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POLITICS BY COINCIDENCE: THE HARAK FACES ITS “PEOPLES”

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Politics of Coincidence: the *Harak* Confronts its “Peoples”

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Introduction

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

The 2015 Summer Protests

A wave of protests swept Lebanon in August 2015, a few weeks after the closure of the *Naameh* (southeast of Beirut) landfill which received Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s waste since 1998. The closure was enforced by around forty protestors who used their bodies as human shield to prevent the garbage trucks from accessing the landfill (Daily Star, 2015). This also happened by the expiration date of Sukleen’s contract, the company responsible for waste management in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Within a couple of days, garbage started piling up along roads and bridges at the height of the summer’s heat and humidity. At the sight of this scene, which Beirut residents – or at least most of them – were not accustomed to, a group of civil society activists launched the “You Stink” campaign in an attempt to politicize the garbage crisis and link it to the corruption of authorities. After August 19, the campaign gradually transformed into popular protests that went beyond demanding a solution for the garbage crisis to expressing broader grievances about unemployment, precarity of livelihoods, and the commodification of public services.² The media used the term *harak* (movement in Arabic) to refer to the protest wave that erupted in August 2015. It was called the “civil *harak*” by some and “popular *harak*” by others in reference to its grassroots masses so that it would not be reduced to civil society campaigns. The research will use the term *Harak* (in italics) to refer to the protest wave from August 19 up to the last major event of October 8, 2015.

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

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

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

The *Harak* can be divided into three main phases: 1) before August 19, 2015; 2) from August 19 to August 29, 2015; 3) from September 1, 2015 to October 8, 2015. The second phase saw the highest rates of new protestors, mass mobilizations⁴, and intensive live media coverage. The repression and arrest campaigns (especially between August 19 and August 25) were associated with conflicting statements by various political forces,⁵ which reflected the authorities' **confusion**. The second and third phases were dominated by activists, as the number of protestors dwindled after August 29. Thus, organizers resorted to direct and symbolic actions rather than mass protests.

While political forces exchanged accusations and tried to contain and co-opt the protest wave in its second phase, all the while closing their ranks,⁶ they managed to contain and defame the *Harak* in the third stage,⁷ accusing it of turning into riots. These three stages reflect changes in the power balance between protestors and the authorities with regards to the momentum of participation, the nature of participants, media coverage, state's reaction, and the political forces' containment.⁸

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

poles. Paradoxically, the new faces in **protest squares**, which gave demonstrations their popular momentum, be they independent or from the “parties’ sympathizers”, were actually the most marginalized groups in articles and studies that addressed the *Harak*.

Research Introduction

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

What factors explain the mobilization of thousands of first-time protestors in the Harak, and their subsequent demobilization after the August 29 turning point? This was the main research question that drove the entire research. The first-timers’ approach allows a distance from activists, who were the main focus of the media and academia, in order to analyze the regional/sectarian and class factors in the protests.

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

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

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

mechanisms, in order to identify the extent of their influence on the mobilization/demobilization of first-timers.

In this paper, I argue that the “*Harak* groups” confronted the “*Harak* peoples” by adopting what I called “politics by coincidence”. I define *politics by coincidence* as spontaneous organizational forms that fall outside traditional political organizations.¹² Their structure is flexible, their discourse is emotional, their demands are loose,¹³ their acts are exhibitionistic and their victories are “symbolic”. These groups rely on “coincidence”, i.e., political improvisation, as a means to compensate for the lack of political organizing and vision. “Politics by coincidence” derives its inspiration from the tools and terminology of NGOs to build a populist discourse that transcends contradictions by identifying a common adversary. Therefore, it distances itself from stirring political problems, by randomly referring to the prevailing discourse, albeit in its “technical” and “apolitical” form, in order to build its loose discourse. “Politics by coincidence” relies on a public that acts as a recipient and not as a partner. The public’s participation is reduced to answering calls for protests without actively participating in the decision-making process.

