International Institute of Social Studies

Erasmus

A Citizenship Project:
Lebanese Youth's Insurgency in the Wake of 'Thawra'

Research Paper

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The Hague, The Netherlands
November 2020

Disclaimer

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the institute.

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List of Acronyms

CSOs   *Civil Society Organizations*

ICESCR   *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*

IG   *Instagram*

MFD   *Mouwatinoun Fi Dawla (مواطنون في دولة) – 'Citizens in a Nation'*

NGOs   *Non-Governmental Organizations*

SVA   *Student Volunteer Army*

ABSTRACT

Placed within a dramatically unstable and continuously changing context, this research paper will explore how the Lebanese youth is constantly rearticulating notions and rearticulations of refusal of the state and status-quo – starting with the wake of the October 2019's uprisings, 'Thawra' , and throughout today's ongoing crises. This study seeks to explore the fruits of years of youth civic activism (or the absence of it) – ironically, the same fruits of years of corrupt confessionalism – giving way to the reinvention of citizenships among youth, in practice and in ideas. The youth's emerging citizenships will be explored as diverse and chaotic processes in a continuum, and mostly, insurgent.

As such, the research allows us to look closer into youth articulations of refusal, activism and emerging citizenships to further build on the notion of insurgent citizenships "in the making", over different spaces and temporalties. By looking closer at dynamics of organic civic initiatives, complexities of intergenerational politics and role of youth activism in Lebanon, this research will develop on three explorations: (1) the terms upon which this youth civic activism shaped and continued to form post-Thawra; (2) the processes and scope of emerging citizenships over various everyday civic dimensions; and (3) the notion of insurgent citizenships as well as pathways of change suggested by the youth..

RELEVANCE TO DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Through this research, I to aim to understand how alternative articulations open up discursive spaces for unfolding and insurgent notions of citizenship among youth that contest the dominant schemes. This builds on the dynamics between the dominant citizenship schemes and the emerging ones carried by young agents in crisis-ridden contexts. I hope to offer insight on the chaotic configurations of socio-political change in Lebanon from the perspective of youth, as well as the diverse nature of refusal as activism and as everyday expressions. This may be of particular relevance in exploring civic innovation and contestation situated in intergenerational political conflicts. Conducting this research could eventually feed into debates of socio-political change and crisis-ridden contexts in the Middle East. It could also add to debates on the many forms of live and virtual communal engagements and how such collaborative efforts could support the articulation of emergent collective narratives among young agents.

KEYWORDS

Youth activism ; Citizenship ; Refusal ; Intergenerational politics ; Insurgent citizenships.

FOREWORD

To my mother and father, Salam and Oussama. You taught me the importance of freedom and never stopped pushing me – even when that meant I would end up far away from you. To you two precious beings, I owe more than I can ever give.
Thank you and I love you.

To my supervisor and inspirer in this journey, Naomi van Stapele. Without your abundant trust, grounding support and stimulating thought-process, I would have not been able to steer this work and unearth the ideas behind it. You pushed me to always challenge my assumptions and guided me in fostering fluidity along this journey. For that and more, I am grateful and I thank you.

To my second reader, Roy Huijsmans. In your own critical yet easy ways, you kept my work on track. Your unique take on things always carefully brought youth back into the picture. Thank you for entertaining my ideas and cultivating them in constructive, interesting directions.

To all my dear friends cutting their ways through today's chaos and strange times, we are all in this together.

To continuity in change,
To change in continuity;

To warmness in belonging,
To richness in difference;

To fluidity and openings;
To activism and art;
And to both the mind and the heart.

I.   Emerging Youth Articulations

خُذوا الأضواءَ والضّوضاءَ
عَن عَيني وَعَن أُذنـي
أَنَـا ابنُ الغَيـم
لي مِن دُونكُم بَرقي وَلي رَعْدِي

*"Take away the light,
take away the noise
from my eyes and my ears;*

*I am the child of the clouds
Without you, I have my own lighting,
my own thunder"*

*- Front cover of "17October",
a free collaborative civic newspaper
born in Thawra
(Lebanon– Issue 5 / June 2020)*

With its population impoverished, it's currency devalued, it's infrastructure on the ground, and it's capital disfigured and destroyed, Lebanon today is going through a series of crises that seem unprecedented and unpredictable. Within this shaky context, youth civic organization continued to shape over time upon chaotic, unstable and 'imperfect' terms that nevertheless generated support networks, intersubjectivities and openings for change (Harb 2018: 75). Youth involvement in the civic realm has been central in socio-political movements within the Lebanese society, constantly emerging fluidly - but in the last few months more than ever. Recently, Beirut has been experiencing new 'tentative and incoherent' sets of citizenship articulations and relationships, involving complex dynamics and led by youth (Jeffrey & Staeheli 2016:483). The terms, articulations and

dimensions of such emergent citizenships are yet to be explored, particularly in relation with the recent 2019 Thawra and the unfolding systemic crisis Lebanon is experiencing socially, economically and politically today.

Aside from the streets and public spaces, social media could be identified as a 'site of contestation and empowerment in the project of critical citizenship' (Durham 2019:754), and today more than ever with spread of the global pandemic that has put a strain on people's freedom of movement. Here, civic media quickly comes into play, as it embodies a powerful role in connecting the (real and virtual) voices of the youth. Rightly so, civic activism and media could be seen as the youth's sidekick in their uprisings and intergenerational political articulations in Lebanon. Naturally, the internet played a vital role in this research, as it was at most times the birthplace of my data and the richest route that lead me to youth encounters, expressions and articulations.

On these terms, this study looks to explore how young Lebanese agents rearticulate their citizenships in light of theThawra and all the instabilities in 2020 that follwed, both live and virtually. To do so, I will explore the unfolding and diverse forms of everyday refusal and activism, in ideas and in practice (Isin 2009: 377). These rejections of the status quo, which kept unfolding throughout Thawra and the series of instabilities that followed, will be analyzed to draw on the flows and meanings of such articulations in terms of citizenship: as rights, as involvement, and as belonging and identity. Such a research will feed on notions of youth, intergenerational politics, refusal and acts of citizenship to further understand the terms and dimensions of an emergent collectivity within the dominant Lebanese discourse: a set of insurgent citizenships. By placing refusal at the center of the emerging articulations, this study builds on Holston's notion and develops on its "in the making" aspect, where the insurgent citizenships of the Lebanese people are seen as continuous (everyday) processes that shape the context, while getting shaped by it. The entanglements between the dominant and the emerging discourses are central to these citizenships, and are driven by the power of refusal. Never along the lines of this study will these above notions be attributed with fixed and monolithic connotations, but will rather be understood in their fluid multiplicities and intersectionality.

This journey was carried with an ethnographic spirit, is it was based on the ideas and practices of young Lebanese actors around their rights, involvement and identities as citizens. It relied on mixed forms of virtual conversations, as well as observations. I interrogate actions as well as representations which, once analyzed, portray momentarily the reinvented citizenships and the continuously emerging interplay between social relations, politics and economic structures as they change within young Lebanese citizens. I hope to understand the temporary formulations of refusal by youth, which articulate as insurgent citizenships that may or may not be intentionally evolving but are certainly revealing. Lebanese youth's citizenships – including mine – have been tied up by historical, political, social, ethnosectarian pulls, which limited them while creating

them. I find myself naturally drawn to explore the narratives, constrains and articulations of the 'new' emerging citizenships in Lebanon today, as these are being so evidently and aggressively reinvented by many young Lebanese in the last couple of months. These multidimensional encounters and articulations, which shaped and cut their way through the dominant status-quo over the years and continue to do so, are to be explored to give voice to a youth, its uprisings and its counter-formulations – on the streets and online.

> "The *communitas* of these mass demonstrations does not deny differentiation; rather, it helps us perceive and explore dimensions of hope born in tensions" (Turner, 1967)

Author's Note: Art

With its ability to change our minds, art stands as a transformative instrument for civic engagement, reclamation and contestation (Nossel 206:103). When I found myself unable to place it at the centerstage of this research, I chose to feature some of the insurgent artwork I encountrered along my online explorations, for illustrative and appreciation purposes. Without having to analyze it, the included artwork supports the research ideas and entertains the journey.

II. Crisis-Ridden Context

1. Structurally Constrained State

The Lebanese inherited confessional systems have always been its curse. Since its independence from the French colonial empire in 1943, Lebanon has been built on a power-sharing scheme of confessional democracy, where sectarianism and patronage rendered the state a tribal one destined to struggles. The 1943 National Pact entrenched confessionalism, which dictates that the President must be Maronite, the Prime Minister Sunni, and governmental positions are to be equally distributed among Shi'a, Druze, and other minorities (Deets 2018: 138). This setup put sectarianism at the core of the state and the nation. Within this layout, political and economic spheres meshed, public and private lines blurred, the nation became fragmented, and the elitist personal rule stood strong. Within these divided Lebanese political systems, the state no longer was effective in its role nor responsible for the provision of services (Abou-Habib 2011:446).

The 1950s civil war between Muslims and Christians laid the foundation for the haunting 1975 civil war, which went on for fifteen lost years and ended in 1990 with the signing of the Taiif Agreement. While the latter national accord was the only viable option to end years of bloodshed, it further entrenched the sectarian divisions in post-war Lebanon. These power-sharing mechanisms, masked under a peace agreement, gave the "militias-turned-parties" access to state resources and empowered their public networks (Rizkallah 2017: 2058). The same elites who ruthlessly fought each other continue to build on lifelong divisions and the enthosecatarian system that rules every sphere of life for a Lebanese citizen. As political parties split amongst themselves the financial, security, education and health care institutions along with parliamentary seats, they similarly split all state funds (Deets 2018: 139). Parliament and state members are historically and personally tied into public/private circles and identity networks, which feed the communal and ethnopolitical ties they build their sect autonomy on (ibid: 140). Keeping the state "weak" became in the interest of all involved
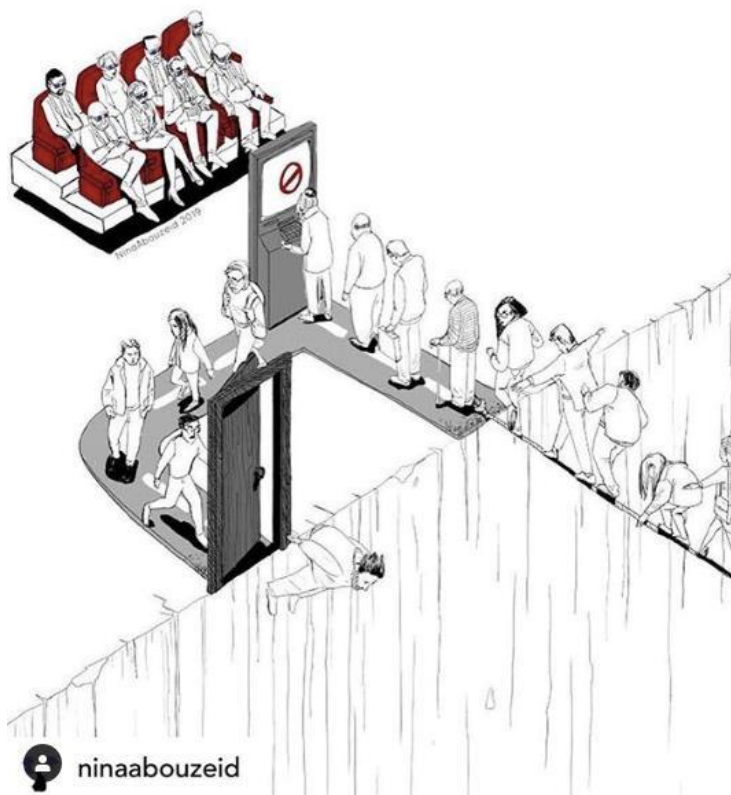
political parties, rendering the Lebanese governmental system structurally constrained with the state not driven to represent the communal interest of the Lebanese public. This Lebanese sectarian democracy scheme produces obstacles in the face of change or civil/secular entities, as Kingston describes it being "path-dependent". Sectarianism is a deeply rooted aspect within the political landscape and it feeds on notions of Lebanese identities and echoes in ideological, social and economic dimensions, over the years. In this way, each citizen is given his place in this divided masked democracy.

