The Peace Building in Lebanon

News Supplement

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Dear Readers,

When the Covid-19 pandemic took the world by surprise in March 2020, it dictated many changes, including in our messages and publications. Accordingly, some of the work we had started in January on this special edition of the Peace Building in Lebanon News Supplement dedicated to "Citizenship and Peace Building" had to be amended to reflect current developments.

In this spirit we chose to replace our regular editorial with this excerpt from the remarks of the UN Secretary General António Guterres to the Security Council in New York on 9 April 2020:

Thank you for convening this important discussion.

The world faces its gravest test since the founding of this Organization.

Every country is now grappling with or poised to suffer the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: the tens of thousands of lost lives; the broken families; the overwhelmed hospitals; the overworked essential workers.

We are all struggling to absorb the unfolding shock: the jobs that have disappeared and businesses that have suffered; the fundamental and drastic shift to our daily lives, and the fear that the worst is still yet to come, especially in the developing world and countries already battered by armed conflict.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis, its implications are much more far-reaching.

We are already seeing its ruinous social and economic impacts, as governments around the world struggle to find the most effective responses to rising unemployment and the economic downturn.

But the pandemic also poses a significant threat to the maintenance of international peace and security -- potentially leading to an increase in social unrest and violence that would greatly undermine our ability to fight the disease.

My concerns are many and widespread, but let me identify eight risks that are particularly pressing:

First, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further erode trust in public institutions, particularly if citizens perceive that their authorities mishandled the response or are not transparent on the scope of the crisis.

Second, the economic fallout of this crisis could create major stressors, particularly in fragile societies, less developed countries and those in transition. Economic instability will have particularly devastating impacts for women, who make up the vast majority of those sectors worst affected. The large numbers of female-headed households in conflict-settings are especially vulnerable to economic shocks.

Third, the postponement of elections or referenda, or the decision to proceed with a vote – even with mitigation measures – can create political tensions and undermine legitimacy. Such decisions are best made following broad consultation aimed at consensus. This is not a time for political opportunism.

Fourth, in some conflict settings, the uncertainty created by the pandemic may create incentives for some actors to promote further division and turmoil. This could lead to an escalation of violence and possibly devastating miscalculations, which could further entrench ongoing wars and complicate efforts to fight the pandemic.

Fifth, the threat of terrorism remains alive. Terrorist groups may see a window of opportunity to strike while the attention of most governments is turned towards the pandemic. The situation in the Sahel, where people face the double scourge of the virus and escalating terrorism, is of particular concern.

Sixth, the weaknesses and lack of preparedness exposed by this pandemic provide a window onto how a bioterrorist attack might unfold – and may increase its risks. Non-state groups could gain access to virulent strains that could pose similar devastation to societies around the globe.

Seventh, the crisis has hindered international, regional and national conflict resolution efforts, exactly when they are needed most.

Many peace processes have stalled as the world responds to COVID-19.

Our good offices and mediation engagements have felt the impact.

Restrictions on movement may continue to affect the work of various confidence-based mechanisms, as well as our ability to engage in crisis diplomacy to de-escalate potential conflicts.

Eighth, the pandemic is triggering or exacerbating various human rights challenges.

We are seeing stigma, hate speech, and white supremacists and other extremists seeking to exploit the situation. We are witnessing discrimination in accessing health services. Refugees and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable. And there are growing manifestations of authoritarianism, including limits on the media, civic space and freedom of expression.

UNDP, Lebanon

Looking Inwards for Solutions to National, Regional and Global Crises

In past months, we have witnessed a phenomenon steadily gaining momentum in Lebanon. For too long, the perception was that the Lebanese people viewed themselves only in a larger geopolitical context in relationship to rival international "axes," making all other considerations of secondary importance. However, recent developments in the country have turned their focus inwards and driven them to ask more vital questions linked to both their rights and their identity.

This supplement, in both its print form and its electronic version since December 2019, is funded by Germany through the German Development Bank KfW, and echoes the dedication and full support of Germany to nurture safe and positive media spaces for public debate that promote a rational and hate-free discourse as part of UNDP's peace building mission.

In a time of such momentous change, this participatory media sphere in your hands is important to reflect the state of advanced awareness of the Lebanese in discovering themselves again and recognizing their huge potential. Taking their cue from the discourse in public squares and streets, the contributors to this issue of the supplement, including researchers, activists, writers and artists, discuss the latest social movements in the country as part of a national exercise to rethink and reevaluate the meaning of citizenship and engagement in public life, which can forge better inclusion, drive reform and ultimately lead to sustainable peace building.

In addition to this supplement, KfW is engaged in the fostering of a positive media landscape in Lebanon through supporting the implementation of the "Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon" developed by UNDP and the Thomson Reuters Foundation, whereby participating media outlets have pledged rejecting discrimination, promoting civil peace and respect, including through funding media studies by UNDP and Maharat. We are also financing the creation of national awareness campaigns aimed at combating fake news, propaganda and misleading or false information.

Mr. Sascha Stadtler
Director, German Development Bank
KfW, Lebanon

The Role of the Media in the Coronavirus Era

This issue of the News Supplement is born in the womb of suffering, at the heart of the multiple crises faced by the Lebanese, the most recent of which is the coronavirus epidemic that is instilling great fear in them, and depriving them, as it is the case in all other nations, of the most basic citizenship rights, and probably internationally recognized human rights. Perhaps citizenship rights in Lebanon, or their absence, suffer the most in times of crises and wars. The Lebanese today look at the citizens of civilized countries and see how their governments provide them with food, without being left with the feeling that they are granted favors and without the mediation of a political figure who is intent on keeping afloat through in-kind aid, sanitizing campaigns and financial leftovers.

What role does the media play in this regard? Eloquent, or rather disciplinary, news bulletins introductions are not enough to raise genuine awareness. They may be counterproductive in a society that has faced all sorts of challenges and has permanently challenged the authorities and law to assert itself.

It is not enough for the media to say to citizens, their fathers, brothers, neighbors, and relatives, "Stay at home." Media professionals are supposed to tell them to take advantage of the time spent in home quarantine to do something useful and engage in beneficial work so that they can catch up on delayed tasks, read, study, and carry out work feasible from home. They can also seek solitude to think about the many future challenges they need to confront.

It is also necessary to raise citizens' awareness of their basic rights and duties. It is not enough to grumble, complain, highlight problems and even overemphasize them, as if defenseless citizens were able to come up with solutions.

It is a time for families to meet, think together, plan the future, and get acquainted with quality media, albeit poor in numbers and means, rather than cheap commercial media that is void of meaningful content.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor-in-chief of An-Nahar newspaper

Don't Let Hope Fade

If there were one element that should be a top priority of political praxis in Lebanon, it would be transparency. The protest movement launched in mid-October last year has demonstrated this gap in the governance of Lebanese public authorities. It is incredible, to say the least, how quickly everything becomes a state secret in this country. This ranges from government formation to various sectoral initiatives, and includes drafting election law and the pricing of many public services. Everything takes place in the shameful whisper of the alcoves, between people who look like conspirators.

The private sector is no exception. The Lebanese have bitterly noticed it regarding the banking restrictions that credit institutions like to change every week, sometimes on a case-by-case basis and sometimes under the non-transparent orders of the Central Bank.

In any case, the protesters have reached a certainty: if Lebanese citizens have a limited involvement in public life, it is surely because of this wall of silence surrounding official information, the access to which is an uphill battle although a relevant law was passed by Parliament. And yet, it is less out of conviction than clearing oneself of responsibility in the face of pressure by the international community...

The outcome: as citizens are very little informed about their rights, they obviously turn to their political mentor. The latter can be a party leader, a minister, a senior civil servant, or even a religious leader. Therefore, instead of following a legal path as it is the case with any country governed by the rule of law, they usually follow the crooked path of influence peddling and corruption.

Over the past few months, the protest movement has raised awareness of this fact and swept away countless assumptions put into practice for many years. However, becoming aware of this abnormality is not enough. It is still necessary to act in a minimally structural framework to make the protestors' voices heard and achieve the desired outcome.

At the risk of letting hope for change fade, even though it has all the characteristics of being salutary.