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

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

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

1. Methodology

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

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

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

Research Design and its Theoretical Justification

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

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

In this context, "events of random and senseless violence" (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2006: 275) or "suddenly imposed major grievance" (Walsh 1981: 18) that are covered by the media may attract more first-timers than new social movements. Verhulst and Walgrave challenge the old and new social movements' dichotomy¹⁴ and suggest a new type of social movement and mobilization, referred to as 'new emotional movements' (2006: 275). The latter consist of a loosely organized movement which is compensated for by emotional shock and mass media support. Through mobilizing a heterogeneous public, and thus attracting a large number of first-timers; these movements remain more or less "without specific demands" (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2006: 275) and do not usually forge enduring bonds between the "new" and "old" protestors (2009: 480).

Rudig and Karyotis (2013) revisit Verhulst and Walgrave's (2009) framework, developing further both methodologically and conceptually. According to them, the absence of data on non-protestors poses a serious limitation to studying the recruitment of people without previous involvement. Focusing on the 2010 anti-austerity protests in Greece, they argue that "new

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

protesters are more similar to the general population than they are to established protesters” (Ruding & Karyoti, 2013: 314). Thus, they underline the necessity of comparing the newly mobilized protestors with non-protestors on the methodological level to answer Verhulst and Walgrave’s key questions: the socio-economic background of new-timers (*who*), their motivations (*why*), and the ways they participate in protests (*how*).

In the Lebanese context, the participation of first-time protestors in cross-sectarian protests, and their comparison to non-protestors, takes further significance. While taking into consideration the complex heterogeneity of first-time protestors and non-protestors, conducting interviews with them added more value on the theoretical and methodological levels. It contributes to linking the recent protests with the channels of power and wealth-sharing on a sectarian basis, or what is known as sectarian quotas. In fact, the control of state institutions and revenues by an alliance between the sectarian/political elite and the commercial/financial oligarchy (Traboulsi, 2016) “consecrates a sectarian institutional set-up and lubricates sophisticated clientelist networks that co-opt large segments of the population” (Salloukh et al., 2015: 2). Hence, the political economy of sectarianism makes it difficult for most people to engage in non-sectarian contentious politics. Resisting sectarian forms of subjectification might generate “political, economic, and symbolic forms of punishment”, i.e., exclusion of “rebels” from clientelist, political awards, and social protection (Salloukh et al., 2015: 7).

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

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

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

Moreover, this methodology explores the extent to which the interests, values, and biases of participants were aligned with the demands, slogans, and actions put forth by the various groups, i.e., “the framing alignment processes” (Snow et al, 1986:464). The “frame” concept originated in Goffman’s theoretical work to denote schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large to organize, experience, and guide action (Snow & Benford, 2000). According to Snow & Benford, frames help to render relevant events or occurrences meaningful in order to mobilize potential sympathizers and participants, and gain the support of the public (Snow & Benford, 1988:198). Hence, successful mobilization necessitates interpretive framing alignment with a common and hegemonic framework that is open and consistent with the social and cultural environment (Snow & Benford, 1988).

Data Collection

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

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

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

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

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

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

I was able to reach participating popular categories through first-time protestors who were arrested during the demonstration¹⁷ with the help of some lawyers and activists. As for Khandaq Ghamiq neighborhood, which has its own particularities, I "entered" it with the assistance of a restaurant owner who trusted me, and whom the residents of that neighborhood trusted. I frequented the place several times before I could meet one of its customers who helped me reach other participants. As for first-time protestors from other neighborhoods, I reached them through previous acquaintances: friends who are activists, journalists and academics from various social and cultural circles. Through daily discussions I had about the *Harak* with taxi drivers, I was able to recruit two of them: one is from Bourj el-Barajneh, and the other is from Tariq el-Jadideh. I got their phone numbers and met them at their own discretion.

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

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

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

such formalities.” To ensure the privacy of research participants, I refrained from mentioning their real names and only referred to their personal details. All names mentioned in the research are aliases.