Lebanon's geographically strategic position right between the East and the West has tied it at the centre of boiling political interventionism, since the colonial era and throughout its history. In fact, post-war, conflicting regional agendas that go far beyond Lebanon's territory intersected heavily within the local political scene to involve countries that neighbor it, (like Syria and Israel) and actors that control it (like the USA and Iran). In 1997, the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound was fixed and this "dollarization" translated into an increase in capital inflow, in hopes of decreasing interest rates and increasing savings (Baumann 2019: 7, 2012: 113). In the years to come, the Lebanese government continued to undeservingly receive soft loans from American and European coalitions (Baumann 2012: 209) while failing to pay off any of these loans and tying the country down with a multitude of heavy debts. Financial struggles became at the forefront of political interventionism in the region and in Lebanon, with national and regional arrangements keeping the political terrain stable for short periods of time (ibid:149). However, as American-Syrian relations deteriorated in 2000, tensions and conflicting interests brought instability to the national scene. In 2005, Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik el Hariri, who was the father of neoliberal Western- relations (Baumann 2019: 11), was assassinated, causing greant regional and national political turmoil. These disenchantments led to a war with Israel one year later, out which came Hizbollah, a growing armed governmental party seen as the ideological offspring of Iran. This translated into the US moving quicker and closer into the political scene of Lebanon, intervening through political parties and international organizations to act against Islamic Iranian regional and local agendas advancing on the regional scene. The neighboring war in Syria, which began as a popular uprising in 2011 and quickly spiraled into a full blown armed conflict, has naturally been the region's axial element, around which all the powerful players entered Lebanon's political mess, fostering their dispersed interests and setting agreements with different political coalitions independently. Within the crisies dynamic, the socio-political and economic conditions have been shifting nationally, all of which weight on the Lebanese citizen's local and communal spheres. In this sense, by historically and continuously shaping the economic and political scenes on the international and regional levels, exogenous interventionism has been contributing in the making of Lebanese citizenships on the national, local as well as individual levels (Ciprut 2008: 348).

2.   Citizenships & Memories of Division

The Lebanese society, like most other postcolonial ones, has always lacked a healthy national narrative and a cohesive governmental apparatus (Nagel and Staeheli, 2016: 505). Since its creation by the French Mandate in the 1920s, the hegemonic scheme allowed competing political elites to meticulously distribute power, resources and land amongst themselves – splitting as well the nation by sects. The dominant structural and historical formulations left Lebanese citizens heavily weaved into religious differences when organizing political, economic and social dimensions. Naturally, this society's citizenship is highly fragmented, with a dense web of actors and groups participating simultaneously yet disjointedly in the reproduction of citizen ideas, values and practices (ibid: 512). The parties' power and control over the state was fortified post-war as the Taiif Agreement further entrenched divisions in the nation and in almost every household. Over time, the Lebanese citizenship regimes and the corrupt confessional systems became intimately related, and eventually "mutually reinforcing" each other (Jaulin 2014:250).

The complex interplays of colonial legacies, sectarian institutionalization, political naturalization, interventionism and a weak state continued to set out the course of Lebanese citizens. Various historical instances have characterized the formation of sectarian belonging in people's minds, with some citizens still guided till this day by the memory of the civil war and its 'Green Line' that once separated "East-Muslim" Beirut from its "West- Christian" half (Monroe 2016:56). That is one of the many, overlayered and interrelated historical obvious forward articulation of this 'difference-based formulation' (Holston 2008:40) would be the Lebanese personal status law, which governs marriage, divorce, custodies and inheritance strictly through religion, creating obstacles for intersectoral marriage and secular expressions outside of recognized sects (Deets 2018: 138). Another representation of these divisions would be the "ethno-religious agendas in the historical production of urban space" (Hourani 2015). In Lebanon, neighborhoods, streets and regions have inclusionary sectarian boundaries and entail their own sets of class- and sect-based terms of inclusion, reinforcing the dominant 'framings of citizenships'. Two big examples of these differentiated spaces would be (Hourani 2015: 186):

1. 'Solidere': *This neoliberal project was the brainchild of the biggest Sunni leader at the time, Prime Minister Hariri and his elite family, which involved the cosmopolitan reconstruction of Beirut's traditional and historical center after the devastating 80s civil war.*
2. 'The Solemn Promise Project': *Hizbollah's approach, anchored in an innovative not-for-profit organization, to reconstruct the main Shi'a urban center (Haret Hreik) in the suburbs of Beirut, after the 2006 war with Israel.*

Such political moves define who is to be included where, and what beliefs are to be perpetuated, over the territory and history of Lebanon, thus separating the citizens:

> "Always in competition, such agendas legitimize political actors and institutions, consecrate identities and delineate the relations between them. These struggles, in turn link to 'larger structures of rule and belonging,' formal and informal, that shape the body politic" (Hourani 2015: 185).

Within this differentiated citizenship scheme (Holston 2008:40), Lebanese citizens are weakened rather than empowered, eventually losing sense of rights and duties, space and history, formality and informality, legality and legitimacy, privileges and basic necessities. The history and conditions of the creation of the Lebanese citizenships limited their potential, while simultaneously reinforcing the hegemonic political status quo (Jaulin 2014:251). A certain daunting sense of 'powerlessness' and mistrust has become a familiar feeling within Lebanese society. Although the aforementioned systemic structural bounds and exogenous factors have miraculously upheld the Lebanese political order for the last century, "these social bases […] are beginning to shift, generating both hopes and fears" (Deets 2018: 135). The status-quo has been getting pressured by the young agents in particular.

3.   Youth Activism & Thawra

The grounds have been shaking under the feet of Lebanese citizens since the creation of the nation itself. The youth, in particular, has been distressed in a conflicting reality: they are conceived as both the "builders of the future" while stigmatized as "disruptive and parasitic forces" (Khalaf et al, 2009:2). Post-war, particularly from 2005 onwards, young people became engaged in activism and political life in Lebanon (Harb 2018:76). Simultaneously, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) bloomed post-war, eventually gaining their place as front-runners in most if not all national protests as well as social activities.[1] This brewing dynamic explored debates, pushed boundaries and created "new forms of collective action" which allowed the youth to "congregate, interact and dream" (Harb 2018:80-75).

In her recent work, Mona Harb concluded that networks' engagement and organization is creating openings within the oligarchic system (2018:90). This rise against the state has almost always been fueled by everyday idioms and popular basic concerns, rather than by a clear and sharp vision. Youth-led civic activism could be distinguished by five features: non-structured, leaderless, research and action-grounded, highly reliant on social media and, *mostly*, diverse (ibid:88). Various momentary 'small wins' represented the youth civic efforts ability in creating openings in the system, the story of *Beirut Madinati* being one of them. After being excluded from any form of state electoral activities, some Lebanese citizens emerged with a revolutionary independent secular party that aimed to represent the civil society in recent municipal elections (2016, 2018) under the name of *Beirut Madinati* (بيروت مدينتي - which translates as *Beirut is My city)* (Deets 2018: 133). All though this group was far from winning the majority of the seats in past elections, such a political appearance on the religion-infected scene painted the picture of a much needed iterative process through which civic efforts may be forming socio-political circles very subtly, possibly giving way for a change in society (ibid: 153).

The most notable moments of national youth civic movements are, arguably, the short-lived *2011 'Arab Spring'-inspired protests*, the promising *2015 'You Stink'* movement[2]; and lastly, the recent remarkable *2019 October Thawra*. On the night of the 17th of October 2019, the much awaited *Thawra (ثورة arabic for 'Revolution')* was born. The people of Lebanon took to the streets and screamed with a unified and enraged voice; one they occasionally used since the wake of the 1970s civil war. This collective move was not in any way organized,

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[1] It may be important to note that NGOs and CSOs were, in some instances, overshadowing the state in service provision, which may disempower rather than support citizens in assuming and claiming their entitled rights and duties towards the state (Abou-Habib 2011:443).

[2] An activist movement that emerged early 2005 during the crisis of waste management which led it to be called "You Stink". The movement was led by "seasoned activists" and echoed refusal from the Arab Uprisings (Kraidy 2016: 20).
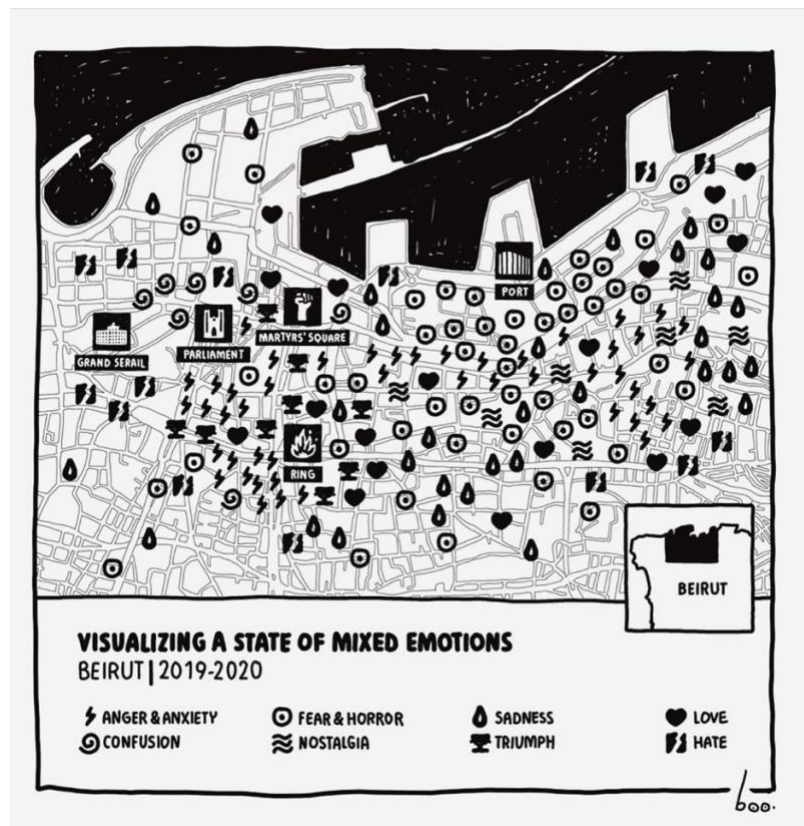
but was rather an impulsive one which was carried out by thousands of angry citizens one Thursday night. The people took to the streets initially to stop the drafting of a new tax law that imposes fees on WhatsApp users, in an attempt to cover the fiscal debts of the privatized telecommunication compagnies owned by state members and their associates. This angered night may have begun on these terms, but this small spark was carried by young angry protestors to become a nation-wide wildfire catching on all of the state's mischiefs. Soon after, the infamous chant of "Kilon Yaane Kilon"[3] filled the streets and public spaces, as the young people rose against all leaders with no exceptions in unprecedented manners, which meant the sectarian bridges of belonging and the shackles of fear may be shaking at last. This story of the angered night was, very rightly so, the start point of this (personal and academic) journey, but not where it began or ended. Contestations did not happen in a vacuum and definitely did not cease when the youth were out of the streets. Thawra, the last of the series of youth-led uprisings, is yet to be explored, unpacked and understood in continuum with all that has preceded and followed it; as it could hold rich and revelatory articulations of the emerging and dynamic reinventions of citizenship among young Lebanese.

4.   New Chapter: 2020's turmoil

The shortcomings of the power-sharing scheme hit Lebanon strongest post-Thawra, with the beginning of the new year of 2020. The banking system was already crashing and the dollar-devoted Lebanese Lira was in crisis, causing devastating inflation nation-wide and related political instabilities. By the beginning of summer, the socio-economic deterioration, political deadlocks and destabilizing spillovers from regional agendas were quickly met with the Covid-19 global pandemic (Mazzucotelli 2020: 29). Within these intersecting and intertwining series of pressures, the cards were reshuffled. The overwhelming corona crisis locked angered revolts inside, emptied revolutionary spaces, and rendered businesses even more morbid. Since October 2019's revolution, over seven hundred establishments had to shut down, further halting down the local economy and sending close to thirty-thousand employees home (Bizri et al, 2020: 10). This intersected with local shortage of national and foreign currencies topped by government and bank restrictions on money withdrawals and transfers. Today, the majority of citizens are struggling to find new and miraculous ways to pay off debts, survive the day-to-day, all the while co-existing with the crippled system that brought them to their knees; all while fighting off a global pandemic. Lebanon and every one of its citizens have been put in a critical spot, with projections that, by the end of this year, the dept-to-GDP is expected to skyrocket to 160%: "this pandemic could not have come at a worse time" (ibid: 16).

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[3] This chant, translating from Arabic (كلن يعني كلن) into "All means all", has been the signature title joining together frustrated and uprising young citizens since the early days of Thawra.

A new layer of exhausting pressure was thrown on top of the Lebanese youth's heavy shoulder on Tuesday the 4th of August 2020. Due to the criminal negligence of its corrupt political leaders, Lebanon experienced a massive explosion that happened in its pumping-capital's and its main and only port: Beirut Port. This resulted in the tragic destruction of the city of Beirut, killing and dismembering innocent citizens while traumatizing an entire nation. Every single citizen was left with the remains of a dear city, fragments of exhausted hope and the inherent duty to fix their state's mischiefs. The layering of this tragedy on top of all preceding crises meant this blow was stronger than all those that came before it and thecrisis ridden Lebanese context appears to be unprecedently unstable and unpredictable. The pillars that once seemingly held up Lebanon have begun to fall one at a time, starting with its trembling power-sharing national Mandate, weakened banking and services systems, failing economic system and threatened livelihood (Yaha, M. 2020). Within this turmoil, youth, refusal and activism had to once again adapt, readjust and cutting their new ways through.