Gaby Nasr
Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour
supplements

Grassroots Citizenship... Utopian Practice During the October 17 Protests

Jamil Mouawad*

Revolutions and popular protests have many interpretations and can be approached differently. For the most part, a revolution seems to be an ideal moment for researchers in the field of social and human sciences aiming to establish the plausibility of some theories or research approaches, or even an ideal moment for the fulfillment of activists' demands and turning them into public issues. In Lebanon, people working on public spaces, for instance, see in the October 17 Revolution a moment when public spaces are reclaimed. Those who believe in class struggle perceive the revolution as an expression of a class struggle between those who have wealth and those who do not. Those who are fighting for the independence of the judiciary see in popular protests a valuable opportunity to highlight the importance of an independent judiciary in fulfilling the demands put forward in the revolution.

How do we understand citizenship during the popular protests in Lebanon?

Imperfect citizenship

In Lebanon we often praise freedom of expression. Some consider that Lebanon, in comparison with many Arab countries, ranks high regarding freedom of expression. These people go so far as to maintain that the sectarian system, that is, pluralism and sectarian representation in the government, has prevented Lebanon from slipping into a dictatorship and the one-party system. Of course, in comparison with other Arab regimes' handling of revolutions, the Lebanese regime, despite resorting to repression, appears less violent. Others see sectarianism as the main obstacle to the emergence of free and fair citizenship based on equality before the law. Therefore, citizenship appears in such literature as antithetical to sectarianism. In other words, sectarianism and citizenship are irreconcilable.

In this connection, it should be highlighted that citizenship is usually linked to rights and equality. According to British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall (1893-1981), who is one of the most important theorists of the concept of citizenship and its development, it is based on three integral components, achieved one after the other along an upward trajectory: civil citizenship (i.e. individual liberties and equality before the law), political citizenship (i.e. all that is related to voting and running for election) and social citizenship (i.e. the provision of minimal social, economic and cultural welfare). Although there are many critics of this theory, the most important of which claiming that it examines the development of citizenship in the context of Britain, which does not necessarily apply to other countries, or that it overlooked the role of marginalized women in developing the definition of citizenship, yet, it serves as a general framework to understand citizenship as a package of civil, political, and social rights. All of these components are certainly associated with the law.

In a country like Lebanon, we are far from meeting these requirements of citizenship. As it is known, there is a lack of civil laws on personal status that would promote equality between individuals, be they women, men, or children, as well as a lack of election and democratic laws that contribute to political equality and fair representation, and a lack of social services provision to all citizens, or even residents

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of different nationalities. Therefore, citizen is imperfect by all standards.

But it is necessary in this respect to step back in order to shed light on the fact that citizenship does not simply consist of a package of laws guaranteeing rights and duties. In fact, another approach to understanding citizenship is grassroots citizenship as a daily practice performed by individuals.

Desired citizenship

The revolution is not a moment of totalitarianism, assuming that all male and female citizens are constituent parts. The

revolution is a moment of negotiation between different intellectual currents and several political trends that might be conflicting. Simply put, this can certainly divide society between those who support the revolution and those who oppose it. But the revolution occurring somewhere cannot be reduced to a moment in which socio-economic and environmental grievances and judicial complaints are expressed, but it is especially an opportunity to present an alternative imagination of a specific reality. In this context, the October 17 moment provided a space to exercise alternative grassroots

citizenship and the rewriting of an imagined social contract, so far utopian, between the state and society.

In other words, politics, and along with it citizenship, cannot be exclusively framed in the context of constitutional and public institutions. Politics, i.e. grassroots politics, rather runs its course in informal institutions. According to political sociologist Asef Bayat, individuals produce, through their regular daily activities, a political act whereby they take the initiative independently to impose a certain political reality as an alternative to the one imposed on them by public institutions.

From this perspective, Lebanese men and women of all ages exercised grassroots citizenship in various Lebanese areas during the October protests. This exercise took on many aspects, whether in claiming civil, economic, social and environmental rights, or in the participatory exercise in public spaces seeking the prevalence of the public good over private interests. Actually, when Lebanese men and women demanded social justice, organized themselves into groups to sort waste, gathered in tents and initiated debates on rights, public space, and other issues, they transformed themselves into political actors, regardless of their legal status, degree of equality, or representation in constitutional institutions. This approach rests on the idea that Lebanese men and women do not just exercise alternative citizenship, but they also imagine a different version of patriotism which is antithetical to traditional Lebanese patriotism based on "consensus and coexistence between Islam and Christianity." It is rather right and duty based patriotism that establishes full equality before the law. The former presumes that the social contract is grounded in inter-communal coexistence and power-sharing according to sectarian affiliation. The latter, in contrast, imagines a social contract grounded in the equality of individuals.

Certainly, such grassroots citizenship is still marginal, and it is a utopian moment in which those who participated in its making imagined a better world. However, the grassroots struggle is not just a reaction to a specific reality, namely flawed citizenship, it can rather be a key element in the path of change, or even a first step in challenging the existing sectarian based social contract.

* Researcher

Public Services

Citizenship in the Face of the Coronavirus: Lebanese Youth Volunteerism as a Model

Ilda Ghoussain*

In light of the crisis triggered by the spread of the coronavirus, the youth, students and new graduates in Lebanon have led most volunteering initiatives aimed at raising awareness and helping the population to adhere to home quarantine, in addition to offering support to hospitals and the health sector. If the most appropriate form of promoting the concept of citizenship and protecting the community from the virus is manifested in self-quarantine, youth initiatives on community service fall within the scope of this group's dynamism necessary for action and momentum needed for free volunteering, as well as their access to the means of communication, both traditional and remote, to disseminate initiatives and attract attention, while counting on the bodily structure and immunity of the young group in fighting the virus.

By outdoing the associations' and ministries' organized work in handling the successive crises that Lebanon is going through, individual and collective youth and student initiatives in particular demonstrate the ability of this group of people to provide a model that is closest to the concept of citizenship with what it means in terms of belonging to the homeland or nation. The youth volunteering initiatives, whether during the recent coronavirus spread crisis, the fires that erupted prior to the October 17 uprising, or during the uprising itself, demonstrate the willingness of young people to overcome the identity, regional, and sectarian boundaries drawn since the civil war in Lebanon, as well as the youth ability to overcome the problems of exercising their rights political and voting rights in their place of residence, their relationship with the geographical space, especially in Beirut, the capital, and their ability to overcome the problem of multipartisan and multisectarian affiliations that shape the identity of every Lebanese citizen.

Among the political, economic and cultural dimensions of citizenship, perhaps its social dimension, as related to behavior among individuals in society reflecting a measure of loyalty and solidarity, is the most achieved dimension in Lebanon. This dimension intersects with the seventh level developed by Roger Hart on youth participation in carrying national responsibilities, and requires the guidance of young people regarding the decisions, projects and ideas they initiate, while calling on adults to provide them with the necessary support, even without their interference. Examples of youth participation in volunteering initiatives to fight the coronavirus nationwide abound, including the launching of initiatives and awareness campaigns on social media, as some of them have created pages to raise awareness about the virus and ways to prevent it. Dozens of young people in Beirut and various areas have also volunteered for free home delivery services by posting their phone numbers to ensure order delivery, with the aim of encouraging citizens to stay home, adhere to quarantine, and avoid store crowding. The volunteers have formed groups that share experience about available prevention methods, including masks, gloves and sanitizing materials, and have asked the Lebanese Red Cross to train volunteers.

The pluralism and diversity model at the Lebanese University (LU) as a gateway to the achievement of citizenship has been demonstrated in the role played by its students in their adoption of a proactive

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approach to volunteering to fight the virus. Medical students of the LU, in addition to students from Beirut Arab University (BAU), have volunteered for rotating in the coronavirus ward at the Rafic Hariri University Hospital, which is the main center that receives patients and offers them free testing and isolation. For their part, students of the Faculty of Public Health at the LU and its alumni, as well as nurses, have announced that they volunteer to visit homes to serve patients with chronic diseases. Chemistry students at the LU have also launched an initiative

to disinfect stores in coordination with medical students, with the aim of helping owners of small and medium-sized stores disinfect them.