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

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

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

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

Coding and Data Analysis

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

The preliminary coding was based on the survey themes, which in turn were formulated based on the hypotheses, i.e., theoretical concepts and literature review. The deductive approach was complemented by an inductive approach through incorporating new codes that appeared while

reading and interpreting the interviews, such as the cost-benefit factor, which seemed to play a crucial role in the withdrawal or the non-participation of some of the people. “There’s no advantage for us in being here.” “Nothing will change.” Such statements motivated me to add a new category of codes. I also added the “protest energy” category, which motivated numerous people to participate in demonstrations. This category covers the state of enjoying demonstrations and their “creative” energy.

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

2. “Politics by Coincidence”: Political Improvisation beyond Organizing

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

The “You Stink” Campaign started as a hashtag launched by civil society activists to protest the accumulation of trash on the streets after the closure of the Naameh Landfill. The hashtag quickly turned into a Facebook page, and later into a campaign, after a series of organized sit-ins started in July 2015 in Riad el Solh square. On August 22 and 23, the square witnessed mass protests where the riot police used water cannons and rubber bullets against protestors. The security forces justified the use of force as a self-defense mechanism against rioters. A dispute arose between activists from the “You Stink” campaign and other activists after the former used the term “infiltrators” to describe non-peaceful protestors. For some activists the use of that term was considered as a form of “discrimination against the poor” (Al-Zein, 2016:29) and a justification for the use of force. “You Stink” unilaterally decided to postpone demonstrations until August 29, 2015 refusing to coordinate with other activists, political movements, and associations.¹⁸

Consequently, the *Badna Nhasseb* Campaign (“We Want Accountability”) emerged, which included independents and members of the “*The People’s Movement*”, “Syrian Social Nationalist Party – Al-Nahdha Faction”, “Socialist Arab Lebanon Vanguard Party” and *Shabab Dod Al-Nizam* (“Youth Against the Regime”). In addition to the two most prominent campaigns—“You Stink” and “We Want Accountability”. Other campaigns were established during the same period by individuals (who were mostly affiliated with parties) such as *Jayi Taghyir* (“Change is Coming”) (which included members from the “Democratic Youth Union”, which in turn emerged from the “Lebanese Communist Party”) and *Aal Chere’aa* (“To the Street”), which is a group that included previous members of the “Democratic Leftist Movement”. *Sha’eb Yourid* (“The People Want”) included independents and members of the “Socialist Forum”, “Feminist Social Justice” and student clubs such as the “Red Oak Club” at the American University of Beirut and the “Radical Club” at the Lebanese University. Other small groups were also established such as the *Shabeb 22 A’b* (“August 22 Youth”) and *Hellou A’ana* (“Go Away”).

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

Contradictions soon emerged between these organizations and the newly established campaigns. These contradictions could easily be seen in the tense “Coordination Committee” meetings, in social media posts, activists’ media statements, and on the street in direct demonstrations and

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

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

actions. While “You Stink” directly addressed the middle-class, educated youth,²⁰ nationalist and leftist groups’ discourse ranged between the discourse of “We Want Accountability” with its judicial-institutional orientation and the discourse of “People Want” and “August 22 Youth”. The latter promotes intersectionality by creating a link between broader social justice causes by focusing on women’s rights and marginalized groups’ causes. The “Lebanese Ecological Movement’s” discourse focused on the technical aspect of the waste management “crisis”. It revolved around advocating for solutions, such as sorting from the source and recycling. Regional campaigns focused on the “our area is not a dustbin” discourse, i.e., closure of current landfills or refusal of the establishment of new ones in other areas: “The Campaign to Close the Naameh Landfill”, “Akkar is not a Dustbin”, “Youth for a Better Barja” and the “Baalbek Harak”).

Despite their ideological and political differences, one can still study a unanimous discourse of the *Harak*, which was dominated by the “You Stink” campaign. This was partially the case due to the fact that their campaign received the most media coverage, and as such its discourse remained predominant to a large extent in the media and public forums. On the other hand, partisan and leftist groups adopted an organizational structure similar to that of “You Stink”, which perhaps prevented them from recruiting the marginalized communities that ideologically support them.