VISUALIZING A STATE OF MIXED EMOTIONS
BEIRUT | 2019-2020

⚡ ANGER & ANXIETY   ◉ FEAR & HORROR   💧 SADNESS   ♥ LOVE
◎ CONFUSION   ≈ NOSTALGIA   🏆 TRIUMPH   HATE

III.   Positionality: and/or

I personally fully identify as one of the many young Lebanese that have collectively struggled alongside their families, friends, communities and institutions from the structurally flawed and economically collapsed regime. Over my 26 years, I never genuinely held a sense of true belonging to any society beyond my personal circle, which happened to exist on a piece of land I did not quite work my terms with. I've always carried myself around the system with resentment and hopelessness; with a set of fundamental questions that I had to accept as unanswerable; and with memories – some of which are not mine – that color my relationship with the place I call 'home' so undoubtedly. Working out my own terms with this country, along with its history and cracks, seemed too exhausting and somewhat out of reach. It was only when I witnessed, from afar, the rise of the people along with the fall of what I knew to be Lebanon, that all the emotionally-charged articulations of belonging and citizenship rose within me. As warm as could be, belonging is in fact such a good feeling to feel.

By the time I was effectively writing my research, the situation back home seemed closest to a snowball rolling down the top of a bumpy and dangerous slope, with nothing in sight to stop it. In various moments of rage, fear, urgency – behind my screen here in the Hague – my position as a Lebanese young citizen and as a researcher kept morphing and clashing, to eventually merge in a somewhat personal research journey. It was important to learn swiftness in switching between seats. I found myself needing and taking multiple moments of pause, self-reflection and adaptation along the journey. Only when I stopped and noticed the magnitude of my internal shifts after the August 4 blast did I realize the centrality of the role I play in this research and the responsibility that it carries. Everything I was looking at was too close to the heart and I needed to repeatedly and regularly remind myself of my position in it all: I am a researcher, shaping and getting shaped by this work.

With the unpredictable series of changes back home, adaptations naturally followed in the purpose, methods and approach of this research. With the weights only getting heavier, I needed to make sure that my work did not to take away from the energies of the youth but rather build on it, and so I tried at the best of my ability to hop on the observer seat more often. Today, I acknowledge sitting in a privileged position here in the Hague, while my family and friends back home struggle with the intersecting crises and tragedies. I feel the outmost responsibility to open my eyes and ears to the entrenched historical features of citizenship and the muffled articulations of a collectively emerging sense of community, intertwining within the Lebanese youth. This story is theirs to tell and so my positionality as a Lebanese young citizen is to be used as a tool of analysis enabling me to take my questions, theories, and knowledge into the spaces of existence and interactions to analyze the youth, their insurgencies, flows of citizenship not only as a researcher, but as one of them.

IV.   Theories & Understandings

Youth

Entrenched with fluidity, this research requires the notion of youth to follow in its spirit. Indeed, this notion is the most central and possibly most problematic in the research; as it could create space for narrow generalizations and ignore variegations in a static manner. As such, this research takes youth as a fluid, heterogenous and dynamic notion that stands for those who self-identify as such. Moving away from the singular groupings of dominant political discourses in Lebanon, 'youth' is understood as a social construct that moves with everyday complexities of young people's lives and their context (Haris 2010: 575).

In any society, young citizens become political only at a certain stage in their lives, when their "economic independence (profession) and cultural markers of adulthood (driver's license, drinking, marriage)" intertwine within their political life (McDonogh, 2009: 146). In crisis-ridden and young democratic systems such as the Lebanese one, the youth find themselves excluded and marginalized with their transition towards adulthood "stalled" (Murphy 2012: 11) or in a "state of waiting" (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009). Naturally, students and young individuals are often seen as the social driving force in non-democratic states, frequently leading on revolutionary activism (Parreira et al, 2019: 4); hence my interest in looking at the people of Lebanon who identify as young, myself being one of them.

On these terms, this study sees *youth* as a constructed identity that is fluid and cross-cuts through a range of age, ethnic, sectarian, gender, class and ideological spheres, to hold a common aspiration for 'a better tomorrow' (Murphy 2012:14). 'Youth' no longer only stands on demographics to include people from a certain age-group; but rather, this narrative is shared amongst individuals that consider themselves 'young' due to the society's limited opportunities and stagnant socio-political and/or economic dynamics (ibid:15).The fluidity of the notion of 'youth' gives way to a variety of narratives and identities that coexist and hold variegated significances amongst individuals, over time and in different localities. In particular, the understanding of Arab youth has been characterized by its openness, where induvials seem to "move in and out of this generational narrative fluidly" (ibid:16). As such, in this research, youth is seen as "a narrative based on common shared experiences of marginalization and exclusion", that joins together a diverse collection of actors that are gendered, classed and differentiated by ideologies and religious identities (ibid: 6, 18).

Although the various individuals joined under the umbrella of "youth" differ in many ways from each other, I should acknowledge that, throughout this research, I allow myself to refer to a 'Lebanese youth'. I employ this 'static/common' grouping to a highly fluid notion not to deny the diversities that characterize it, but in an attempt to move close to a youth that is less fragmented by the historical and structural divisions of Lebanon.
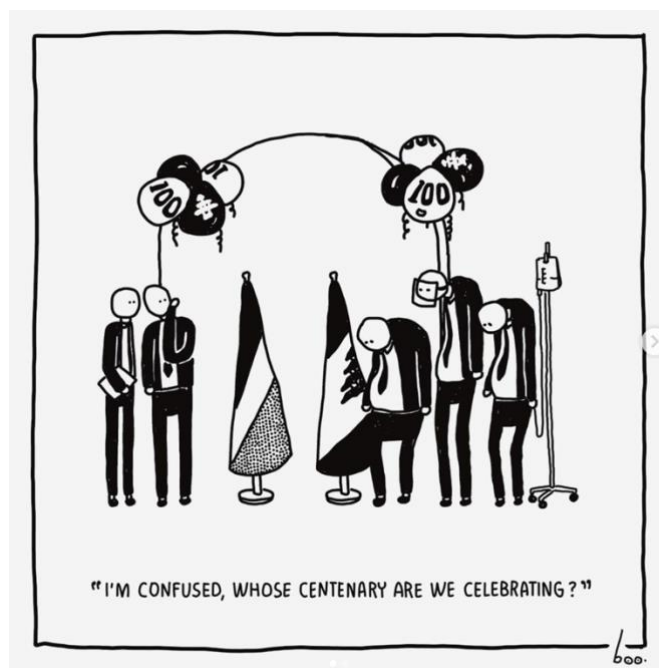
Intergenerational Politics

> "The social and historical processes' and limits a generation to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and a characteristic type of historically relevant action" (Mannheim 1928: 290).

Political societies are always intergenerational, as all citizens are born into a historical framework heavy with traditions, culture, polity and collective memories (Thomson 2009:26). At every other moment, generations hold obligations for and with earlier/future generations (Gossiries & Meyer 2009: 3). In this logic, young citizens see themselves as carriers of a history and preservers of tradition, all while having the ability to rearticulate and shape new identities. Within unstable contexts of intergenerational conflict, such as the Lebanese one, the youth operate as a "social group with an evident civic deficit" and a fear for the common future: young people are unable to exercise and fully enjoy their rights within the society they live in, today and tomorrow (Benedicto & Morán 2007: 608).

To develop on these multi-sited dimensions of social life, Lawford discusses the notion of 'generativity' among citizens, which stands as the concern for future generations and a legacy of the self. This understanding is central in intergenerational contexts as it integrates aspects of an actor's personal agency with aspects of communion and future generations (Lawford & Ramey, 2017:134). In broad terms, agency refers to the self-oriented and self-acted goals and capacities of a person; whereas communion refers to the collective care and cooperation with/for others. When young citizens involve both their self-advancing goals and their communal interests, they are actualizing their generativity which is tightly linked to their community involvement (ibid: 133).

Within intergenerational politics, time distance and lack of overlapping between generations within the same political society are the main challenges (ibid: 4). Bartels and Jackman (2014) help us understand these differences by proposing a new political learning model that bring into the picture two interrelated elements: "(1) period-specific 'shocks' that reflect the distinctive political events of a given time period" (*ex: Recent Beirut Port explosion)* and "(2) age-specific 'weights' that reflect the extent to which

"I'M CONFUSED, WHOSE CENTENARY ARE WE CELEBRATING?"

these shocks are internalized by individuals at various points in the life cycle" (*ex: the 80's civil war*) (Neundorf & Smets, 2017: 14). As such, intergenerational political change arises from the interactions happening between contextual 'shocks' and 'weights', which are taken up differently by each young and adult citizen. To further explore these dynamics, Vanderbeck & Worth (2015) bring into the picture the notions of spaces, memories and negotiations of values; where mutual prejudgments could exist between different generations. These entanglements of intergenerational politics give way to various spaces of negotiations within public spaces, institutions, media, neighborhoods, schools and in everyday interactions. Young actors' refusal and expressions, based on both personal and broader interests, will be explored within these spaces to further understand the intergenerational conflict in Lebanon.

Youth Refusal & Insurgency

Refusal and insurgency are the main colors that paint this research, as the Lebanese youth movements and interactions carry with them nuances of rejection, opposition and denial everywhere they formed. Refusal refers to civic frustration, discontent and rejection of the ruling order, and it does not always involve action nor any forms of ruptures. When the youth express refusal with the status-quo, they are in a quest for emancipation and structural change. This could shape as activism, one of the main refusal dynamics that moves the youth's citizenship notions.

This conception allows the young subjects of a community to depict and reconceptualize themselves as active agents "or, at least, as potential participants […] with the possibility of claiming new rights" (Benedicto & Maron 2007: 617). Refusal could also be expressed through everyday articulations of agents within a society. Such everyday expressions (social, political and economic) are diverse and fluid as they highly depend on the unfolding context and move with it (i.e. art, civic communal efforts, alternative media, etc.). Ideally, refusal changes ideas and actions, and new habits of cooperation are adopted (on a localized level), for an eventual collective change in customs (on a broader level) (Jeffrey & Staeheli 2016: 486).

The youth's varied and chaotic articulations and presentations of refusal reflect modes of involvement that could work around insurgency against the existing colonial and asymmetrical power relations, in hopes of abstracting 'another

sphere' of belonging outside the dominant relations of power (Tabar & Nahas 2010: xvii). Insurgency refers to the complex and diverse strategies of resilience employed to address socio-historical patterns and dominant configurations. In this research, it will be understood as "an agility, an adaptability, a refusal to accept the world as it is, a refusal to get stuck into fixed patterns of thought" (Kahn-Harris, 2011). This could take various nuances. In the Lebanese context, the overriding insurgencies have 'revolutionary' inclinations (which seek to entirely replace the existing political order and insert new economic and social structures) as well as 'reformist' connotations (which do not entail the replacement of the existing order but seek to undertake structural and policies reforms).

When exploring refusal and insurgency, these notions are not to be fully situated within the agency of citizens but have to be understood in relation with the dominant and historical structures of the context they thrive in. Refusal and related insurgencies changed with the context, with time and with space. In this manner, this research will follow and explore refusal and insurgency within young Lebanese people. Not as merely "new" pervasive dynamics, but rather as "disruptions" in a continuum, within hegemonic and dominant discourses.

Citizenships: Ideas and Acts

Instead of replacing the dominant systems, youth refusal and insurgencies actually coexist - very unstably - with the entrenched understandings: "the insurgent will undoubtedly and unconsciously perpetuate historically dominant attributes of citizenship" (Holston 2008:13).

Therefore, in this research, *citizenship* will be understood as a complex dynamic concept that continuously emerges in the ordinary socio-political spheres of life, which could translate in a person's everyday life (1) as rights and responsibilities, (2) as communal involvement and political participation and (3) as belonging and identity (Rumsby 2015: 3). Citizenship as rights and duties articulates as entitlements coupled with duties that intrinsically guide the citizen's engagements within her/his society. These conceive social, political and economical dimensions, which overlap in many instances. Citizenship can also be laid down as political involvement and engagement within one's community, which involves the (active) drive to participate in the decision-making processes on national, regional and sometimes broader levels. Regardless of the form this participation takes (i.e. violent, peaceful, in/formal, artistic, national, international, etc.), it holds with it communal "us" connotations that go beyond just the personal scope of interest. Identity and belonging are two other pillars that scaffold the notion of citizenship: the former involving emotional attachments and the later articulating as narratives and negotiated experiences involving individuals and their societal ties (Yuval-Davis 2006: 3; Mazzutcolli 2020: 28). These emotionally-tied notions involve dynamic processes which mix with memories, relations, places and future prospects when shaping citizenships.