The shortage of respiratory devices in hospitals in different countries has prompted a number of engineering students and graduates to launch a "Breather for all Lebanon" initiative, with the aim of producing artificial respiration ventilators. The initiative, which turned into a crisis cell involving more than 270 experts in various fields, was endorsed by the Ministry of Industry, and now involves

the production of respiratory devices from the materials available in the market, the collection of existing devices and repairing them. An online platform has also been launched to develop prototypes of respirators, smart thermometers and protective masks. An initiative has also been undertaken by a team of engineers and IT programmers to develop an application that links people with delivery outlets and facilitates online access to them in their residential area.

Journalist

Public Services

Providing the Necessary Services to the Lebanese People Promotes Citizenship

Georges Hayek*

Modern citizenship is not a static concept that is indefinitely emulated, but rather a changing reality. The 2020 citizens are different from the 1789 citizens, and they are also different from the 1920 citizens. It is noted that citizenship practices today take tangible forms that vary across democratic countries. The fundamental question raised today is: to what extent does the Lebanese state takes into consideration the citizenship concept regarding citizens' access to services. Lebanese citizens live in a time of radical changes as a result of the economic crisis and the imminent health risk posed by the coronavirus. Therefore, citizens are convinced of the need to turn the page of prosperous life and shift to a lifestyle which they were not previously used to. They now live at the highest levels of anxiety while their minds are filled with concerns over the country's economic collapse, the high cost of living, the devaluation of the Lebanese pound, the lack of employment opportunities, and the closure of some businesses similarly to the domino effect, potential taxes, school tuition fees, inflated bills, low salaries, in addition to the concern over the coronavirus which has spread to all countries of the world before the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic.

The right of access to services for better citizenship

What we are talking about is the economic and social citizenship associated with the broader concept of citizenship. This concept reflects specific issues such as the right of access to electricity, water, health, education, communications and the Internet... The management of the modern state is based on the concept of the state as the servant of the people rather than on the people as the servant of the state. This concept requires the state's fulfillment of its duties and responsibilities in order to facilitate the delivery of services to citizens residing on its territory, as well as to people coming from different countries, foreigners, and permanent or temporary residents, without regard to any ethnic, religious or sectarian considerations in particular, in addition to the provision of basic public services necessary for life and for the preservation of dignity and well-being, which include, but are not limited to, education, health, work, electricity, water, communications and Internet access.

The provision of public services represents the essence of the social contract between the state and its citizens, the spirit of social justice among citizens in terms of achieving equal access to quality public services, and the cornerstone for ensuring a satisfactory quality of free and dignified life. Furthermore, the issue of providing, developing, activating and evaluating public services is one of the most important specialized topics in modern public administration.

Problems that need solutions

- Education: The embodiment of the right to education has developed according to two paces, one for the poor and marginalized social groups, and the other for the upper strata including the middle classes and the wealthy. This dualism has caused a sharp disparity in the quality of education, and a discrepancy in the failure, dropout, and passing rates according to the quality of education in public and private institutions, as well as according to the various regions and social groups. The structure of the Lebanese state's interventions in the field of public education seems to be contrary to the outcome achieved by the structure of similar interventions in developed countries that have adopted them earlier: relatively low attendance in public pre-primary and primary schools in Lebanon, followed by a gradual increase in attendance in subsequent educational levels up to university. Perhaps the economic downturn recently suffered by Lebanese society has forced the acceptance of public education, whereby public schools have witnessed a higher demand for registration.

- In the coronavirus era, private schools have resorted to online learning in the framework of adapting to difficult circumstances and to make up for the losses suffered by students as a result of not attending school. The obstacles brought up by some people about these options and their relevance are real in principle, but this is the best option for schools, parents and students in the current circumstances.

When we talk about online learning, we practically refer to two topics: the production of the digital content, and communication with students to provide them with the educational digital content, in addition to interacting with them in line with distance education.

- Health: The embodiment of the right to health has been subject to a certain extent to the same rationale, thus causing a multiplicity of public and semi-public health insurance systems that vary according to the membership conditions and coverage standards that are not subject to a uniform rationale, while nearly half of the Lebanese people still lack an explicit and well-defined healthcare system. The costs of health services are relatively high in comparison with regional and international rates. Before the economic crisis and the spread of the coronavirus, there was a surplus in the supply of health services at the national level in terms of the average number of hospital beds, doctors and pharmacists per 1,000 population, as well as in terms of the size and type of health equipment in comparison to income levels. However, after the economic crisis, hospitals' conditions deteriorated owing to their inability to provide all the medical supplies needed to treat patients, in addition to the lack of sufficient artificial respirators for those infected with the coronavirus, along with an increase in the cost of health services resulting from the rise in the dollar exchange rate on the black market. With regard to facing the coronavirus crisis, social awareness has contributed to reducing the number of infected people while some volunteered to provide social and health services to reduce the burden on citizens. This is manifested in personal and collective initiatives led by the Red Cross, the procurement of medicine from overseas and the launch of massive awareness campaigns. Another example is set by 14 medical students from the Lebanese University who have volunteered to fight the coronavirus in isolation, quarantine and intensive care rooms in the Rafic Hariri University Hospital.

- Work: The flawed embodiment of social rights is more obvious regarding employment creation for tens of thousands of Lebanese who enter into the labor market every year. Both the direct role of the state through public employment, and its indirect role through sectoral development stimulus policies have remained non-existent or virtually non-existent. On the other hand, the socio-religious makeup has left its tangible mark on the working mechanisms regulating the private sector in this market. The relationship between the structure of demand for labor by private institutions, and the structure of labor supply from graduates produced by the educational system, has been governed by narrow and progress-hindering regional, sectarian, and familial considerations. This has led to weak labor mobility and promoted outright unemployment, disguised unemployment and underemployment, while resulting in poor labor productivity. During the spread of the coronavirus in Lebanon, workers must immediately declare staying in quarantine once infection is confirmed, while all their binding rights established by the law, regulations, and rulings issued by the Ministry of Labor are preserved.

- Electricity, water, satellite dish and the Internet: Lebanese lifestyle today necessitates that citizens pay additional subscriptions to electricity, water, satellite dish and the Internet, to the extent that the Lebanese have established a small state in which they provide themselves with services by incurring additional expenses. Citizens have to pay an additional monthly bill of around $100 for private generators, a subscription to the satellite dish which amounts to around LBP 20,000, not to mention the additional water weekly subscription fee of around LBP 30,000 since the water is almost off throughout the year, in addition to the Internet subscription, which amounts to LBP 30,000 per month. Thus, citizens have to pay double bills for services. Measures taken recently by the state to contain the spread of the coronavirus include the provision of faster internet connection to encourage work and studying from homes. In addition, young men posted their phone numbers the social media as they volunteered to provide free delivery service on motorcycles, including the delivery of raw materials and grocery items to families undergoing home quarantine in various areas in the north and south. Chemistry students at the Lebanese University, in cooperation with the Faculty of Medicine, also disinfected shops, hair salons and clothing stores, and provided masks and gloves to their owners, for a symbolic fee of 1,000 Lebanese pounds only.

Citizenship building revolution

The lack of such services has led to a massive resentment by Lebanese citizens of different affiliations, especially that all complain about the corruption of government officials and their failure to provide equal social citizenship under a fragmented political system ruled by two opposing rationales, the rationale of the civil state on the one hand, and the rationale of political sectarianism on the other hand. The problem is further exacerbated by the tendency to dismantle the system of public insurance and services for the benefit of quasi systems built by political sectarianism that uses them as a tool to maintain the political and social subordination of the "sectarian masses" in return for a handful of services that are often funded - and this is the worst thing – through the theft and deduction of public money. The increased polarization of growing social groups by such quasi-service systems has very negative implications, especially with regard to systematizing the concept of social citizenship and the citizen's affiliation with the civil state. In brief, this polarization promotes the recreation of the sectarian system and its elite families and sectarian elites.

Citizens exploded with anger on October 17, 2020 as a result of this situation and revolted against the decline in public services, political paralysis, and aggravating corruption, and demanded a state of citizenship that strengthens their ties to the country, deepens their sense of belonging and loyalty to it, and enhances community security on the basis of the rule of law and equal opportunities, free from sectarianism, corruption, and narrow partisan interests.

