators are subjected to urine tests to detect drug use.
- ▶ Sukleen drivers, who are worried about arbitrary lay-offs, hold an open sit-in demanding their financial dues from the company.

August 27, 2015

- ▶ Youth and political party groups hold two sit-ins, called for by youth in Sidon and Tyre in solidarity with the “You Stink” campaign.
- ▶ The “Akkar is not a Waste Dump” Campaign holds a sit-in in Halba Square in Akkar. Protestors threaten to close down the Sarar dump by force and announce filing a lawsuit against the owners of the dump.

August 29, 2015

- ▶ Thousands of protestors head to Martyrs’ Square in response to the repression exercised by the security forces against them in the previous week. This demonstration is the largest since the launch of the Harak.
- ▶ Groups give the government a 72-hour deadline to execute their demands (the resignation of the Environment Minister, accountability for the Interior Minister, holding parliamentary elections and finding a sustainable eco-friendly solution to the waste problem), failing which they will escalate their actions.
- ▶ The “You Stink” campaign suspends the sit-in, while some people continue protesting in Riad El-Solh Square. Security forces arrest around 29 protestors at night.

August 31, 2015

- ▶ Environment Minister Mohamad Mashnouk recuses himself from handling the waste issue, which is considered a way out of demonstrators’ demand that he resign. Agriculture Minister Akram Shehayeb is tasked with managing this issue.

September 1, 2015

- ▶ After the 72-hour deadline given to the government expires, and while groups participating in the movements are convening to declare the formation of the “the Coordination Committee for the August 29 Movement” as a joint regulatory framework

to lead popular movements, the “You Stink” campaign storms the headquarters of the Ministry of Environment to hold a sit-in in front of the office of Environment Minister Mohamad Mashnouk.

- ▶ Security forces compel journalists to leave the building and then disperse the sit-in by beating and dragging protestors across the ground.

September 3, 2015

- ▶ Six young men and women, including activist Waref Suleiman, start an open hunger strike in front of the Ministry of Environment until Environment Minister Mohamad Mashnouk resigns.
- ▶ The “Badna nhasseb” (“We Want Accountability”) Campaign removes parking meters from the sea road that stretches from Ain El-Mreisseh to Ramlet El-Bayda, which forces the Governor of Beirut to stop installing parking meters on that site.

September 7, 2015

- ▶ Internal security forces chase Yusuf Al-Jirdi, who is on a hunger strike, and follow him to the Rafik Hariri University Hospital after he is transferred there after his health deteriorated.

September 8, 2015

- ▶ The “Badna nhasseb” (“We Want Accountability”) Campaign gathers in front of the Electricity Company of Lebanon to protest the privatization and corruption in the electricity sector.

September 9, 2015

- ▶ Tens of activists throw eggs, tomatoes and garbage bags at the cars of members of parliament participating in the national dialogue sessions on their way in and out of Nejme Square.
- ▶ A central demonstration that gathers various Harak groups is held in Martyrs’ Square coinciding with the dialogue round table called for by the Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri. The turnout is much less than the August 29 demonstration as a powerful sandstorm engulfs the country.

September 10, 2015

- ▶ A sit-in, called for by the “Akkar is Not a Waste Dump” campaign is held in the Al-Abdeh roundabout in protest of the “Shehayeb Plan” which stipulates the adoption of the Sarar-Akkar dump as a sanitary landfill out of three chosen landfills to receive trash from Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

September 11, 2015

- ▶ Several sit-ins take place in Bourj Hammoud (to protest the dumping of garbage in the sea), in Sidon (to protest the garbage pile-up) and in West Bekaa (to protest building a landfill).

September 12, 2015

- ▶ Jayi Taghyir (“Change is Coming”) Campaign carries out a symbolic sit-in in Zaitunay Bay and then heads to the Dalieh of Raouche and removes the iron fence surrounding it under the slogan of taking back public property.

September 13, 2015

- ▶ The Badna nhasseb” (“We Want Accountability”) Campaign holds a gathering in front of the pedestrian bridge in Dora in protest of the death of Shawqi Al-Najjar. He was hit by a car while attempting to cross the highway after he was unable to use the pedestrian bridge due to the trash pile ups filling it. The campaign activists carry some of the trash thrown at the bottom of the bridge in order to throw it at the entrance of the Sukleen company.

September 16, 2015

- ▶ A sit-in is held in Martyrs’ Square coinciding with the second dialogue session. Security forces launch a systematic campaign of arrests against organizers of the Harak and its prominent figures, which results in more than 40 arrests.

September 18, 2015

- ▶ Activists on hunger strike call off their strike after 16 days.

September 19, 2015

- ▶ “Souk Abou Rakhoussa” (the ‘Cheap’ Market) is established in Riad El-Solh Square in response to comments made by the chairman of the Beirut Traders Association, Nicolas Shammas⁴³. This market aims to take back the city center and make it a public place for all people.