These various 'registers' for citizenship exist on both the individual and the collective levels within a certain nation (Jeffrey & Staeheli 2016: 483), holding variegated and overlapping meanings. Anderson defines 'nation' as an "imagined community" that resides beyond physical or text exchanges, but rather exits in the mind of each member of the communion (1983: 6). As such, citizenship involves the negotiation and assemblage of perceptions, understandings and 'imaginaries', on personal and other broader dimensions.

Vinken explains that youth are developing a 'new biography of citizenship' distinguished by the ''dynamic identities, open, weak-tie relationships and more fluid, short-lived commitments in informal permeable institutions and associations'' (2005: 155). We are, therefore, in need of a new vocabulary for citizenship that would allow us to explore the emergence of new sites of struggles and new articulations of rights by the youth between regions, organizations and civic networks (Isin 2009: 368). Here, we bring in Engin Isin's (2008; 2009) extensive work on the notion of *acts of citizenship*, which she defines as individual and collective manifestations that rupture the habitual patterns and practices, through which members of society construct themselves as citizens. The emergence of this understanding followed the recent emergence of new 'sites' (ex. political bodies, networks, media, social organization, etc.), 'scales' (ex. cities, regional, international, etc.) and 'acts' (ex. protesting, organizing, art, etc.) that allow agents to transform themselves (and eventually the society), in claiming their rights and articulating ever-changing understandings (Isin 2009: 372). Acts of citizenship, moving between spaces and over time, are hence "inherently intersubjective and dialogical" (Rubmsy 2015: 4), which makes them revelatory in nature. A prominent example of such acts could be the reclamation of public space, both the real and virtual ones (Bergh & Ahmadou 2018: 102).

To fully respect the fluidity of this notion, the observed and analyzed acts of citizenship should stretch beyond the ordinary sphere of activism (i.e. protest, road blockades, etc.) to include everyday forms of ordinary refusal. On those terms, two fundamental principles carry the notion of *citizenship* along this research: firstly, it is a multidimensional notion, made up of several components and their interrelations (as rights, as involvement and as identity); and secondly, it is a collection of dynamic processes and acts – "deeds by which [the youth] constitute themselves (and others)" (Isin 2009: 371), continuously forming over space and time.

V.   Ethnographic Narratives & Encounters

The decision to conduct the research following an approach that understands everyday articulations and expressions of citizenship (1) within youth, (2) as rights, as participation and as identity, (3) over various intersecting spaces and dimensions, is the result of a conscious and personal preference over such a fluid view of people-state relations; as well as my belief that such lived articulations allow the youth to "momentarily subvert their marginal statuses" (Rumbsy 2015: 1), which in turn, can support them steer through the Lebanese intergenerational crisis.

This research is a journey of encounters, ideas, actions, flows and change.

Contained Fluidity

The above notions of youth, refusal, intergenerational politics and citizenship will be understood in the plurality of their meanings and multiplicity in their enactments, without trying to homogenize any understandings by "fostering synergistically constructive differences that humans can at long last acknowledge and celebrate" (Ciprut 2009: 348). The dynamism and interconnectivity between the notions allowes the research to explore them through various theoretical entries: *youth* and *refusal* interplay to rearticulate *emerging citizenships* within *intergenerational* political dynamics, giving way to *insurgent* citizens "in the making". Together, the notions highlight specific social phenomena that shape temporarily within young people in Lebanon. Indeed, acts and expressions of youth, as explored from their perspectives, momentarily invoke boundaries and understandings that are not fixed but rather fluid: refusal and citizenships change over time and space.

All though heavily based on fluidity, I will still need to place the research within a framework that makes the analysis more operational and grants the findings temporality that further validates them. As such, the analysis starts with October 2019's uprisings and ends a year later, in October 2020 after Beirut's August blast which brought abrupt contextual changes. I propose the analysis of local and online practices to reflect on youth's conceptions of citizenship and the mechanisms for achieving it (Benedicto & Maron 2007: 616). This research will focus on flows, interactions and dynamics of involvement over the recent periods through everyday expressions of active, mildly involved and uninvolved young citizens, both online and live. To record and explore various processes and expressions of youth refusal, I will need to employ a complementary selection of research methods which foster a safe and open space for the various individual and collective narratives and emerging citizenships to exhibit themselves in their truest forms.

Spaces of Refusal & The Internet

Naturally, I hoped to explore these articulations up close and personal, as my thirst for the streets kept building up as dynamics escalated and instability rose. However, this year had different plans in store for me with the overwhelming global pandemic, which made it difficult to be physically present in spaces and places of youth refusal to observe, collect and interact with the expressions.

When focusing on spaces and sites in their mainstream understandings, it becomes very easy to get trapped in narrow articulations of location-based connections, disregarding the variances and existing heterogeneities outside of these observed sites. To avoid such narrow ends, I have resorted to a more dynamic view which understands space as 'space of flows', which unlike the conventional space of place, is organized "around connection rather than location" (Hinne 2011: 29). On these terms, I believe that social relations are not simply linked to localities and spatial sites but are rather suspended within a circulating flow of moving spaces and connections. The internet, being the biggest data platform in modern history, became my research playground to which I resorted more than I would have liked to. The importance of this vast platform resided in its broad ability to represent and link together networks of online actors whether they are individuals, groups or organizations – which would eventually transpire into the rise of new imagined communities – both online and offline. The internet quickly gained its weight as "a place, cyberspace, where culture is formed and reformed" (Hinne 2011:9). As I dived into this open space, it granted me front-seat view to young socio-political expressions, artistic takes, organizational organization, civic media, everyday citizens' interactions in various formats of posts. It gave me more than what I needed, with a timestamp that became all the more important as time passed and the context kept shifting. I found myself dissecting pages on the lookout for elements and statements that resonated with the young people's political identities, senses of belonging, (un)involvement, space and time referrals as well as visions and priorities. Vinken suggests that the internet, typically a "leisure domain", became the space for youth to build their alternative routes of participation and to organize in new forms of "non-place-based communities" (2005: 155). It was there that I needed to look.

The openness and accessibility of this web also means that the data collection process could possibly never end; for with every quick swipe of social media at the end of a day, came a small piece of information about the people and the situation back home. The mass and continuity of data opened my eyes further to two central aspects of this research: (1) the ever-changing nature of the context; and (2) the fluidity of the notions at hand. This only reminds me of one important notice without which I cannot carry this research: all observed and analyzed articulations are not fixed views but rather momentary snapshots of the youth refusal and carried emerging citizenships in a continuum. Citizenship is never made, it is always "in the making" (Nagel & Staheili 2016: 512). In this sense, this research does not try to understand *what* youth

articulations are, but rather looks to explore *how* citizenships articulate and transform within youth, at this particular moment in the Lebanese context and online.

Virtual Ethnography

I became most aware of the fluidity of space, the diversity of involvement and the imaginability of communities when I found myself in the Hague yet able to identify with, and take part of,Lebanese civic movements. When I found myself away from it all, I was only interested in speaking with people, asking about the revolution, asking about family and friends, the emotions, our money at the bank, the crippled situation and where we could be heading. As I browsed, (re)posted and networked online, I was able to expand my digital spaces through civic pages of the Thawra, profiles of activists, media platforms, networks of civic groups as well as insurgent artists. My positionality and involvement in this study did not lead me to shift the research's direction into autoethnography. I do believe my current narrative (a young Lebanese living abroad) does not reflect that of the majority of young citizens that have recently been surviving under tragic series of crises and shifting through a paralyzing deadlock. Nevertheless, I used my position as a tool to expand my reach and have access to organic interactions and expressions from online youth platforms and pages. I let the people's (online and live) narratives and interactions portray ethnographically the data of this research. The notions of citizenship are heavily intertwined in the personal narratives of young Lebanese citizens which are 'suitable documents' for illuminating aspects of social relations and 'are situated at the intersection of human agency and social structure' (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 5). As such, virtual ethnography came naturally to carry this research rather than having the research resort to it.

Any assessment of sectarian narratives and practices "should consider their specific spatial and temporal context" (Mazzucotelli 2020: 25), all while being holistic and sensitive to all the various and ever-changing dimensions of interactions involved. As such, virtual ethnography emerges as a "multi-sited, […] experiential, interactive and engaged exploration of connectivity" (Hinne 2011: 19) where various methods and tools will be triangulated in an approach to complementarity exploring youth refusal in its different forms and potentials. When indicating that the research was multisided, it translates as the suspension of the observed ideas and behaviors over spaces and over time: in flows and consequences that exist in different places and are constantly moving with time.

To do so, this research relied on online semi-structured interviews/interactions with young people about their own narratives: in ideas and in actions. I carried digital dialogues and interactions with four young Lebanese citizens[4], both involved and uninvolved in the uprisings,

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[4] Refer to Table I.

most of whom seemed to have held more than one position in the last period of instability. These conversations flowed around three pilar moments[5]: *passé recent* (moments from their recent past, including Thawra), *présent* (moments lived out around the time of data collection, most notably the month of August with the explosion and carried changes) and *future proche* (projected moments in aspiration for tomorrow). The talks naturally followed the interviewee's input and their personal experience with the political and economic system, uprisings, instabilities, as well as their visions and aspirations as young Lebanese citizens.

To further voice out the youth's articulations and expressions, I resorted to the yet most interesting form of data collection: the observation of everyday acts, ideas and practices of refusal and/or citizenship carried online and on the streets, over the period of Thawra and all what followed. Considering social networking platforms, such as Instagram, one of the most prominent networking terrains and interfaces for state–society confrontation (Murphy 2012; 12), I searched, noted and analyzed youth-led efforts and online-based insurgent articulations through the observation of the following content:

- Pages for civic/community groups
- Pages for civic/community initiatives (political, social, economic and emergency response)
- Pages for activists and political bloggers
- Pages related to Thawra (i.e. announcements, videos/pictures, maps, contacts, etc.)
- Pages of civic media platforms (i.e. Megaphone News, "Daleel Thawra", "Thawra TV", digital newspaper '17October', etc.)
- Users' posts and comments
- User's online interactions

FGDs: Virtual Tool

Informal conversations also fed into this research through two focused-group discussions (FGDs). In their conventional understandings, FGDs do not make part of ethnographic approaches. In this study, however, I recreated this data collection method by using ethnographic principles to further explore the youth's articulations (refer to Annex I). With the help of my research assistant, Youssef, I (virtually) sat down with two heterogeneous groups of five young citizens, in the main urban hubs for youth uprisings: Beirut and Tripoli (refer to Table II). The meetings' unstructured and informal allowed the conversations to flow with the participant's changing and interrelated dynamics, thoughts and positions. There was very little interferences from the assistant's side or mine – we were taking the roles of listeners. The talks were full with moments of chaos, clarity, agreement and disagreements – some of which were relevant to my research, and others not so much, all while granting me a broader look into all what shapes up in the mind of a young citizen within this crippled, complex context.

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[5] Refer to Annex I.

VI.   Youth Citizenships "in the making"

This chapter will develop on three main ideas: firstly, the distorted and dynamic nature of youth refusal among young Lebanese citizens; and secondly, the emerging citizenship discourses within them; to finally develop on the notion of insurgent citizenships "in the making" and sketch out youth-led pathways of change picked from the field and online.

1st Idea - Chaotic & Moving Refusal

While recognizing the socially and structurally-constructed nature of the notions of "youth" and "refusal", this chapter will develop on their interplay and dynamism within the Lebanese context, particularly in terms of the 2019 Thawra and what followed of local instabilities.

Having been marginalized from formal political engagements, public spheres and mainstream media, the young people in Lebanon are looking to be part of a society via vibrant and innovative intervention efforts that hope to contest the dominant status-quo by developing their own hubs for state-society confrontation, in the streets and online. Lebanese youth activism has been shaping over the last ten years in variegated and chaotic terms. The youth refusal at hand is the "manifestation of the fluid, eclectic, pragmatic construction of Arab youth identities – another 'framing' of youth – which are formulated within the context of a triangulation of family, state and street" (Murphy 2012: 11). This will include moments of convergence and divergence, continuity and change, over space and time.

a.   An Intergenerational Chaos

When exploring youth as a political body within a certain context, the question arises by itself: what are politics like in this context and how is youth positioned within it?

In Lebanon, the youth and all the members that move to and from this fluid 'umbrella' have been excluded from the mainstream political institutions and activities, and they seem to fall in a somewhat problematic categorization scheme that is barely portrays them as "coming political subjects" (Isin, 2002:110). The intergenerational conflict in Lebanon has been historically and structurally constitutionalized through an exclusive election law, poor youth policy, peripheral ministry, which translates into the active marginalization of a large proportion of agents from

socio-economic and political spheres (Harb 2018:79). The young people of this nation are in a constant battle against the same old leaders. One frustrated active member of Mouwatinoun Fi Dawla (MFD) described the current governmental scheme as exclusive, one that makes it "very difficult for any candidates from outside of the mainstream politics to actual appear, let alone young ones" [6]. The reality of the situation has been expressed over years of youth frustration but a recent graffiti spotted in Cola, one of Beirut's busiest areas, puts this notion to more clarity than ever, as it read: "we inherited a broken world, and they call us a generation of failures"[7]. Members of this rising group envision themselves as limited within an inherited and closed intergenerational system that renders them inactive outsiders, unable and unequipped to practice their political independences and wills.