Following the uprising, the era of coronavirus began. It has showed that all the Lebanese - individuals, parties and political and social groups - assume responsibility at the national level. They have contributed in all sincerity and in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity to effectively fight the coronavirus, and have acted with a sense of patriotism and compassion and a clear conscience.

*Journalist

Sharing Information in the Era of Post-Facts

Jad Melki*

When mass protests erupted in Lebanon on October 17, 2019, people from all walks of life posted their calls for action and shared their opinions on social media. Many of the videos, photos and messages they shared seemed quite spontaneous and visceral, expressing rage and dissatisfaction with the current economic and political situation. But most people mainly shared content created by others, often without factchecking claims, authenticating sources, or verifying credibility.

Here lies the dilemma of our rich media ecosystem: an overabundance of information and tools to disseminate opinions—supposedly a diverse marketplace of ideas good for democracy—countered by an overwhelming amount of false information, propaganda, and noise. On one hand, citizens today have an unprecedented access to information and tools to instantly communicate across vast distances. On the other hand, information overload may cloud judgement, particularly in redistributing information—assuming well intention. But the tools of freedom of expression may be easily abused for intentional ill purposes too—a privilege that was the sole domain of governments and major corporations in the past.

More information is supposed to lead to more informed citizenry, the linchpin of democratic governance, but too much information is leading to informed tribalism—the outcome of what communication scholars call echo chamber effects, where people tend to associate with likeminded fellows (on social media) who reinforce their biases and prejudices.

Because we are overwhelmed with information and have limited time and energy, we more often than not tend to select media, people, and ideas that reconfirm our beliefs—what scholars call selective exposure. When we access such reconfirming information, our critical defenses are down, and we are more likely to share reassuring views unquestionably, while we are more likely to dismiss and delete information that challenges our beliefs.

When we ran a recent national survey to discern how Lebanese accessed news about the uprising, we asked about their social media habits. At first, we were pleased that a majority (80%) of respondents said they verified original sources before sharing, and 73% said they only shared news from institutions or persons they trusted.

But then we questioned people's understanding of the concept of verification when we realized that sizeable majorities on both sides of the political divide admitted posting anything that supported their cause: 69% of pro-protest Lebanese said they published any news that supports the protests compared to 0% of anti-protest Lebanese, while 39% of anti-protest Lebanese said they published any news that opposes the protests compared to 0% of pro-protest Lebanese. Furthermore, we noticed that those who supported the protests tended to get their information from media sources that were also pro-protests and vice versa—evidence of selective exposure.

Democratic societies face a historic challenge today. In the past, journalists and media institutions had the grave responsibility to keep society informed, while the law tried to shield the rights of a free press from government incursions. With the stupendous power in the hands of citizens today, this relationship is altered. Journalists and legacy news institutions feel their traditional values have left them powerless in the face of false information spread by citizens, while governments (at least those not in a perpetual coma) have countered by erecting an additional branch to their armed forces: electronic armies and cyberwar brigades.

What is the role of citizens in this context? We may rush to judge the masses as irresponsible, unethical, and ignorant. But what have governments done to equip these citizens?

During WWII, the US invested massively in propaganda that warned citizens against spreading sensitive information. The phrase "Loose lips sink ships" still resonates today. The goal was not only to avoid leaking intelligence to the enemy, but primary to limit demoralizing speech and dangerous rumors that could incite internal conflict. Today, many countries invest in media literacy education as a measure to educate the public and empower them with the new tools of communication.

What has the Lebanese government done in this arena? Has the Ministry of Education taken seriously the constant calls for integrating media literacy into school and university curricula? The most troubling statistic from our survey found that only 6% of Lebanese had some media literacy training in their life. Preliminary data from other countries, including Iraq, show much high percentages. Unfortunately, Lebanon continues to ignore the need for media literacy education at its own risk.

With the Coronavirus ravaging the world today, will we learn from past lessons? Will we realize that media illiterate citizens—ill-trained in methods of information verification and unaware of human tendencies to reconfirm biases—will most likely engage in dangerous, bigoted and harmful media habits? Will the new Lebanese government realize the value of generalizing media literacy education that has the potential to turn a whole society into responsible ethical citizens who not only share higher quality information but also serve as fact-checkers and counter false information.

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* Researcher

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Media

Digital Media Between False News and Social Responsibility

Nour Melli*
Nawar Baksrawi**

It is self-evident that every one of us has an account in one of the social media platforms, given their increasing role and impact, whereby their task is no longer confined to communication between friends. They have rather gone beyond it to invade every aspect of our lives to form a parallel world that resembles our material world, but with less censorship and a greater room for self-expression. Apart from this, they do not need a large budget and can transmit information quickly. Therefore, they can reflect the street pulse or individuals' opinions more freely than the traditional media that is still controlled by the authorities in Third World countries.

Despite all these characteristics that enable the social media to ascend the throne of the media, be part of the Fifth Estate following the traditional media, with the former having the strongest impact on the decision-making process, the social media is seen as a double-edged sword. Indeed, it can contribute to community advancement by raising individuals' awareness of citizenship education and informing them about their rights and duties, free from intolerance and subordination. It can also be a dubious tool that serves the interests of certain parties.

This highlights the role of active citizenship in steering digital media away from emotional manipulation, a huge gap that can be exploited for personal ends, especially when it comes to a country like Lebanon known for its peculiarity that differentiates it from all other countries as a result of the civil war that affected its social makeup and the recent wave of Syrian displacement.

Perhaps the most prominent example is the racist campaign conducted by some Lebanese parties against Syrian refugees. For instance, a Lebanese TV channel aired a report titled "Cancer Invading Lebanon... Two Reasons for Its Spread" The title may seem normal, but between the lines of the report lie scientifically unfounded analyses. They are simply founded on accusations that hold refugees responsible for high cancer rates.

The rumors are not limited to refugees but go beyond that. Even the coronavirus has its share of the rumors through the promotion of false news on infections in the south and Iqlim Al Kharroub, which prompted the Minister of Health to make statements reassuring the Lebanese that no such cases have been registered in Lebanon.

This misinformation has created a gap between the components of society. Some social media platforms have partially filled this gap by producing information materials that refute false news. We also notice that behind these platforms are mainly groups of young activists who believe in their community causes. Hence the role of these platforms in raising community awareness and the importance of citizenship, which will be manifested in reducing ethnic and religious differences, in addition to promoting the concept of peace between refugees and host communities.

Therefore, this type of media is considered a boom at the level of the city of Tripoli in particular and at the level of Lebanon in general. Although active digital media at the moment is limited to being just Facebook pages, it has overcome many obstacles such as the incitement of sectarian strife or even the distortion of the image of some components in society and breaking stereotypes, all of which are traps some satellite channels are still caught in. Yet, digital media focuses most of its attention and expertise on consolidating the concept of citizenship and building social peace through intensive courses offered by these platforms to their journalists.

For instance, the Shadda platform, which is one out of several Facebook platforms, projects a very positive image of Tripoli. Between January and December 2019, Shadda recruited volunteers who received intensive training in peace, citizenship, journalistic ethics, as well as the techniques and skills of digital journalism.

In addition to training, Shadda produced many videos highlighting the problems faced in Tripoli and Lebanon in general in programs that address problems and suggest solutions. This platform has also launched advocacy campaigns on the cause of women, the fight against

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human trafficking, and defending refugees from the xenophobic campaigns by some parties serving their own narrow interests.

Based on simple experiments in the field and practice of social media, it is clear to us that the weight of a media outlet is not measured by the large size of its technical equipment or budget. The world has countless channels, but do these channels have an equal impact? Of course

not, because impact is not only about offering a dazzling image or trying to beautify things by using a modern camera, since the job of the media is not limited to transmitting images without addressing problems, a task that the new platforms are trying to undertake.

SHADDA Media Lab coordinator
Journalist

Arts

Changing Channels:
Young Lebanese Find Themselves

Kareem Chehayeb*

Lebanon's media landscape is seen as unique in the region, with a diversity of channels and platforms with a variety of owners compared to its regional counterparts. However, this has left many Lebanese begging for something different.

Despite this diversity, Lebanon's media has significant limitations, particularly when it comes to its ownership. The Lebanon Media Ownership Monitor, a project by The Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon and international NGO Reporters Without Borders, revealed that the vast majority of Lebanon's media is owned and run by partisans of the country's traditional parties and businesspeople with similar ambitions. This leaves little space for a new generation that has challenged these perspectives, often supportive of the sectarian political and economic status quo.