Refusing Hierarchy, Monopolizing Decisions

Discourse analysis shows a dominance of statements along the lines of “We are a movement without leadership; we are a horizontal movement”. The media adopted those statements in its own description and characterization of the *Harak*..²¹ Chalcraft, whose analysis is based on a study of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, defines the “horizontalism” of protest movements, as a “networked form of organizing; leaderless protest movements; the eschewal of top—down command (...); the emphasis on participation, creativity and consensus; and the opposition to dogma and sectarianism, often associated with older generations” (Chalcraft, 2012:6). Although this definition holds true in many occasions, it obliterates the dynamics of invisible forces that take place in the horizontal forms of organization.

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

²⁰ For example, the “You Stink” campaign stated in a press conference on October 26, 2015 that “we” is confined to “university students, teachers, activists, employees, business owners, artists ... and **home children** (WHAT IS MEANT BY HOME CHILDREN?).” Choosing the word “employees” denotes the exclusion of workers, where as “**home children**” proves the exclusionary attitude of the campaign towards what it called “**street children**”, “**hooligans**” and “infiltrators”.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Want Accountability” that “the partisan groups in the “We Want Accountability” alliance appointed their representatives in committees, in addition to independents who were trusted by the rest of the partisan members” When I asked a “You Stink” volunteer who participated in the July 21 sit-in why she was not a member of the Core Committee, she answered that: “Nobody knows. This issue caused numerous problems. Volunteers don’t do anything except logistics. We were not informed about positions and statements.” Another volunteer said that he was not invited to the Core Committee meetings and thus did not want to impose himself by asking to attend. This was also what another “You Stink” volunteer confirmed:

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

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

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

their previous rhetoric on the tactics used for taking decisions.²² In the words of one interviewee, this can be summed up as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An analysis of the above shows that the *Harak* reproduced a two-track power dynamic. Under the guise of “organizational flexibility”, the *Harak*’s campaigns were a mere replica of traditional politics by pulling out decision making tools (veto and consensus) from the traditional toolbox.. Simultaneously, the organizational structure created was similar to that of an NGO in the sense that it was centered on rights-based advocacy campaigning dominated by self-appointed representatives, who mostly hailed from educated, middle class demographic. This form of organization is not surprising as most of the activists’ political experience is limited to civil society campaigns. In other words, they used the tools that they were familiar with. Intriguingly, groups with political affiliations such as “We Want Accountability” and “Change is Coming” opted for civil society techniques as well. For instance, they sought out and recruited volunteers for logistical support through their Facebook pages instead of the traditional method of mobilizing their own rank and file members.

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

Hence, the “horizontalism” and “organizational flexibility” discourse was effectively accompanied by an imposed semi-closed leadership of the *Harak*. This does not necessarily mean that the development of a democratic organizational structure was easy or feasible within a context of mass mobilization and a limited timeframe. However, it led to the alienation of some activists and “volunteers” who felt excluded from the decision-making process. More importantly, it made the framing alignment process between activists and participants more difficult, as we will see in Chapter 3.

Fragile Populism

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

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

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

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

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

“When demands and slogans started to become numerous, we felt that we needed to specify the demands and solutions and what we wanted. We decided to focus on the

garbage crisis to avoid a fragmentation of the demands. We considered it the main battle, the main engine.” (a “You Stink” member)