The troubling fact here is that the same war militias that fought each other throughout the fifteen years of war in the 70s and 80s are the same faces running today's crumbling systems. This selection of individuals and "feudal" families have been politically active over the years, "without formal or informal plans on handing over the state (or any parts of it) to new generations or fresh sets of faces"[8]. Nevertheless, promising early signs of "generational change" shaped during the 2015 'You Stink' movement and during the 2016 'Beirut Madinati' electoral run, where some memories and physical reminders of the civil war seemed to be fading with the emergence of post-Arab Spring activism (Deets 2019: 153). However, this activism is not necessarily well understood and absorbed by policy-makers and other political bodies, as the structure within which this youth-refusal shapes is based on "adult and traditional measures of engagement" (Harris 2010: 586). Nevertheless, the young actors never ceases to stop shaping themselves and their refusal, in a continuum over time and space.

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[6] Extract from the live webinar "100 Years: What's Next?", held on the day that marked the centennial anniversary of the establishment of Greater Lebanon. It was hosted by @Meghterbin.Mejtemiin and moderated by Chloe Kattar (@Leb.Historian), a young civic activist and historian that was particularly involved in Thawra and the period that followed. It entertained scholars and activists, providing them with a platform to exchange ideas and formulate post-2020 visions of the non-sectarian organizations or parties they represent (source: Facebook, September 2020)

[7] Post by @zakaria.jaber1 (source: IG, May 2020)

[8] Interview with Mira (September 2020)

b. Refusal in a Continuum

"The contextualized examples of youth activism challenge dominant approaches to the study of politics, political action, and activism in the Arab world […] – where events are interpreted as developing in a linear fashion from authoritarian rule towards liberal democracy. The study of youth activism in Lebanon contributes towards the challenge of this paradigm." (Kiwan 2018: 12)

The diverse groups of young political agents have been able to organize in innovative ways over various ruptures, mostly since the surge in national youth activism demanding reforms in 2005 (Kiwan 2019: 8). The most prominent moments of uprise are the Arab Spring inspired short-lived uprisings 2011, the trash-related 2015 'You Stink' movements leading to 2019's October Revolution. In this sense, the young dynamics have almost always been "re-emergent", rising in moments of urgency and dipping over consequent periods of instability. These youth-led groups organized in action-oriented immediate phases of 'reaction' to national crises, which were followed by more quiet periods of reflection (Carlton & Mills 2017: 783). A study on youth civic efforts builds on this aspect of "re-emerge", with the example of the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) in New Zealand which is a student-led emergency relief effort that surfaces consistently in the face of natural disasters. It showed that the youth build on, adapt and redevelop their organizational characteristics as they marked their appearances (ibid: 765). In this sense, the young faces that carries refusal during Thawra and after it, are most of the time the same ones that fostered moments of refusal and activism in previous years. The youth's "re-emergence" as a group played out very evidently among the few young citizens interviewed for this research: Obeida and Mira, who were avid Thawra supporters, were both proud to discuss their past involvements in protests and civic projects; while Rawane, a less politically active Beirut resident, also mentioned having taken part in one or more protests previously to Thawra with some of her friends.

This shows that young agents never stop organizing and reacting with their context, even when not so evidently present on the main political scene. In summer 2020, after the series of crises emptied the streets from protestors, one activist found that Thawra was certainly not dead but was rather "in a transition phase, from one dimension to another"[9]. In this sense, Lebanese youth refusal and insurgencies do not rise in a linear and location-based manner, but rather they shape dynamically and in waves that move with the context over connected moments. In the following sections, I analyze the everyday articulations of refusal and activism by young agents in a continuum, starting with 2019's October revolution Thawra and changing with the context as 2020 laid its terms.

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[9] Interview with Rahaf Dandash, part of online dialogue sessions, 'Lawen Rayheen?' (لوين رايحين؟) translating to 'Where are we headed?') by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)

Thawra*: Experimental Collective Narratives*

The recent Thawra of October 2019 is one of the most mobilizing moments of uprise in Lebanon where the people, mainly young citizens, took the streets to express long standing civic frustrations. That night may have been begun with the drafting of a peculiar law but, in the fiery nights that followed, the whole Lebanese faulty system of injustices caught fire. This phase of youthful refusal represented chaotic nation-state exchanges that a civilian referred to as "a collective psychological therapy session for the first time since the civil war" [10]. Even though the first moment sof rupture were impulsive, a series of intentional, interconnected and overlaying acts of refusal surfaced in the days and months that followed this October night. Shooting with a strong start, Thawra fueled a heavy presence of young groups on streets that demanded the attention of the state in more than one demeanor. During the revolutionary months of October, November and December 2019, youth-led initiatives and actions were mainly busy with the reclamation of streets, daily protests, organized sit-ins, road blockades, arrests, dialogue circles (and moments of violence) – coupled with simultaneous online coverage and coordination. Online youth-led media platforms fed the civic movements, most notably @MegaphoneNews[11], @Thawra.tv[12], @ThawraMap[13] @DaleelThawra[14] and the 17Teshreen (a free civic newspaper, by the people for the people). The emergence of a united front, on the grounds and online, was to counter the dominant appearances in the socio-political scenes and to express opinions on many issues that differed between economic, social, environmental, juristic and others. The heterogenous and at times contradictory groups were made up of different agents from various backgrounds who "organized" but did not coordinate as much. In such unstable dynamics, there was barely any time for consensus. The organization of and amongst youth groups was in itself chaotic and unstable, as the whole movement was abrupt and often violent when faced with such reactions from the state. Yet, by reoccupying the streets and momentarily redefining public spaces, the youth was able to express its refusal and opposition, regardless of the coherence of such articulations. The diversities among the frustrated youth was evident on the streets, as they shaped with the context and the changes it brought.

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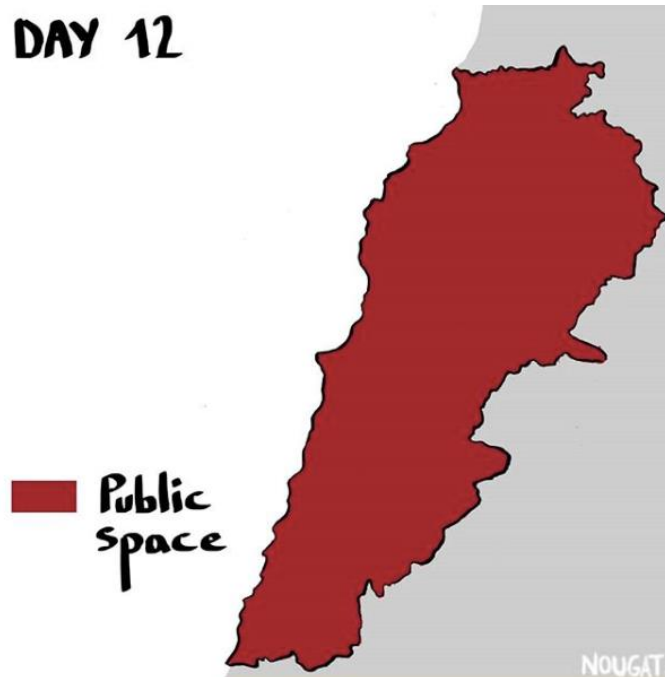
[10] Post by @selimmawad (source: IG, January 18 2020)

[11] Independent online media platform, mostly volunteer-based, founded in 2017 by a multidisciplinary team of young journalists, researchers, and designers, mostly known for Thawra coverage, publications and interviews.

[12] Civic news coverage and Thawra platform.

[13] Mapping service for all organized and ongoing protests as well as calls for them).

[14] Directory of Lebanese revolution & Aug 4th relief, following on protests initiatives, donations, safety tips, etc.

The youth who carried the revolts came from various sects, religions, genders and social backgrounds yet they intersected to meet under moving causes. In this way, refusal introduced many civilian faces to each other, and it joined together sub-groups of Lebanese people that otherwise have not been able to meet on common grounds in previous moments. One active Thawra goer pleasantly described how, hereon, "the social classes in the street were blurred and the socio-political spheres were merged with the economic one finally"[15]. Over several memorable moments of Thawra, the religious partitions of public spaces and the dominant memberships to sects were suspended among an impressively large number of civilians, most of which were young. As this was happening on the streets, the internet was boiling with dynamics and social drivers, foremostly through civic media platforms which allowed for online communication exchanges that transferred into local civic actions; hence, giving way to a collection of alternative and innovative involvements by/for the local public (D'ambarosi & Massoli 2012: 530).

The youth's efforts naturally spilled into the formulation of collective civic groups that worked around political awareness and secular altenatives such as @MinTeshreen[16] , 'The United Diaspora Movement' (@Meghterbin.Mejtemiin)[17], 'Citizens in a Nation'(@MmFiDawla) [18] and 'Lebanese Citizen'(@MuwatinLebnene)[19]. Obeida, an activist from Tripoli, was involved in three civic initiatives[20] that supported political dialogues and citizen awareness in his area when Thawra bloomed, as he believes in the need "to simplify the notions and make politics more relatable for a better inclusion of citizens to bring the political dialogue back to the people". Such socio-political efforts were coupled with relief and nonprofit support initiatives that secured the basic needs for Lebanese families as the economy and livelihood deteriorated towards the end of the year. As that happened, some civic groups organized around more specific economic efforts, examples of those would be @JobsForLebanon[21] and @ThawraEconomy[22].

Regardless of their weak coordination, the pressures of civic refusal were able to make promising 'small wins'. One of the first wins came only thirteen days into intense revolts as the

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[15] Interview with Rawane Nassif, part of online dialogue sessions by Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020).

[16] Progressive youth movement "born from the October 17 Revolution that seeks to build a modern civil democratic state based on social justice, the rule of law and respect for human rights".
Name has an interesting <u>double meaning</u> in Arabic: read as 1 word it means "Spread-out" (منتشرين) and read as 2 words it means "from October" (من تشرين)

[17] Civic movement of Lebanese diaspora that formed in Thawra and organized around protests calls and gatherings in various international locations in Europe and the Americas. They later on formed into a media platform organizing civic coverage, webinars and conference calls between activists and analysts, all while leading on relief efforts after the August Blast.

[18] Secular political part that is citizen-oriented and youth-led) and "Lebanese Citizen".

[19] Community collective action of individual Lebanese citizens driven by civic duty.

[20] Three people dialogue circles: 'Citizens Sessions', 'Our Economic Political Vision' and 'The city and its people (المدينة وأهلها)'.

[21] A civic collective that worked on connecting and building networks among Lebanese employees and employers/businesses.

[22] A grassroot economic resistance movement that supports local and small businesses.

prime minister, Hariri junior, resigned. This alteration meant little in terms of actual structural change, as the reelected minister rose from the same contested political entity; it nonetheless stood as a hard-earned victory and a medal of recognition. The second most significant formal win came in November 2019 as the independent and secular candidate, Khalaf, won the elections of the Beirut Bar Association. He was assigned president and occupied a position that has almost always been exclusive for politically affiliated lawyers (Houssari 2019). As he was announced president, the internet flooded with livestreams and the streets were filled with glorious cheers. This moment was for all youth to celebrate as they were able to express – even if momentarily – their effective role in the decision-making processes, and to reclaim – even if partially – their space in the public spheres through street and civic pressures.

In its most fundamental sense, Thawra is not a moment or point of change that should mark the history of Lebanon. Rather it is part of a continuum that continues to unfold as it is being carried: Thawra is a rupture that has a past, a present and a future. The young revolts kept adapting and reinventing themselves and their refusal – both on- and offline – to meet with the everchanging situation. Thawra is hence seen as a very unstable and impulsive collective expression of youth refusal that opens space for the rearticulation of citizenship notions by the agents. This refusal, nevertheless, shaped within a shaky context that quickly deteriorated as the new year brought with it its own new set of unpleasant surprises.

2020: A Turmoil & A Blast

And as 2020 rolled in, the collapsing financial systems and worsening social instabilities were met with a global pandemic that "could not have come at a worse time for the citizens of Lebanon" (Bizri et al 2020: 5). By summer 2020, being on the street and revolting became a privilege. The following periods of uncertainties further deteriorated with the blast at Beirut Port in August. This event forced many civilians and activists to abruptly stop all they were planning and working towards, to cope with a tragedy that affected the nation as a whole[23]. Here on after, an emergency context dominated the scene, which naturally shifted all priorities: this meant the forms of refusal also shifted. Mira, a young activist from Beirut, expressed this change in our interview: "we were first angry but, after the blast, things changed and so did my view of the street".