This new wave of Lebanese feel excluded from the mainstream's programming and narratives, and it also does not necessarily trust it. These developments have especially intensified in recent months, following a wave of mass protests demanding reform and transparency. Lebanon's media either downplayed these issues and demands, or spun them in a way that this generation feels does not address their grievances.

Many citizens feel that independent and inclusive media is crucial to push transparency through rigorous investigative work and to promote citizenship through the inclusiveness of different voices from different segments of the population. In this media landscape, they feel excluded. And in recent months this demand for knowledge and interest in civic engagement has surged as Lebanon's economy continues to tumble.

Since the end of Lebanon's 15-year civil war in 1990, talking politics, and being active to challenge the status quo were considered taboo, which does not resonate with much of Lebanese young adults. Entertainers and influencers have suddenly found themselves filling a major gap to address these demands

"We're relatable!" Nour Hajjar, Lebanese standup comedian, said with a laugh. "We connect everything to our daily lives."

Hajjar is among a handful of standup comedian, entertainers, like Shaden, Oleksandra El Zahran, and Gino Raidy, who have especially gained traction over their takes on various social and political issues around Lebanon. And this isn't exclusive to Lebanon; satirists like Bassem Youssef and Youssef Hussein (of Joe Show fame) have proven that this is a regional phenomenon.

Whether it's on stage or a short video on Instagram, they have built up a massive audience who feel that they include perspectives and voices often excluded in the traditional media narrative.

What has helped these new sources of information grow their audience is their presence in neutral spaces. In cultural venues and on the internet, they can bring a diversity of people together to promote civic rights, denounce existing policies, and call for change.

Collectives are being formed like awk.word, which brings together standup comedians who can express themselves comfortably and harness their craft and share resources. Meanwhile, influencers' channels on social media platforms of all stripes continue to create a free and open space for discussion and collective support.

These spaces are the fertile ground for dialogue; people bond over shared experiences and commonalties, and discuss their differences in good faith as they transcend imposed barriers of ideology and sect.

For comedians like Nour Hajjar, there is no better way to promote dialogue and civic engagement than with a punch line.

"We're pushing for political engagement of citizens," he said. "Comedy is the nicest way to be serious about it...the friendliest face to talk to about politics."

However, this new development does not absolve a generation hungry for information and civic action from obstacles that continue to get in the way of things.

Among the significant hurdles is a recent spike in disinformation campaigns that have impacted not just news coverage, but online discussions and narratives. Cryptic WhatsApp voice notes and devious social media campaigns aggregated by bots creating a cacophony of information has troubled Lebanese citizens at large, often trying to fuel sectarian tensions at a time where more and more Lebanese continue to reject it.

Lebanon currently stands at a critical junction, having defaulted on its debts for the first time and is set to introduce a rescue plan for the economy. Demand for information, transparency, and accountability is greater than ever.

Independent journalism has been on the rise, with the likes Habib Battah, Lara Bitar, and others to counter the mainstream with rigorous editorial standards and in-depth reporting. Hajjar sees the surge in independent media platforms such as Megaphone, Daraj, and The Public Source in recent years as key to tackle the problems with Lebanese media, especially with Lebanon's worsening economic crisis, working without editorial restrictions.

And in turn, he feels he, other comedians, and social media influencers, want to keep doing their part to promote transparency, democratization, and citizenship – which he says complements what independent media is doing.

"We all need to be ready and informed about why things are going wrong," Hajjar said. "[That way] we can all tackle the situation and build something new together."

Journalist

Citizenship: The Writings on the Wall

Students in North Lebanon for Citizenship – Between Empowerment and Disenfranchisement

Nathalie Rosa Bucher*

Starting 18 October 2019, Tripoli citizens of various backgrounds had turned al-Nour Square into a public forum. Every night for weeks, crowds gathered would chant revolutionary slogans, protest and dance. Many young Lebanese joined in and women in particular stood out for their fierceness, bravery and eloquence. The recent Covid-19 virus-induced lockdown, however, has forced students and university lecturers to adapt and move courses and activism online.

Nala Kalamouni, a Lebanese University graphic design student from El Mina, was among the young women who participated in daily protest marches. "I was also involved in other ways including spreading messages and demands on social media platforms," she recalled.

Fellow Lebanese University student Nazih Chami, who also partook in the movement, put forward the role of women as one of its greatest successes: "I was proud to see how strong women were, being the headlines of many stories," he said.

Samer El-Hajjar, who lectures in Business Management at Balamand University and set up public discussion sessions at al-Nour Square titled "Madrasat El-Moshaghebeen" (literally "The School of the Mischievous," based on a famous play of the same name), observed that female students were generally more active than their male counterparts: "There were strong feminist slogans and women had an additional agenda in this revolution."

Hajjar pointed out that students are aware that they are cheated of their rights and full citizenship status. "Students are not organised – we don't have independent political young students.. They protest over applications!"

"Basic rights are lacking. That touches on the issue of nationality and unemployment. This was the main factor for demonstrations. Especially if you consider that my students take a three-year business course that costs $15,000 per year and 90% to 95% consider leaving Lebanon as they have no prospects here at all," Hajjar said.

In a recent article for The Legal Agenda website, Lama Karame, a visiting scholar at the University of Columbia's Faculty of Law, wrote that "the education system also contributes to the exclusion of youth from public affairs via pedagogical policies that marginalise any political education of children."[1]

"The fact that universities maintain strict religious or political affiliations affects the students as well as staff," Hajjar said. "Nonetheless, 17 October was a watershed moment. It broke the ice with the political system! Students were for once motivated to talk about politics, they took part in the protests and the discussions in the tents held in the squares."

Among the tents that started mushrooming on and around al-Nour Square, four were student-run: one by Lebanese University students and three by private university students. Equipped with an old megaphone, Obeida Takriti, a graduate from the American University of Beirut, started daily public discussion sessions in October 2019. Initial attendance: seven people. The sessions quickly grew organically, totalling 260 attendees by early March. "They have become more interactive and besides touching on political matters, we have also included political methodology and philosophy related to what is happening into the 10-minute presentations," Takriti explained.

Topics covered included "How to communicate with people who are against the revolution," "How to avoid Covid-19," and a session on why Lebanon should not pay the Eurobonds.

Attempts to hold such sessions at other universities were vetoed by their respective administrations.

Asked in March 2020 how the situation had evolved since October, Takriti observed that many students were upset now, especially as their problems were no longer overwhelmingly political but economic. "They didn't know how to move to real politics and other activities; many believed in a quick fix and thought this would be over in one month. I believe in a long-term vision," Takriti said.

Hajjar qualifies the mood as sombre. "Many stopped protesting and chose to deal with private matters. There has also been pressure from political parties as well as families."

While it may be too early to assess the gains of the protest movement, particularly for students' rights, Hajjar pointed out that his students had started to read and were attending more seminars. Chami corroborated this, stating: "Generally speaking, in this period I felt that I've grown-up quickly because of these changes around me and also the changes in my thoughts and reflection."

"Maybe the greatest achievement is that the square has brought together two cities," said Hajjar. Discussion sessions as well as civic initiatives launched in tents drew in some 100 to 200 Tripolitans over the past months, engaging both affluent citizens and residents from the poorest parts of the city!"

Since meeting in public became no longer safe and possible with the current Covid-19 situation, Takriti, Hajjar and others have moved the discussion online[2]. Not surprisingly, current topics explore many aspects of the health and economic crisis Lebanon is facing.

* Writer and researcher

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[1] https://www.legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=6370

[2] Facebook Group: https://www.facebook.com/_مدرسة-المشاغبين-إنتفاضة-طرابلس-108966520529408/ and YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz2RbTsHnjw66clqHgIpqQw

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Women in the Age of Transformations: Mothers, Media Professionals, or Activists…

Manal Shaaya*

Perhaps it is no coincidence that we have chosen to talk about women in times of revolution. Since October 17, 2019, Lebanese women have played a prominent role in a revolution that has marked Lebanon's modern history. What impact do women have on this movement?