The “we” in this instance specifically refers to middle classes. “We” is consistent with the definition put forth by “You Stink” for their class and social identity: “University students, teachers, activists, employees, business owners, artists ... and **home children**” (according to an aforementioned campaign statement), and consistent with the class and social background of activists. Most influential members in groups, i.e., members of the core committees who imposed the priorities and course of action either worked for NGOs or were self-employed, and therefore flexible in terms of their schedules.²³ They were capable of attending long, daily meetings, be they within their groups or in the Coordination Committee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Specific demands were articulated in a purely scientific and technical language and were confined to providing various environmental solutions to the trash crisis. Kreichati indicates that the knowledge production advocacy was always dominated by a discourse of technicality and scientific expertise, distancing itself from social and economic demands emerging from the protestors. Krechati argues that “the expert model of engagement with knowledge seeking to tackle environmental issues in Lebanon is part and parcel of the very system it seeks to address” (Kreichati, 2016). The positions of the Coordination Committee did not generally tackle political problems and conflicts of interests related to the trash crisis. When the Coordination Committee’s statements partially went beyond the “technical” aspect or generalizations to take a political or ideological form, they did so randomly, and as a result of purely circumstantial factors.

²⁴ Columnist Khaled Saghieh discussed the populist discourse used by the *Harak* in a presentation entitled “The Civil *Harak* against the Rule of the Crook,” which was organized by *Ashkal Alwan*, during “Home Works 7” on November 14, 2015. (I have a recording of his talk if you want to link to it: It’s available here: <http://racing-thoughts.com/2015/12/28/khaled-saghieh-the-youstink-movement-against-the-rule-of-the-crook/>)

Although the same demands were reiterated in almost all statements,²⁵ the tone of the statement would change according to the party drafting it. The modifications in political positions and discourses did not necessarily come as a result of a political revision of a strategy and vision, but were sometimes related to internal dynamics between individuals and groups, or simply put, as a result of “coincidence”. For example, the Coordination Committee surprisingly adopted the statement of “The People Want” on September 16, which was characterized by its leftist tone, to an extent that it ended with the phrase “power, authority, and wealth are to the people,” whereas the term “social justice” was omitted from the first statement of the Coordination Committee due to pressure exercised by “You Stink”.

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

Various media outlets, including those who supported the *Harak*, had a role in diluting its demands. They imposed certain limits on the act of protesting (manifested perhaps in the “protesting etiquette”²⁶), filtered demonstrators into “civilized and uncivilized” and accused protestors from marginalized neighborhoods of rioting and being infiltrators. They also contributed to containment of the demonstrators’ demands and rendering them meaningless by framing the demonstrations, for example, as a “national celebrations or carnival” (especially the August 29 demonstration). The media, which had supported the *Harak*, changed its position on October 8 and adopted the authorities’ discourse in defaming demonstrators, accusing them of damaging public and private property, and exaggerating the losses of Solidere and Le Gray Hotel in downtown Beirut (Nayel & Moghnieh, 2015).

The reliance on mass media and social media in the recruitment process (during mass mobilization) contributes to the de-radicalization of the discourse, especially when a movement is still in its crystallization phase. In the context of the *Harak*, this reliance proved to be weak and impossible to sustain when the media changed their agendas, specifically after October 8.

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

²⁵ The main demands issued by the *Harak*’s Coordination Committee : 1) The immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and the cessation of arbitrary arrest campaigns; 2) The resignation of the Minister of Environment Mohamad Mashnouk and accountability (or resignation) of the Minister of Interior Nohad Mashnouk; 3) Finding an environmental and sustainable solution for the waste crisis; 4) Holding immediate parliamentary elections.

²⁶ The Lebanese TV channel MTV aired a special **segment** within its daily programs to discuss “protesting etiquette”, i.e., raising the awareness of demonstrators regarding the “**essentials**” of demonstrations.

media-centric actions and mobilizations, which would in turn, through the media, attract the public, proved its impotence in recruiting the “peoples” and scoring quick wins.