The blast gathered around young Lebanese citizens, with major appearances on both the national and international (virtual) scenes. Within this turmoil, youth efforts refocused on relief, economic and people-based initiatives: the refusal was still there, it just needed to readjust to the

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[23] All though the explosion happened in Beirut, it had nation-wide implications mostly on the availability of food and prices of goods as the Port of Beirut is the biggest and main import point for goods and medical products. The shortage that happened post-blast further deteriorated the conditions of the markets and communities all over the country.

circumstances laid before it. As the government is dormant and unreliable, it was evidently the young people of the nation that flocked to Beirut and began all rescue and clean-up activities on the grounds. They adapted their refusal articulations and organized under various efforts: rehabilitation, food assistance, sheltering and rent security. A striking number of volunteer-based relief initiatives were born overnight to restore homes that have been affected by the August 4 blast, such as @Impact.Lebanon[24], @BeirutBlastRelief[25], @KafebeKafak[26], @BaseCampBeirut[27], @Lebanese.nl[28], 'From London To Beirut' (@MinLondonABeirut)[29] and many other efforts[30]. Most of these civic initiatives rose from collaborations and organic networking between active and involved young agents, based both in Beirut and aboard. Such organic organizations are yet another articulation of the youth's everyday forms of refusal, which hold revelatory meanings and understandings of citizenship constantly shaping within young agents. As the youth's everyday articulations and efforts changed, so do their meanings of citizenships which this study seeks to explore.

c. Weak Political Dialogue

Within the Lebanese dynamics of insecurity and risk, the expressions of refusal and involvement of young actors became "transient and mobile", as their ideas and understandings grew less fixed and much more fluid, innovative (Harris 2010:585). The diversity in ideas and acts gave way to innovative youth-led expressions and constructive initiatives; yet, it also allowed for disagreements among them, which threaten the sustainability and effectiveness of the movements (Deets 2018: 144). This year's financial and social deadlock made it all the more difficult for any priorities to be political and for any consensuses to form. This was mainly due to what one Thawra activist referred to in our talk as "an immature political body" that also lacked the "logistical preparedness" to lead on the various visions of refusal: the ideas won the people but lost in the face of politics. During the focused-group discussion in Tripoli, the participants did not seem to agree on much. They did, however, all agree on the abundance of disaccord among young societies in terms of approach, organization and priorities. One participant gave the example of road blockades, showing the various disagreements that exist around such a common act of refusal locally:

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[24] Civic incubator for Beirut blast relief: fundraising, networking, awareness, etc.

[25] Online platform presenting all civic efforts that are working toward relief efforts post-Beirut blast.

[26] Independent youth initiative on a mission to help people in need. They started a disaster relief fund to help rebuild destroyed homes and provide assistance to the afflicted

[27] A collective civic initiative for Beirut Relief between various groups: @muwatinlebnene, @baytna_baytak, @embrace_lebanon, @minteshreen

[28] A volunteer-based collective based in the Netherlands, in coordination with @Meghterbin.Mejtemiin, that organizes to meet the support expats and local Lebanese communities through relief and awareness efforts.

[29] A group of volunteer mobilizing to allocate good from London to Beirut post Port of Beirut blast.

[30] 'House by House' (@beitbeit_beirut), 'Houses of Beirut' (@byoutbeirutleb), which I was able to take part of virtually, and 'Door & Window'(@bebwshebbek).

> "During Thawra, some citizens were busy blocking roads leading to parliamentary sittings; others burned tires in entry points to Beirut (hence halting more than just state members); while some did not even support the blockades to begin with."

In this sense, the youth did not always coordinate and organize amongst each other, which halted them from forming alternatives that could stand in face of the entrenched state. Political dialogues were weak and uncoordinated, which caused the lack of formulation of an effective political framework with independent leadership by the time crises and emergencies struck. With conflicting ideas and practices that are always trying to coexist, the youth civic communities were present on the scene but fragmented in circumstances "plagued by dialogues of the deaf" (Ciprut 2008: 346). Yet, this chaotic diversity of the youth refusal is both its beauty and its curse: "it protected the movement from political sabotage but hindered us from moving forward in some instances"[31]. The articulations and interactions by and among youth nevertheless helped shape new unfolding notions of citizenship in unstable and diverse ways.

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[31] Interview with Ali Murad, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020).

2ⁿᵈ Idea - Emerging Citizenships

> *"Young protagonists hold, within their own communities, unstable and contradictory combinations of positions that "assert empirically the different conceptions of citizenship involved" (Benedicto & Maron 2007: 618).*

Young citizens form in progressive and complex ways through social interactions, in contexts of experience that endow what they say and do with meaning (Smith et al. 2005: 440). As such, exploring the above everyday acts of refusal and activism could add texture and layers to the Lebanese intergenerational conflict. During Thawra and the August blast – and all what happened in between, young frustrated actors have been reconceptualizing a new citizen approach which stands in contrast to and against the "traditional models of participation" (Bergh & Adhmadou 2018: 102). It is through such voluntary and self-mobilized 'mass-gathering' movements that citizenship is acquiring momentum (Ciprut 2008: 347). These include moments of convergence and divergence, agreements and points of difference - as diversity entails. As such, this chapter will explore the youth's articulations and the emerging networks as new "shared sense[s] of citizenship [...] created in the face of institutional incentives and embedded social practices that discourage them" (Deets 2018: 134). In this way, refusal is placed at the center of the formulation of citizenships.

By exploring the various forms of youth refusal as emerging and reconceptualized 'acts/practices' of (1) rights and duties, (2) political involvement and (3) identity and belonging, one can further understand the carried assemblages of citizenships that redefine aspects of the Lebanese social and political lives. Here, the real exploration is not whether young people are forming into citizens, but what kind of citizens they are becoming or projecting.

Citizenship as right & duties:

To refer to rights and duties in a context such as the Lebanese one is undoubtedly a bold move, as those have been ridiculed by the state, with confessionalism reasserting social and political injustices everyday: "under this tragic system, I feel my dignity being stepped-on on the daily"[32]. Still, the youth have been articulating, while simultaneously reconceptualizing, their rights and duties in recent moments of frustration, both collectively and on more personal levels.

When the subsistence needs that make a citizen's life livable in dignity are on the line, articulations of rights as well as responsibilities within a society do not necessarily change but rather they came into play (Baderin & McCorquodale, 2007: 9). The sole presence as a front of

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[32] Interview with Nadine Mouawad, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)

alternatives is by itself a collective reclamation of the right for political participation. The young groups of protestors and emerging civic networks were speaking and acting upon their rights – ones they fought for in past moments or ones they were not aware of. When asked about her take on Thawra, and whether or not she found the latter violent, Rawane a social activist was confident in her answer: "If today a young citizen breaks the front of a bank, know that this person has in fact already unwillingly paid its price ten times. This is not street violence, this is our full right"[33]. Rahaf, a 24-years old active student, agrees as she sees "violent protests [as] a right in face of what people have been through for the last 40 years of their existence"[34]. As such, the earliest and foremost reclamations of rights by the youth were the reclamation of public spaces during the first months of Thawra. Such claims of rights echoed nationally, by the assertion of a place for and by the people; and internationally, through online-based channels and internalized messages (Jeffrey & Staeheli 2016: 494).

As Thawra advanced with time, the economic and social spheres of life merged with the political ones and the reclamation of citizen rights interplayed between those dimensions: "no more separation between economy and politics, politicians and the banks - and mostly, between sectarianism and today's crisis"[35]. Through the different emerging and chaotic forms of everyday refusal, the youth are demanding and acting upon their civic rights of social justice freedom and economic security - the right to work[36], the right of family to protection and assistance[37], the right to an adequate standard of living[38] and the basic right to education[39]. In fact, when asked about the transition he envisions for Lebanon, Ibrahim[40], the representative of the independent youth-led political party MFD, said that needed to be done carefully through three main pathways:

1. Political involvement and change via the state, which is why "we believe we have to be part of the transitional state"; *(as in political rights)*
2. Universal healthcare and universal education "to remove the hostage situation within which people and society are caught"; *(as social rights)*
3. A clean and independent judicial system, that is independent and could hold the state accountable *(as protection for these legal rights)*

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[33] Interview with Rawane Nassif, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020).
[34] Interview with Rahaf Dandash, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)
[35] Ibid.
[36] Article 6, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966)
[37] Article 10, ICESCR (1966)
[38] Article 11, ICESCR (1966)
[39] Article 13, ICESCR (1966)
[40] Extract from the live webinar "100 Years: What's Next?" (source: Facebook, September 2020).

Rights, however, have a central and reciprocal relationship with duties, as those two intertwine in a web that entails personal security and communal bondings (William & Eskridge, 1724). During and after Thawra, the young citizens were acting upon the rights they envisioned by rearticulation their political involvement, formulating economic alternatives and sustaining social support networks - regardless of the formality or sustainability of those acts.

Citizenship as involvement: civic & political

Having been marginalized and unable to effectively act within the public spheres, the Lebanese youth turned to the streets and to the internet as spaces where they ''write their community into being''(Boyd 2007: 14). Their involvements, whether social or political, are an indispensable element and mechanism of citizenship which includes a broad range of activities and social engagement processes. The youth's moving forms of refusal give way to their emerging conceptions of engagements as citizens within their respective societies. These live and online forms of civic involvements are also in themselves chaotic and diverse, as conceptions vary within individual and collective bodies (Benedicto & Maron 2007: 617).

Some of the interviewees displayed signs of disengagement while at the same time having been involved or moved by early uprise waves. In such cases, there exists a somewhat disenchanting distance between the young citizens and the state - as well as their community - feeding on their exclusion from civic life (whether voluntary or not). What is important to note here would be the justification for this disengagement. Ahmad, a young citizen I had an online call with, lives with the coexistence of his interest and lack of involvement in Thawra, as he explained: "I was hopeless yet I participated some days, it was only an emotional outlet for me". The inability or unwillingness to engage in the political spheres could be understood as the refusal of some young citizens to engage with the state or the civic society. This emerging articulation of refusal also joined together some activists and political analysts that collectively rejected the idea of early elections which they viewed as "not effective at the moment with the existing system"[41].

Active involvement, on the other hand, has shaped very diversely and strongly in Thawra and post-Thawra days. In fact, the creation of a youth-led civic realm can be treated as "evidence of newly learned citizenships" (Jeffrey & Staeheli 2016: 489). Another interviewee, Rawane, who "was living [her] life, going on without any political involvement", told me that Thawra drew her to the streets where she took part in many marches and acts of community engagement. With the diverse tool of refusal, the young Lebanese subjects are depicting themselves as active or potential participants in the community, with the possibility of claiming new civic rights (ibid: 619). These emerging citizen participations involve both personal and communal motives, which indirectly relate to one's involvement "through generative concern" – one that keeps growing

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[41] Interview with Ali Murad, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020).

(Lawford & Ramey 2017: 141). As such, the Lebanese youth's actions and narratives display a sense of duty that feeds their citizenships through participation, stemming from an interest to positively benefit their (future) community while securing their place (today).

By forming alternative fronts, colored with various brushes of refusal and activism, the youth are actively placing themselves as citizens and agents of change participating in the decision making on national and local levels. The diverse political and civic involvements have the necessary flexibility that allowed them to adapt and bend with the changing conceptions of citizenship: as the political crisis tightened the youth-led efforts focused on social and political networking; while after the August-4 Blast the groups organized around relief and communal support. These youth-led efforts have been multi-sited, based in and articulated over various locations that went beyond the borders of Lebanon. The civil society has most of the time worked locally online around "international ideas and messages" of empowerment, responsibility and citizenship (Nagel & Staeheli 2016:248). In addition, the Lebanese diaspora's unprecedented political and civic involvements that fed the local ones signifies the emergence of new understandings of citizenship based on social and political involvement, beyond spaces and borders. It is then indeed, "important to think about the ways in which the 'emotional' human satisfactions of citizenship can be appropriated for nonnational entities" (Ciprut 2008: 377). Such global involvements mixed with the local ones have been supporting the Lebanese youth in their citizenship articulations and enactments.

Citizenship as Belonging & Identity:

The agents' involvement and participation as citizens within a community closely relate with their sense of self and belonging, which are highly personal and diverse. Even within what I considered and wanted to explore as 'civil society', nuances of belonging and identities widely diverged between individuals from this same society. My talk with one of the interviewees awoke me to the hyper fluidity of belonging and imagined identities that are set in the minds of individuals and groups involved in these moving dynamics. When I engaged in a conversation with Mira, a fiery feminist and social activist that rarely missed out on Thawra's protests and confrontations, she made sure to start by proclaiming her deeply complicated (and negative) relationship with the notion of 'citizenship' itself: "we've always had a problem with our citizenship notions". With a shaky smirk, she then affirmed not identifying with what I would refer to as the civil society, which she described as being "classified, status-related groups led by a privileged and educated middle-class that exists outside of the miseries of the poor majority of Lebanese societies"[42]. In fact, in one instance too many, the civil society inevitably reflects and, somewhat reinforces, the ethnosectarian identities of the deeply divided Lebanese society (Deets

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[42] Interview with Mira (September 2020)

2018: 136). The way in which groups form and are attributed meanings naturally reproduces "inside and outside" spheres of belonging, that bind and separate people according to their identities and belongings. Still, this did not stop young active agents, like Mira, from belonging to groups of civic activists that saw what they saw and worked towards the same visions of citizenship. When the youth is politically mobilized, they demonstrate "a shared aspiration for better, more representative forms of national governance" regardless of the diversities that exist within it, as this constructed identity crosscuts ethnic, sectarian, ideological, gender and class identities (Murphy 2012:14).