If we proceed from the premise that women are citizens on a par with men, and accordingly they enjoy full rights and carry out duties like them, then talking about distinctiveness is no longer justified, because in this case, women are seen as citizens participating in professional, social, cultural and political life, and consequently in revolutionary life.

Barbed wire

In times of revolution, the issue of equality between women and men cannot be considered transient. But if we linked it to the concept of citizenship as a whole, then equality would be a matter of detail and would not assume importance. This is probably what has motivated Lebanese women to become increasingly involved in the revolution since its outbreak and to struggle side by side with men on all levels, not to say that they have outdone them in some instances.

The most significant role played by women in the revolution was manifested in the Shiyah - Ain El-Remmaneh demonstration in an area bearing a powerful symbol since war times. The "women's" decision to organize a demonstration there aimed to prevent the recurrence of the war bitter experience on the basis of genuine citizenship that makes women responsible at the national level, just as men, and because genuine citizenship must also promote civil peace and protect it from violence.

Linda Khairallah, one of the mothers who participated in the demonstration, describes that day by saying, "It was a great day. We felt that spontaneous love which prevailed among all. As Muslims and Christians, we have common concern and pain, i.e. adverse living conditions in this country."

She goes on to say, "We are all mothers, and we do not want our children to leave this country."

Linda is the mother of three young men out of whom only one still lives in Lebanon. She commented by saying, "I am fed up with immigration, even though I have not experienced it myself, but my children's experience makes me hate it. This pain is certainly shared by many mothers."

Linda admits that Lebanese women, and specifically Lebanese mothers, have suffered tremendously, and it is not unusual that they are at the forefront of the revolution. "It is the pain that drives them, so their experience is heartfelt and touching."

This women's movement has further strengthened the concept of citizenship and women's sharing men in all fields, even those that are considered risky.

This problematic of equality between men and women prompted the 2019 Human Development Report to address the issue in the framework of "inequalities in the 21st century". Issued by the United Nations Development Program, the report indicates that "Gender inequality is intrinsically linked to human development, and it exhibits the same dynamics of convergence in basic capabilities and divergence in enhanced capabilities. Overall, it is still the case—as Martha Nussbaum has pointed out—that 'women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life.' This is evident in the Gender Inequality Index and its components—reflecting gaps in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market."

However, the report itself refers to the fact that "Inequalities for some basic capabilities are slowly narrowing across most countries, even if much remains to be done." It also emphasizes a key message that "Inequalities accumulate through life often reflecting deep power imbalances."

This equation bears no resemblance to the time of the revolution that Lebanon has witnessed for nearly six months, as women have often been at the forefront of the protest movement and have proven how they can translate genuine citizenship into concrete action. Accordingly, referring to differentiation is unlikely. The role of women was evident in every clash, as they acted as buffer between demonstrators and security forces and formed "barbed wire" to prevent any friction between the two parties. In short, they are the ones who have protected men!

Once again, women have demonstrated that they share with men genuine citizenship.

Media professionals or women?

The media has been the main pillar of the revolution over the past six months. At the practical level, journalist Rachel Karam had field experience with the protest movement in the critical area of Tripoli.

She says, "Roles differ in accordance with the nature of women and men. Women generally tend to be calm; they approach reality from a humane perspective more than men do, and know how to tackle pain and suffering. But I do not think that people deal with female and male reporters differently. Even security forces do not deal with women differently. I noticed that women have never been protected in the revolution, because the security forces do not distinguish between a man and a woman, especially in expressing their anger. There is no differentiation at all."

As a woman, Karam thought that perhaps the equation is clear when it comes to men: force versus force. However, when it comes to women, the approach is different. Karam admits that "the reporter's personality also plays a major role, add to this the fact that professional experience and the perception of the media and the profession as a whole are all cornerstone factors in dealing with the event. This is what causes the distinctiveness between media professionals, whether they are men or women."

But the media in general is facing a major challenge, namely social media, as every individual has become a journalist evaluating the experience of media professionals. This is partly negative and detrimental to the profession as well.

Such "chaos" never promotes genuine citizenship, but rather impairs and derails it, because public responsibility can never be dissociated from citizenship, but rather both are two sides of the same coin.

In conclusion, Lebanese women have undergone many experiences during wartime, peacetime, and the revolution. As a result, it is said that "the revolution is female."

Human Rights

In Revenge for Our Usurped Rights

Amal Charif*

When I travel, I devote some time to exploring public squares as well as parks and other public facilities as I see in them the backbone of successful societies. They mirror community policies, the level of services provided by the state to all segments of society, and the opportunity given to them to meet and interact, especially when these places are accessible to all components of society without discrimination against the elderly, people with disabilities or families.

I have always wondered why our Lebanese squares are empty, as if we were living in deserted cities. Perhaps this is attributed to the civil war and its consequences. When the war ended, no serious work was done to rebuild public spaces and use these open and shared spaces to create closeness between compatriots exhausted by the fighting among themselves. Public spaces remained semi-deserted and were not used as a stepping stone to initiate debates among the various social, political and religious groups emerging from the devastating war on all levels, work with them to transition from war to peace, and promote the concepts of partnership and acceptance of the others who are different. Instead of all of this, the squares had been used as parking lots until October 17, 2019 when the landscape was transformed.

What is special this time is the decentralized protests, in addition to setting up tents in all areas, not just in Beirut's squares. These tents played a large role, especially in the first weeks of the revolution. Debates as well as dialogue, training and education sessions were initiated in many fields. Tents became places for participation, interaction and sharing while one tent was set up in northern Lebanon to fight illiteracy. We, at the HalTek NGO, hesitated and preferred not to set up a tent for us in Martyrs' Square to introduce the concept of disability as we call for the establishment of an inclusive society that treats all its members equally without any discrimination.

Our core values are also based on providing solutions to improve conditions in the country, after we noticed a decline in services and in the quality of the nearly absent infrastructure. At the same time, we focus on breaking stereotypes of people with disabilities. As disabled individuals, we share the protesters' demands as we share their suffering. Our demands may be different when it comes to more precise details, but we, like them, are deprived of health insurance, pension and a luxurious life. Nor can we engage in political life as stipulated by the constitution and laws, not because of our negligence, but for many reasons. We prefer to be part of the massive protest movement rather than work separately and demonstrate carrying banners bearing the same slogans. Once everyone's demands are fulfilled, we will be able to fulfill our demands more easily and quickly.

People of all age groups, areas and social strata, marched to the squares to restore their usurped citizenship. They benefited from the public space to get together, and raised many slogans, the most important of which was on demanding a civil state. The cities' walls were transformed into murals where many demands, both

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satirical and serious, were made. Some walls were not without insults, as well as paintings that reflect the artistic talents in need of spaces to demonstrate their creativity and express themselves in their own ways.

The demand for a civil state was manifested on Independence Day, whereas it had formerly been an ordinary holiday. In a landscape contrasting the pattern witnessed in Lebanon since independence in 1943, citizens took the initiative to restore their confiscated independence, after having been framed for years in regional, partisan, religious, sectarian, and leaders' followers groups, at the expense of their citizenship and belonging to the homeland, and thus decided to turn Independence Day into a national day for male and female citizens. Civilian regiments of teachers, doctors, artists, workers, students, and many other specialties paraded as a reflection of the pillars of society. A special regiment was also formed for people with special needs. I would have personally preferred to see its members join the other regiments as I am sure that it also included lawyers, university professors, professionals and

many other specializations. As disabled individuals, we are citizens first. We are part of the productive workforce and consumption power too. Even if we suffer from disabilities, we carry out our daily activities similarly to other members of society. We have needs, but they should not be the cause of our social exclusion.

In a scene not witnessed before, a girl in a wheelchair was in the crowd of protesters blocking the Ring Bridge. On the day a parliamentary session was held for a vote of confidence for the new government, a young man in a wheelchair wearing a helmet and waterproof clothes took part in the protests in the face of water cannons and tear gas, along with other young people. I was not very surprised by these two scenes as I used to see, since the beginning of the protest movement in the squares, young men and women in wheelchairs, who exercised their natural right as individuals seeking change like other protesters claiming their rights. We used to greet each other from afar.