September 20, 2015

- ▶ A demonstration heads from Bourj Hammoud to Martyrs’ Square, breaks the security cordon and reaches the entrance of Nejme Square. Security forces do not suppress the demonstrators as they did in previous demonstrations, however, “Amal Movement” sympathizers attack them on their way in and out of Martyrs’ Square.

September 27, 2015

- ▶ A sit-in, called for by the “Campaign to Close Naameh Landfill” is held at the entrance of the landfill in protest of its re-opening amid the heavy presence of security forces.

September 28, 2015

- ▶ Commissioned by the movement groups, five environmental experts draft an alternative plan for waste management. The plan includes sustainable environmental options based on processing waste and not using landfills, holding each area responsible for managing its waste, declaring an environmental emergency state in the transitional phase and holding officials accountable for corruption in managing waste in the previous stage.

September 29, 2015

- ▶ The Badna nhasseb” (“We Want Accountability”) Campaign holds a surprise action in front of the Ministry of Energy and Water under the slogan “One Bill, Not Two”. A number of the ministry’s employees join in, including the head of the Association of Public Administration Employees, Mahmoud Haidar.

October 1, 2015

- ▶ A sit-in is held in Akkar Valley and Al-Drayb Al-Awsat in protest of Minister Shehayeb’s Plan.

October 5, 2015

- ▶ A gathering is held in Dalieh of Raouche to celebrate the release of the Hirak’s detainees.

October 6, 2015

- ▶ A symbolic event by the “You Stink” campaign is held to demand transferring money to municipalities.
- ▶ Activist Assaad Thebian is arrested during the protest for desecrating the Lebanese flag.

October 8, 2015

- ▶ The Harak groups hold a demonstration in Martyrs’ Square, which is considered the last major Harak event given the significant decline in the number of protestors.
- ▶ The demonstration is marked by violent clashes with security forces that go on until after midnight, and are later known in social media as the “Le Gray Hotel Wall Incident”, in reference to the media dramatization of protestors tearing down the wall.
- ▶ Security forces use excessive force and fire tear gas at protestors, arbitrarily arresting 50 of them (including 4 minors and 5 women)

Sources: Al-Akhbar Newspaper, Assafir Newspaper, Annahar Newspaper and Legal Agenda.

43 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub2nZ1JZ0ko>

Table 1
Sample of new participants and non-participants

Alias	Participating	Gender	Age	Area	Socio-economic Status	Political Affiliation
Hassan	Yes	Male	19	Khandaq Ghamiq	Unemployed	Independent
Abbas	No	Male	37	Khandaq Ghamiq	Self-employed	Amal Movement
Rasha	Yes	Female	18	Khandaq Ghamiq	Clothing store employee	Independent
Ali	Yes	Male	41	Khandaq Ghamiq	Self-employed	Amal Movement
Mohammed	Yes	Male	55	Khandaq Ghamiq	Civil defense employee	Iraqi Ba'ath Party (previously)
Adnan	Yes	Male	22	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	Street vendor	Hezbollah (previously)
Mahmoud	Yes	Male	22	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	Unemployed	Hezbollah (previously)
Mousa	No	Male	53	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	Self-employed	Amal Movement
Hussein	Yes	Male	40	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	Taxi driver	Independent
Bassem	Yes	Male	23	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	Unemployed	Independent
Rayan	Yes	Male	17	Chiyah/ Beirut's southern suburb	School drop-out/unemployed	Hezbollah (previously)
Tarek	Yes	Male	22	Tariq Al-Jadideh	Unemployed	Independent
Yousuf	Yes	Male	25	Tariq Al-Jadideh	Hotel employee	Future Movement (previously)
Walid	No	Male	63	Tariq Al-Jadideh	Taxi company employee	Independent
Narmin	No	Female	47	Tariq Al-Jadideh	Sales representative	Independent
Soha	No	Female	64	Corniche Al-Mazraa	Self-employed	Future Movement sympathizer
Nawal	Yes	Female	45	Raouche	Unemployed	Independent
Afaf	No	Female	54	Salim Salem	Library employee	Independent
Pierre	No	Male	73	Ashrafieh	University professor	Sympathizer of Lebanese Forces Party
Zaven	No	Male	35	Bourj Hammoud	Self-employed	Independent
Mary	Yes	Female	22	Bourj Hammoud	Student at the Lebanese University	Independent
Henry	Yes	Male	26	Bourj Hammoud	Publishing house employee	Free Patriotic Movement (previously)
Carla	Yes	Female	42	Broumana	University professor	Independent
Roy	Yes	Male	24	Naqqash	Bank employee	Lebanese Forces Party
Sandy	Yes	Female	31	Broumana	Movie director	Independent

Table 2
Sample of Activists



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