In the book *The Future of Citizenship*, Greg Urban develops on the differentiation between the ascriptive sense of belonging (attained at birth or during upbringing as an exclusive membership), and the volitional one (adopted by choice and involves voluntary associative relationships) (2008: 329). He describes those senses of belonging as "the competing bases of citizenship" (ibid: 331). Thawra, in its organic and chaotic ways, allowed for the articulation of volitional, voluntary and constructed senses of identity and belonging among young citizens, which differed from the ones assigned by the dominant schemes of citizenship and structural ethno-religious divides.

The youth-led efforts of refusal during the early months of revolts allowed agents to rearticulate and shape their belongings, firstly, by reclaiming the streets and exclusive public spaces (Bergh & Ahmadou 2018: 113). The social engagements and mass-led confrontations allowed many marginalized young individuals and groups of citizens that "considered themselves foreign/excluded from the society [to] find out that they may actually make-up the great number"[43]. The street was later assigned a new dimension of significance, "imaged as beyond just a physical location" (Murphy 2012: 12). Consequently, the civic youth have been reconceptualizing themselves, while emerging through collectively-imagined spheres that joined together new ideas of identity and belonging – even if momentarily and discontinuously. On the streets and online, the young citizens stopped asking each other 'where are you from?'[44] and started asking constructive questions like 'what changes do you believe in?' and 'what is your vision?'. Through refusal, the youth were reconfiguring their narratives and, in some instances, adopted more Westernized and international experiences and perceptions of identity and belonging; ones that contrast the predominant national disorder (Deets 2018: 140). In fact, due to the history of international involvements in national political affairs, the youth's citizenships are entrenched with transnational attributes and their political discussions revolve around regional and international connotations: "USA or Iran? East or West?"[45]. In this sense,

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[43] Interview with Nadine Mouawad, part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)
[44] In Lebanon, it is very common to ask one another: "where are you from?", hence 'to what sect do you belong'. This cursed question, that seeps 40-years of geo-ethnic separations and confessional divisions, has been threatening the secular civic life and the proper formulation of an independent civic society.
[45] Interview with Ahmad (September 2020).

the colonial past of Lebanon haunts it till this day, forcing its citizens to identify with/against players beyond just the national ones[46].

After the August 4 Blast, some online expressions and interactions showed signs of exhausted efforts of belonging and struggles in identity shaping among young citizens suspended within an intergenerational chaos: "My love/hate (leaning more towards hate) relationship with my country is understandable. […] I used to feel guilt but I don't anymore"[47]. In this way, expressions of refusal are another articulation of the young citizens' belongings and identities. In a country that has been fragmented for several decades, most young agents find no choice but to reinvent themselves - a complex, diverse and chaotic process of assemblage. One confused citizen posted online in frustration: "Why do we have to be the government, the victims and the survivors in every crisis? We are no longer resilient. We are angry and full of rage."[48]. The notion "patchwork identities" falls perfectly in place here to explain the contemporary emergence of young self-constructed and diverse 'collections' of identities shaped by the new technologies of communication and information (Murphy 2012: 12).

Ultimately, through all the explored expressions, the Lebanese youth may be rearticulating themselves away from their eternal role as victims of an inevitable series of tragedies; or as a resilient phoenix that supposedly keeps rising from the ashes; or as prisoners of a violent circle of history repeating itself. The young agents are reshaping their identities as owners of their history and writers of their futures: they are "citizens in the making".

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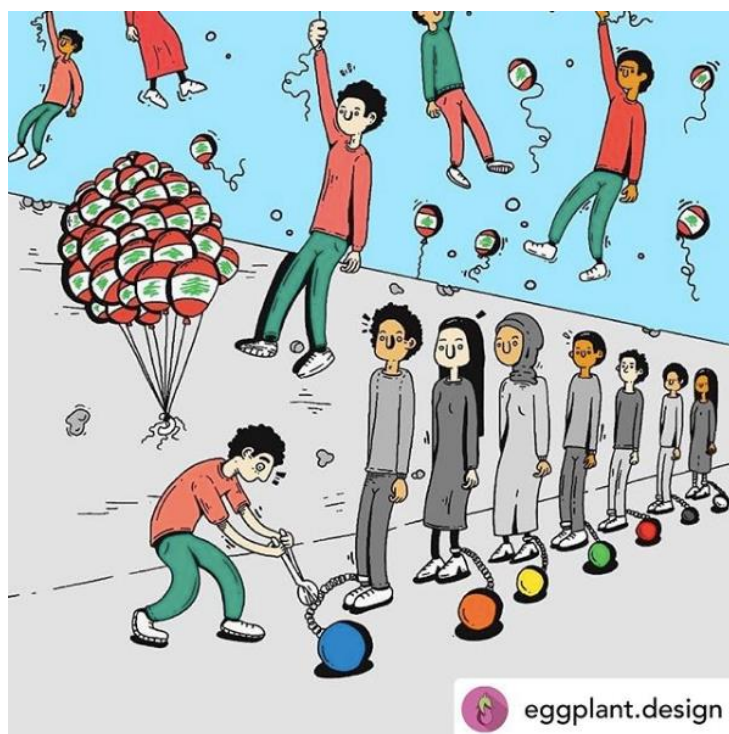
[46] It is interesting to note that, around October 2019 and the months that followed, when Thawra was ignited in Lebanon, the Chilian and Hong Kong revolts were simultaneously shaping up on their local contexts as well as on the international scene. Such forms of civic refusal may have also played a particular role in feeding international experiences and understandings within the Lebanese revolting young agents, through the open internet and modern communication technologies.
[47] Post by @ListentoMichele (Source: IG, August 2020)
[48] Post by @Lamakarame (source: IG, August 2020)

3rd Idea – Citizens 'In the Making'

Reality Check: Deadlock

When explored, the youth refusal articulations and expressions grant us insight into "the creative ways in which people disrupt and momentarily subvert their marginal statuses" (Rumbsy 2015: 1). These are nevertheless conceived and develop within adult-led and traditional systems of engagement, that have existed long before these articulations saw daylight (Harris 2010: 586). Thawra and the periods of instability that followed were rich with youth-led civic participation and enactments of belonging that allowed diverse actors to meet. Yet, all this happened and is continuously unfolding within the socio-political structures of the Lebanese confessional regime, its fragmented history, institutional obstacles and geographical divides that controlled the Lebanese political landscape for the past 40 years, and nevertheless dominate it today.

With the pressuring crises and recent national deadlock, the confessional forms of assistance and clientelist connections are once again "the only lifeline for many stranded families across the country" (Mazzucotelli 2020: 39). The weak and lack of national belonging, immature political body and limited public resources, mixed with the deteriorating conditions of insecurity within every citizen, have aggravated the entrenchment of the system of the warlords. Ibrahim from the independent party MFD explains this: *"For a vast majority of citizens, they may prefer keeping the status quo which would possibly ensure a certain level of security for the hard times to come, as oppose to risking it for an unknown with a possible switching cost"*[49]. The dominant sectarian divisions, built strictly on ascriptive belonging, seem to possess a remarkable staying power of an untransferable group identity. In this way, every citizen is always part of a solid, fixed block they are born or brought-up into (Urban 330). Many of the uninvolved and anti-Thawra members of the Lebanese society are seeing the uprise as "an attack on their religion, especially the old

THE ANATOMY OF A CANNED SYSTEM

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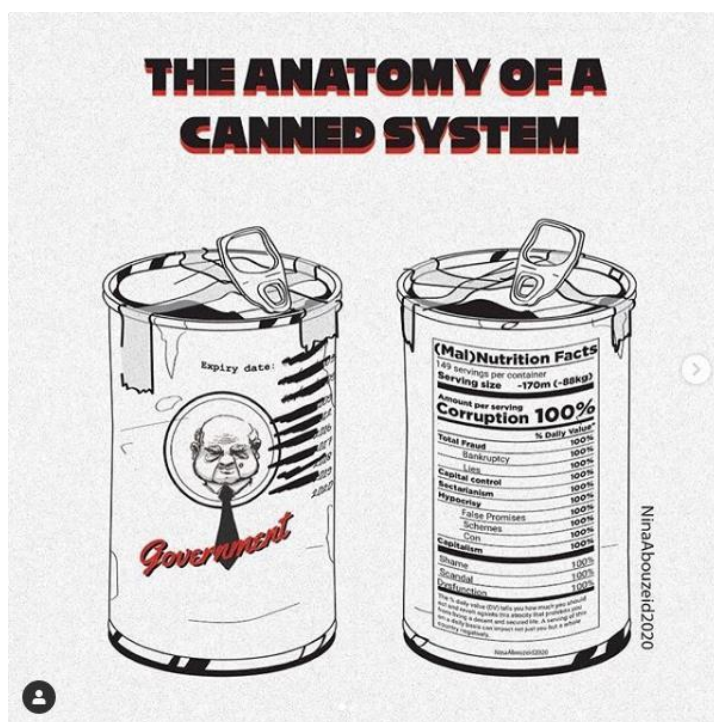
[49] Extract from the live webinar "100 Years: What's Next?" (source: Facebook, September 2020).

generations"[50]. In the Lebanese society, over time, sectarianism became a pragmatic choice that most people took/take; hence, society is a "hostage of a certain political economy that locks families from their rights of access to jobs, education and even the most basic public services"[51].

Insurgent Citizenships

Today's young citizens and activits are thus still entrenched in confessional colors within the dominant system: "all of us are against all of them, were almost against ourselves" [52]. Such findings allow us to broaden our understandings of citizenships by no longer positioning the civic young actors and the Lebanese state as simply opposed in this refusal. Rather, we can view both those actors as "implicated in a set of shared and divergent forces that bring [them] together and move [them] apart" (Fortier 2016: 1043). Refusal expressions are suspended and entangled within the Lebanese dominant systems and societies they rise within. This entertains Balibar's observation that "the birth of the citizen as subject of power [subversive of authority] does not mean the disappearance of the subject as a subject to power [submissive to authority]" (Bergh & Ahmadou 2018: 114). In this sense, the Lebanese young identities are "in the making", driven by the power of refusal, within a web of dominant powerful discourses (Balibar, 2001: 211). One activist recently confessed on an online civic media platform that "right now, [she is] trying to find [her]self politically and find how we should organize ourselves to move forward and not to only work within Beirut but towards a national vision"[53]. What this suggests is that citizenship is a defective and incomplete process, which builds on practices and ideas of unstable nature and diverse nature, never complete but always "in the making" (Nagel & Staheili 2016: 512).

Here, Holston's notion of *'insurgent citizenships'* serves to further illustrate the chaotic youth refusals, and allows us to further understand their citizenships as assemblages between the dominant and the emerging insurgent discourses: a contestation between the entrenched and the rising (2008 :15). The youth-led conceptualizations of insurgent citizenships are shaping in Lebanon through everyday articulations of refusal (as rights, as involvement and as belonging) within the dominant confessional scheme of politics, in alignment with both individual and collective interests. The people's narratives, ideas, actions, visions and hopes are where refusal forms, hence where insurgent discourses emerge. In this sense, through formal and informal practices, refusal gives way to new sets of insurgent citizenship alternatives (Butcher & Frediani 2014:121). The young agents are expressing themselves within a context that they shape and get shaped by: the young actors are insurgent citizens "in-the-making", on the daily.

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[50] Post by @Aya.Nehme (Source: IG, September 2020)
[51] Extract from the live webinar "100 Years: What's Next?" (source: Facebook, September 2020).
[52] Interview with Rawane Nassif, part of part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)
[53] Interview with Rahaf Dandash, part of part of online dialogue sessions by @Megaphonews (source: IG, June 2020)

Areas of Convergence & Pathways

In their own way, the series of socio-political crises that hit the Lebanese scene reaffirmed the incapability of the state to act, reinforced the need for people to collectively organize and reignited senses of refusal among the people, mostly the youth. Today, there seems to be some consensus on the need for youth to refocus their efforts on challenging, not only the politicians but, their own selves and choices: "it is time for alternative politics and citizen trust" [54]. The idea of changing the system abruptly and radically seems out of reach and, even more, dangerous given that the majority of the society is entrenched in the collapsing dominant regime. Samer, the representative of an independent secular collective of Lebanese youth (@Minteshreen), said that the critical situation in which Lebanon is in today "needs gradual change, an organic process that allows parties and organizations to mature"[55]. Nevertheless, many of the political analysts, activists as well as young citizens are demonstrating positive and hopeful articulations towards change: "today is an opportunity!"[56].