Five months have passed since the beginning of protest movement, but it looks as if it were a thousand days. I am confident that citizens will fulfill the

demands appearing in their slogans regarding the right to education, the use of public facilities, the right to run for election and vote, the right of women to confer their nationality on their children, the right to old age security, and the right to medical care and other demands. In this connection, I will not forget my friend Alan who passed away of cancer the day before the confidence vote session, leaving behind a will to the rebels: "Avenge me for the medicine drawer, the pollution that is killing us, my huge hospital bill which has amounted to about LL 80,000,000 paid out of my own pocket over two years, as the Social Security does not cover all expenses. Avenge me for our humiliating and abhorrent health system we are subjected to at the door of the Ministry of Health and the terrorist Social Security. Avenge us all."

Perhaps Alan is right in considering it a battle of revenge between us and those who usurped our rights.

*Activist and managing director at
HalTek association*

Lebanese Diaspora and Citizenship: Beyond Remittances

Bilal Malaeb*

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Red umbrellas was the dress code for today's protest

The Lebanese diaspora has historically had its feet in its country of residence and felt homesick at the same time. While this is not particular to the Lebanese context, what differentiates the Lebanese diaspora is its sheer size and Lebanon's legacy over the centuries of sending some of its brightest overseas. One might be tempted to consider this as a brain drain, but there has also been a considerable gain: the country has in fact capitalised on its foreign human wealth in terms of trade, remittances and investment, in addition to social capital and reach. Indeed, expats save and invest in Lebanon – largely due to banking secrecy and higher-than-normal interest rates –, invest in business and real estate, and remit to family and friends.

Resulting in its current demise, the Lebanese financial model, since 1990s, relied on the constant inflow of foreign currency as one of its pillars, most of which is dispatched by the diaspora. But beyond just monetary remittances, how does the Lebanese diaspora contribute to Lebanon's social cohesion, peace, and growth? Undoubtedly, the monetary remittances

and their contribution to financial stability and reconstruction of Lebanon in the Post-Taif period contributed to the country's journey of rebuilding and reconciliation. However, an often-overlooked element of migration is the social remittances. The idea of social remittances hinges on the ability of expats to exchange ideas, skills, and social capital (including peace, human rights, and democracy) between their countries of origin and destination. While there is no shortage of good values, skills, and philosophies in Lebanon, certain practices in public resource management, human rights, and solid democratic processes can be enhanced based on foreign experiences. The propagation of new ideas and experiences creates a new socio-political 'imaginary', which is a set of values, norms, institutions, and practices through which one can project their society, the social contract, and the public sphere. This imaginary, therefore, promotes a sense of belonging and shared purpose, and ultimately, citizenship.

During the turbulent times that Lebanon is currently going through, the heightened

level of energy and mobilisation among the diaspora is clearly visible. While traditionally seen as unable to instigate change in the confessional divisions in the homeland, and indeed within diaspora politics and associations, the latest movements that have emerged since October 2019 have proved a structural change in the outlook of the diaspora towards homeland politics – very much in line with the mobilisation on the streets of Lebanon. There thus came a global movement of "Meghterbin Mejtemiin" or "United Emigrants". They were united, in the order of thousands across major cities, in solidarity with their friends and family back home, raising the voice against corruption, poor governance, and injustice. They protested, organised fundraisers and donation drives, launched a campaign to encourage as many immigrants as possible to go back home for the holidays, reinvigorated professional associations (e.g. Lebanese International Finance Executives), and started new initiatives in their countries of destination (such as Impact Lebanon – in the UK, among

others). These solidarity initiatives raise the morale back home and create a sense of shared citizenship that is transnational and de-territorialised.

While Lebanon needs to get on a sustainable development path and foster skills and talent domestically rather than exporting it, the diaspora's support will be essential in any effort to ameliorate its conditions. However, the country must also strive to keep its diaspora engaged and rooted for its success. While opening the electoral vote to the diaspora in 2018 was a welcome step in the right direction, a sure-fire way to strengthen the diaspora's involvement is by establishing it as an electoral constituency in the Parliament.

In many ways, the Lebanese take their homeland with them wherever they go, and the homeland looks outwards for their support in search of opportunities. And indeed, besides sending their money and investments, they proved to also remit hope, energy, and a sense of unity.

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The masthead reads "The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement" with "Public Sphere" below.

Declining Sense of Space in Today's Beirut: An Obstacle to Belonging and Civicness

Antoine Atallah*

The sense of belonging one may feel about the contexts of daily life largely stems from a sense of place, i.e. a sense of being part of a recognizable environment, of living and progressing in spaces that bear meaning and specific identities. It is also the idea of being part of an ongoing and collective history that has wrought settlements and landscapes. Indeed, belonging is closely intertwined with spaces that are shaped and reshaped by people, spaces they have appropriated and experienced. Of course, it also relies on a sense of community made up of diverse social relationships that can be fostered even in unfavourable conditions. However, when belonging is rooted in both space and community, civicness can emerge and a shared experience of the city can flourish.

Beirut dwellers increasingly lost access to the city's original landscape and were thus bereaved of many of their social practices. With the expansion of the Port in the Rmeil and Medawar neighbourhoods and the construction of the Corniche in Ain El-Mraisseh, these areas lost public beaches, swimming and fishing spots, restaurants and other leisure and gathering spaces. They were pushed away from most of the coast in Mina El-Hosn and Ras Beirut as the resorts privatized the shore. The banks of the Beirut River had been a terrain for playing, strolling and celebrating local religious traditions before they were turned into a concrete ground. Horsh Beirut (Beirut's forest) has been closed for decades, and as a result it no longer hosts celebrations and family gatherings under its pines. Barely a few discontinuities in the chaotic urban fabric give views of the surrounding landscape, fleeting reminders that Beirut is a city located between the mountains and the sea.

The disappearance of the architectural heritage from the Ottoman period, French mandate or modernist era is similarly causing a loss of familiarity with the neighbourhood and with a certain way of life. Gardens, verandas, balconies and all sorts of interstitial spaces used to blur the limit between indoor and outdoor, allowing the private sphere to project onto the public realm. Such traditional features are disappearing, reducing the porosity between private and public spaces and inducing growing confinement to the domestic realm. Simultaneously, because of the city's accelerated post-war transformations, people are losing the buildings, landmarks and places that make up their neighbourhood life, along with their attachment to a collective urban history. Meanwhile, public spaces have increasingly shrunk or become hostile. Parks in Beirut are either neglected or eradicated to make way for underground parking lots, or they are monitored with limited public access. The Corniche abounds with multiple bans on people's activities, thus limiting their appropriation of the space. The squares of the historic centre, such as Martyrs' Square, are unadorned and depopulated, while others such as Samir Kassir Square and Saifi Village are gentrified, surveilled and exploited for profit.

Therefore, belonging to Beirut is too often eliminated by a feeling of dispossession and an understanding that the city is being reshaped without and against its people. In reaction, one of the most significant manifestations of Lebanon's October Revolution is the reappropriation of public spaces in Beirut's downtown area and in major cities across the country. Protesters express their right to the city and one of their first act has been the remaking of public spaces in such a way that they fulfil their purposes, needs and aspirations. They have collectively introduced the spaces of debates, protest, exchange and politics, and even the spaces of celebration, leisure and joy that they lacked elsewhere. This spontaneous act of civicness should become a roadmap for urban policies that meet the social needs of city dwellers and help cultivate a sense of belonging to a city that is open, shared and welcoming to all its citizens.

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Architect and urbanist

Contested Public Spaces in Tyre

Reem Joudi*

The problem of urban planning in Lebanon has long been a topic of interest for scholars and activists looking to understand how postwar nations and cities are re-shaped by experiences of precarity and violence. "The Problem" in this context holds a dual connotation —on the one hand, it refers to the intellectual and physical complexity of planning-as-practice in a sectarian nation; on the other hand, it reflects an opinion on the lack of effective planning policies in Lebanon. Both assertions imply an understanding of space as socially produced; an argument put forward by Henri Lefebvre (1991) in his seminal work *The Production of Space*. As Lefebvre argues, a social space like the city is "the outcome of of a sequence and set of operations", subsuming "things produced...and their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity" (Lefebvre 1991: 73). His argument implies the existence of contending power dynamics that constantly reshape city-spaces, which, in turn, impact how they are experienced and who has a right to access them.

The last point is of particular interest to this article, which looks to understand how public spaces are negotiated and contested in the southern Lebanese city Tyre. The "right to the city" as a theoretical-spatial concept is closely dependent on the existence of public space (Mitchell 2003), and the boundaries of this right are changing, as citizens grapple with how and when to exercise it. Public spaces —as meeting points and places to connect —take on heightened importance in a sectarian nation like Lebanon. They can be places for postwar reconciliation (Larkin 2012) or reminders of the past; they can also be places through which power dynamics are negotiated (Nucho 2016) and claims to citizenship are made.   Tyre —one of the largest cities and administrative districts in south Lebanon— is considered a peripheral space, both in terms of its geographical location and its lagged socioeconomic development relative to central Beirut (Deeb 2006). Its constructed marginality has also produced different expressions and understandings of public space, three of which will be examined in this article: the public beach, Tyre garden, and the flag square.

Tyre's public beach is among the cleanest in Lebanon, bringing in a notable number of local and foreign tourists every summer. The sea has long been a part of the city's historical, sociocultural, and economic makeup, creating and/or buttressing narratives of Tyre as a Phoenician port city; as a fishing town; and/or a touristic, leisure space. More recently, the public beach has stood in stark contrast to the increasing privatization of Lebanese shores, providing one of the best maintained, accessible, and affordable swimming venues.

The perceived publicness of Tyre's beach and it being used to that end is significant on domestic and global fronts. On the one hand, it challenges the failure of local state policies in providing clean and open shores; on the other hand, it affirms the "ungovernability" of the Mediterranean Sea and its environmental implications as a shared natural resource. Thus, when situated within broader power dynamics and contexts, Tyre beach becomes a space for negotiating different conceptions of (inter)national belonging and identity — a venue to contend with cultural forms of citizenship.

Another contested public space in the city is the public garden, located on the southern peripheries of Tyre. The triangular area covers approximately 0.2 km² and is mostly unexploited, despite its potential to link Tyre's mainland to surrounding towns and neighborhoods. The public garden has become a topic for discussion among some local stakeholders as well as local and international NGOs, the former of whom are reluctant to activate the space and the latter of whom find its activation a public right for citizens. Thus, Tyre's garden has become an ideological battleground for discourse on civic engagement, participatory policymaking, and social justice in the city.

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Lastly, the "Flag Square" (*sahet al-'alam*) near Tyre's northern entrance has become imbued with new meaning following the recent uprisings and mass mobilizations in Lebanon. Named after the large Lebanese flag in its center, the space mainly functioned as a roundabout —dotted with visual culture markers like billboards, posters, and political party flags. The October 17 uprisings, which united Lebanese under socioeconomic demands, transformed the use of the space. It became an area for protestors to meet and hold discussions; tents were erected; and forums for debate were held by different local activists, NGOs, and everyday citizens, thus, transforming from roundabout to public square. "Flag Square" reflects how public spaces are reconfigured and reclaimed during popular uprisings, acting as a stage on and through which discussions of citizenship, inequality and identity are performed. This act was part of a broader, national momentum to reclaim, repurpose, and reinvent public spaces through protest, hence integrating the geographically peripheral Tyre into nationwide debates and discourse.

The aforementioned spaces in Tyre are constantly contested and reinvented by users, reflecting the dynamic nature of social spaces and the ever-evolving discussion on who can access them. Both factors are impacted by underlying power relations—here, nation, citizenship, identity, and socioeconomic considerations are at play. Their push and pull dynamics can create multiple, and sometimes contradictory iterations of public space within the same city-space; they can also create pockets of momentum for social change.

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Public spaces

Revolution and Identity Building in Tripoli's Public Spaces

Jana Dhaybi*

In northern Lebanon, the deteriorating economic and social conditions over the decades have directly affected public spaces in their makeup, identity, and people's relationships with them. Tripoli, in particular, may be one of the richest Lebanese regions in public spaces due to its historical sites and archaeological monuments, which can provide ample room for the promotion of citizenship and the creation of a social, political and cultural fabric leading to comprehensive development.

However, what do these "public spaces" look like?

In form, Tripoli has abundant public spaces, but its residents do not benefit from most of them as public spaces mirroring their social context. In addition, these spaces have not been utilized without restrictions on everything related to the affairs of the community and its members' interaction with politics, culture, activities, living, education and the economy.

If we consider Tripoli's heritage landmarks first, we see that some have played a role in configuring a space or a type of public spaces. For instance, some public spaces in Tripoli located in ancient and traditional khans, such as Khan El Saboun, Khan Al-Khayyatin, and Khan Al-Askar constitute a gathering area for the city residents and visitors. Similarly, the ancient baths of Tripoli have constituted public spaces; however, out of the 11 baths, only "Hammam Al Abed" is still operational and is located in the old markets area. The residents of the city and its suburbs flock to it, and so do most foreign tourists who visit Tripoli.

Gardens and squares

On the other hand, there are a number of squares in Tripoli, such as Abdul Hamid Karami Square known as Al Nour Square, Al Tall Square, Al Koura Square, and the Mina Roundabout Square, as well as a number of other public parks, the most famous of which is Al Mansheya Park in the middle of Al Tall Square. Today, this garden has become almost non-operational and people rarely cross it or gather in it, while its role is limited to being a haven for beggars or homeless people.

Changes brought about by the October 17 uprising

All of the aforementioned has failed to help the residents of Tripoli shape their identity and social fabric within their public space, as a result of the city's marginalization by the state and the lack of effective plans that ensure equitable development. However, since the outbreak of the popular protest movement on October 17, 2019 to date, the relationship between the Tripolitanians and public spaces has turned upside down, as has been the case in various Lebanese areas. On the one hand, their relationships with these spaces have changed, and on the other hand, they have created new public spaces that contribute to framing their movements, bestow a special symbol to their living and economic demands, and mark their slogans against public order and authority.

Perhaps the most important achievement in Tripoli following the popular uprising has manifested itself in the city's regaining its usurped standing, albeit morally. As a result, it is dealt with as Lebanon's actual second capital after being dubbed the "bride of the revolution." Tripoli has acquired this title from its public squares, specifically from the Al Nour Square to which hundreds of thousands of Tripolitanians and people from surrounding and other areas flock to express their discontent. In this square, they have produced a new discourse that embodies their economic and political demands and sparked a major revolt against the ruling political class at the level of Tripoli and Lebanon.

The events witnessed in Al Nour Square after October 17, can be seen as one of the most prominent gains of the popular uprising, following the success of male and female citizens, for the first time in decades, in regaining public space in most areas, thus shattering the idea of Beirut's centrality. Al Nour Square is one of the squares that have shaped its common public space and broken its stereotyped traditional role as a roundabout for passing cars only. Similarly, its role as a geographic entity where events unfold has been transcended by that of a civil entity reinforcing the concept of citizenship and an essential component contributing to the making of the revolution, ensuring its continuity and scheduling the fueling of the revolution or even its fading away.

One of the most prominent manifestations of people's changing relationships with the public squares in Tripoli is the expansion of the revolution to places and streets that were not available to them, such as Azmi Street, the port, and some inner streets. Even the vicinity of leaders' homes in Tripoli, which had its "prestige" and privacy in terms of surveillance and security, has been incorporated into the public spaces formed by the revolutionaries who have challenged such prestige by besieging the area and demonstrating in front of these homes while shouting revolutionary slogans.

After the popular uprising, Al Nour Square had its geographic and interactive scope widened to include other roads leading to the square where some activists have set up tents to hold dialogues on political, economic, educational and cultural issues.

In turn, these tents have also formed "public spaces" accessible to the public in the open air where they can meet, hold discussions and raise awareness at various levels. As for some institutions and offices which are symbolic of the state and the authorities, they have become free-for-all. Examples include the Serail, public financial institutions, banks, and Kadisha Electricity Company which have been transformed from mere public offices into public spaces visited by citizens to express their anger, opinions and demands.

Although the creeping poverty has expanded to the heart of Tripoli in light of the worsening economic crisis, chaos and high unemployment, the city residents have succeeded in public squares in practicing the concept of citizenship and in engaging in political life, after politics had been rather an unattainable realm in this city.

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Beirut

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