Active citizens and the civil society organizations, as branched and diverse as they may be, are still independent, while the Lebanese running state is divided and struggling to maintain any forms of agreements (Deets 2018: 153). Today might be one of the rare openings for the youth to transform their insurgencies from verbal and ideational articulations of citizenships into actualized political and social framework that could exist as valid alternatives to face and eventually reform/replace the existing crisis-ridden system. In his book, Kingston (2013) developed on the weaknesses of the fragmented Lebanese system that prevent the involved political parties from sustaining proper control over the state. Within this weakened state scheme, which he refers to as a 'dispersed domination system', the insurgent discourses of citizenship have windows of hope to rise and transform against the status-quo.

To end on a more hopeful note, the insurgent data and narratives portrayed potential areas of convergence, where youth activists and citizens could meet and build on collective constructive pathways of change. When projecting on their political and civic priorities, the young agents expressed some commonalities in terms of visions of change and reform, which include but are not limited to:

1. **Structural political and juridical changes**, which include building alternative political frameworks made up of secular and independent parties delivered to citizens and politicians (as individuals or groups). These alternatives are to be accepted as part of the transitional state, aiming for the gradual reform, seperation of religion and state, as well as the progressive insertion of a clean and expanded judiciary that is independent and could hold the state accountable;

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[54] Post by @Selimmawad (source: IG, July 2020)
[55] Extract from the live webinar "100 Years: What's Next?" (source: Facebook, September 2020).
[56] Interview with Obeida (September 2020).

2. **Communal corporations and civic networks,** developed and nurtured in collaborative efforts towards social and political reform through which new relations, engagements and collaborations will help build trust, allow for openings in the political dialogue, and create new belonging narratives in the society to counter the dominant ones;

3. **Economic independence and alternatives,** installed and disseminated through the public networks and associations, initially, to secure the basic financial needs and rights for members of the society, which includes focused efforts that go beyond just the political spheres. Some youth members opt to eventually transform the existing incapable economic system into a productive export-based one that secures their livelihoods and provides opportunities;

4. **An international stage,** employed through online activism and archiving of the abruptly changing actualities through civic media and new media practices. This will include the use of the internet as a platform to build on internationalized conceptions and organization; as well as to reach international stages and actors that could support young citizens through their national conflicts (i.e. fundraisers, awareness, justice courts, etc.). The international diaspora located in almost every corner of the world is also one of the positive outlets that could be deployed for organizational support and a stronger presence on the political scene.
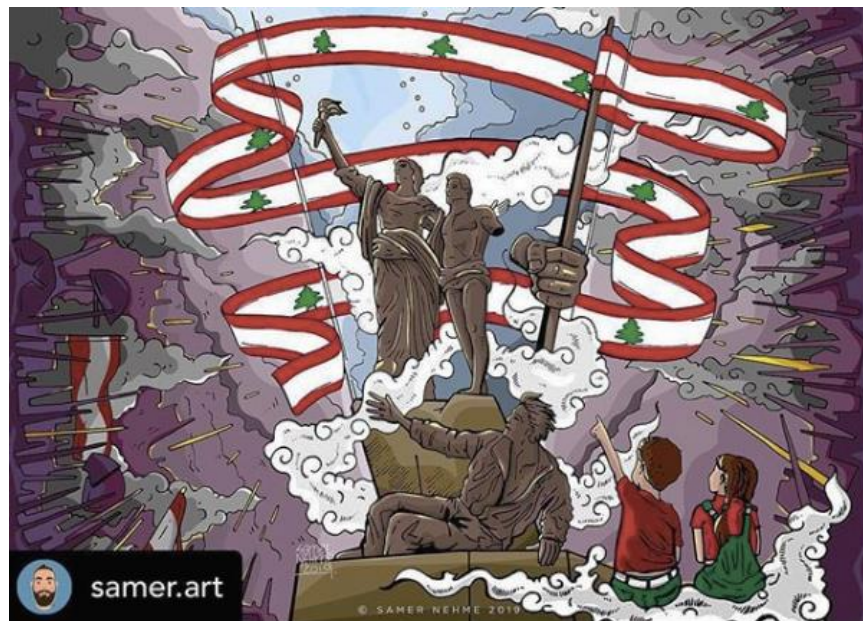
VII.   CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Intersubjectivity derails us from rigidness and allows for openings, possibilities and fluidity. I have been drawn to it long before understanding and appreciating it. This research thrives on the coexistence of diversities and interplay within the notions it explores and context it moves with; and so, fluidity is central to it. By exploring the complex and continuously changing forms of everyday refusal and activism employed by young agents over Thawra period and the crises that followed, this study gave space for emerging citizenship imaginaries rising within the dominant systems to portray themselves. These articulations and expressions are multisited and fluid, and so they are understood through the ideas, encounters, relations and practices of young agents, on the streets and online, over space and time.

> "The particular features of youth political participation and the structural obstacles that block it should not be confused with young people's representations of this participation" (Benedicto & Maron 2007: 615)

In Lebanon, young people are placed within an intergenerational conflict that denies them their formal role as agents within the public spheres. They are thus driven to express their refusal for the status quo and dominant systems through various innovative ways (on- and offline), that never cease to that fold and change with the context and the needs. These include everyday (political, economic, and social) articulations as well as more active involvements. All though the diverse expressions of refusal gave birth to various civic secular organizations and spaces, they lacked coordination and suffered from weak political dialogue.

In an attempt to move forward in the Lebanese intergenerational conflict, this study explores these diverse and chaotic forms of youth refusal as emerging articulations of citizenships that reconceptualize around the agents' notions of rights, engagement and belongings. The young actors are developing and articulating new, incoherent sets of citizenships. Nevertheless, these expressions emerge and exist within dominant systems that have a staying power.They are hence understood as insurgent citizenship alternatives, that build on the interplay and interactions between the existing dominant systems and new emerging meanings. This analysis of acts of citizenship placed refusal at the core of insurgent formulations and added to Holston's notion the aspect of "in the making": citizenships as a process of entanglement between the dominant and the emerging citizenships.

The youthfulness of the actors makes this research exploration particularly interesting, as these agents are diversely driven through innovative and international modes of "imagining, forging, and engaging in community", which have the power to contest mainstream and traditional notions of civic life that are "no longer evident or sustainable in contemporary societies" (Harris 2010: 543). A big majority of Lebanese young citizens, myself included, are in a quest to secure their places as agents of change and to reshape their inherently confessional identities. By choosing to write about the echoing articulations and expressions of the marginalized citizens, I

am also acting upon my own conceptions of citizenship and expressing my understandings through this work. As October 2020 marked a year since the birth of Thawra, it also brought with it a substantial win for the uprising youth as, for the first time in the history of students' elections, the independent candidates won the majority of seats of university council in the one of Lebanon's top ranked institutions (Lazkani, 2020). This is yet another articulation of the insurgent citizenships within the Lebanese intergenerational conflict. The civic, social, political spheres of young agents' lives are dynamic and will keep moving with time. Today is however "an opportunity" as the dominant systems are in crisis and political entities are weakened – *even if momentarily*. On a hopeful note, the people's narratives and research data captured areas of convergences where young agents could meet in their visions and pathways for change.

Within a context that has more than one flaw, it is only natural to deal with more than one form of refusal. It is then up to those refusal expressions to coexist and interplay to eventually abstract alternatives spheres of social, economic and political lives that contest the existing dominant ones. Indeed, through all the obstacles and turmoil weighting them down, the refusal and citizenship did not cease to transform within Lebanese agents, moving over spaces and with time. Still, as many activists and scholars that strongly celebrate the power of civil society acknowledge, the young public's involvement in the socio-political dimensions is not enough within today's crisis-context; structural transformation is required to create the needed changes (Ishkanian 2015: 1220). How can the young agents form an inclusive political body within a structurally-divided society that is in crisis? What are the processes that could help allign people's priorities to work towards valid and effective alternatives? By relating acts of refusal with insurgent citizenships, this research invites for additional and deeper explorations of the Lebanese civic prospects and how potential pathways for change can form within this unstable setting.

Today, the young actors want to understand their own identities and their shared commonalities within this continued context, to know how to "transform [them]selves and change understandings of 'othering' to break this cynical cycle"[57]. To think chaotic and unstable exchanges created a revolutionary transitory momentum like Thawra, it would be interesting to explore how much more could transpire when young civic efforts are better explored, coordinated and focused among actors, to meet the various needs today and the rising visions for tomorrow.

"If the state constructs itself first in mentalities,
the biggest revolution, then, is the one of the minds"
- Dilar, 2018: 230

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[57] Interview with Ahmad (August 2020).

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ANNEX & TABLES

ANNEX I – Data Collection Themes & Guiding Questions

After having introduced myself and the project, I ask a question and let the talks flow, making sure I only prompt the conversations to focus them on: youth, refusal, intergenerational politics & change.

A) **Passé Recent – ماضي قريب :** *moments from their recent past, including Thawra*

- What and where were you before October 17?

  - وين كنت سياسيا أجتماعيا جغرافيا كمواطن لبناني قبل تشرين ١٧؟

- What brought you to the street recently?

  - شو نزلك ع الشارع بتشرين أو قبل؟

B) **Présent - الحاضر :** *moments lived out around the time of data collection, most notably the month of August with the explosion and carried changes*

- What was the best thing that came from this Thawra?

  - شو احسن مكسب طلع من الثورة ؟

- *How* do you challenge the system today?

  - كيف اليوم انت كمواطن بتعارض الطبقة الحاكمة؟.

C) **Future Proche – المستقبل القريب :** *moments projected in aspiration for tomorrow*

- *What are your* priorities for the next phase? What is your vision of change?

  - شو أولوياتك السياسية؟ ما هي نظرتك للتغيير في الفترة القادمة؟

Table I. Online Interviews Respondents	
# Name	Gender & Affiliations
1. Rawane	Female - Fresh graduate – Not actively involved in political life
2. Ahmad	Male – Receptionist – Not actively involved in political life
3. Mira	Female – Social Worker – Active member of "Dammeh", a feminist collective, and involved in "Balad Biseh el Kel" (البلد بساع الكل), a group orgnaizing efforts around the inclusion of Palestinian residents in the work law.
4. Obeida	Male – Activist - Head of "Citizens Sessions" project in Tripoli and involved in two side projects: "Coffe and Politics" and "Al Madina wa Ahla" (المدينة وأهلها which stands for The vity and its poeple)

Table II. FGD Respondents

FGD 1: Tripoli - 4th of September, 2020

1. Female social worker – involved in political and social networks
2. Young male activist arrested in Tripoli protests
3. Male journalist – Actively involved in politics
4. Previous Future Movement member and previous Thawra supporter
5. Young male not actively invovled in his political life

FGD 2: Beirut - 20th of September, 2020

1. Young male, start-up owner, uninvolved politically
2. Young male - supporter of Hizbollah, the dominant Shi'a party mostly active in the suburbs of Beirut and the south of Lebanon.
3. Female activist – member of "House of Peace" a social peace organization
4. Young female – Architect – Thawra supporter but now politically uninvolved
5. Young female – Designer – Thawra supporter

Note: These FGDs were not all necessarily cited in the above chapters but were used as part of the overall data reviewing and analysis process.

	Table III. List of Referenced Media Content & Links		
Platform	Title & Description	Source	Link
@Megaphonews An independent and volunteer-based online media platform, mostly known for Thawra coverage, publications and interviews.	**Online Dialogue Session**: 'Lawen Rayheen?' (لوين رايحين؟ translating to 'Where are we headed?') - Rawane Nassif	IG (June 18, 2020)	https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBlPqlCK9Y8/?hl=en
	Online Dialogue Session: 'Lawen Rayheen?' (لوين رايحين؟ translating to 'Where are we headed?') - Rahaf Dandash	IG (June 17, 2020)	https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBi1z35imYM/?hl=en
	Online Dialogue Session: 'Lawen Rayheen?' (لوين رايحين؟ translating to 'Where are we headed?') - Ali Murad	IG (June 19, 2020)	https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBngVVHKrCu/?hl=en
	Online Dialogue Session: 'Lawen Rayheen?' (لوين رايحين؟ translating to 'Where are we headed?') - Nadine Mouawad	IG (June 14, 2020)	https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBaDx1tCMDC/?hl=en
@Meghterbin.Mejtemiin Civic movement of the Lebanese diaspora that organized on a media platform with civic coverage, webinars and conference calls between activists and analysts.	**"100 Years: What's Next?":** a live webinar held on the day that marked the centennial anniversary of the establishment of Greater Lebanon. It was moderated by Chloe Kattar (@Leb.historian) and it entertained scholars and activists, providing them with a platform to exchange ideas and formulate post-2020 visions of the non-sectarian organizations or parties they represent.	Facebook (September 1, 2020)	https://www.facebook.com/112514810166128/videos/330273064761324/