Theatrical Mobilization/ and its “Symbolic” Victories

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

Mary, like others, expressed what I later called the “protest energy”, the significance of which I was not aware of when I wrote the research hypotheses. This “energy”, which was referred to by many people in different ways, was watershed after which people took to the street for the first time. Mary drew an angry, screaming face. Graffiti artist Ali Rafei mocked the security forces’ oppression in a graffiti stating, “from you, to you and on you.” visual artist/illustrator Jana Traboulsi identified the street battle in her “for you... and for us..” graphics. The *band, Al-Rahel Al-Kabir, or “The Great Departed”* turned the slogan “Everybody means everybody”²⁷ into a song, and singers/songwriters/rappers *El-Rass* and *Bou Nasser Al-Touffar* sang “We and manure are neighbors”.²⁸

Indeed, “politics by coincidence” created a force of hope and confrontation, which traditional organizations, be they parties or trade unions, were incapable of creating due to structural and political factors. This politics possesses the ability to unexpectedly mobilize the street. In the context of the *Harak*, it took advantage of a political opportunity, attracted the media, recruited first-timers, and mobilized innovatively. This politics distressed the authorities, albeit temporarily. The ability to mobilize groups from all sects, regions and classes, start networks amongst them, occupy public squares for days, especially in Solidere in Beirut’s downtown, and troubled the authorities. Their distress was evident due to the officials’ contradicting statements and the oppression of demonstrations (Wansa & Franjeh, 2015).

The ability to mass mobilize, under the slogan of “You Stink”, was manifested from August 22 to 29 when Martyrs’ Square witnessed mass demonstrations and violent confrontations with security forces. Some groups, especially “The People Want”, were able to deconstruct the authorities’ discourse and directly respond to it. *Akhbar Alsaha* (“The Square’s News”)²⁹ covered the events of the *Harak*, and the “Daily Bulletin” systematically and sarcastically responded to statements by political forces. “*Souk Abou Rakhoussa*” (the ‘Cheap’ Market) was

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3StogLz_ZU

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTdlfAkwpJ0>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/akhbaralsaha/>

considered the most popular response to the statement of the chairman of the Beirut Traders Association, Nicolas Shammas, who cautioned against turning the (upper-class) downtown of Beirut into a “Cheap Market”.³⁰ The market was set up in Riad Al-Solh Square on September 19 in defiance of Shammas’s statement and to take back the downtown area as a public place for all classes (Shoufi, 2015). In addition to the “Cheap Market”, the “We Want Accountability” campaign removed the parking meters from the corniche that stretches from Ain El-Mreisseh to Ramlet El-Bayda. They successfully compelled the governor of Beirut to stop installing parking meters along that site (Mahdi & Farfour, 2015). After the August 29 demonstration, and because the campaigns failed to establish strong relations with first-time participants and to articulate a clear and coherent political discourse, the number of participants started dwindling. Actions and victories, hence, became “symbolic”.

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

There is no doubt that the politics of “wherever you can hit, then you should hit” (or “politics by coincidence”) succeeded occasionally, but more often it failed. It often set actions arbitrarily and spontaneously. For example, when “You Stink” threatened the government with escalations after 72 hours if it did not implement its demands (Shoufi, 2015), the group’s threats were empty. On the eve of the 72-hour deadline, a group of activists, in a social gathering at a friend’s house, decided to take some sort of action the following day. One of them suggested breaking into the Ministry of Environment, and the rest approved the idea. They informed a number of journalists that night, and half an hour before the move, they informed the volunteers. The move was so spontaneous that “We didn’t know if the minister was inside or what the offices looked like,” a “You Stink” member said.

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

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

This form of protests seeks to express demands and ideas, but not exercise pressure (or attempt to exercise pressure) to enforce them. Therefore, occupying the parliament square and other

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub2nZ1JZ0ko>

public squares becomes the objective in and of itself.³¹ This was evident in the responses of many activists and participants in the October 8 demonstration to questions by Al-Jadeed and LBC reporters about their motivations to take to the streets: “We want to enter the Square (of the Parliament)”. Nobody had a clear answer for what comes after “occupying the square.”

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

The “symbolism” of the actions also included activities to collect garbage (organized by “You Stink” and previously by “The Joy of Giving” campaigns). These actions sought to polish the image of the “activists” and affirm their good intentions at a time when there were talks about reopening the Naameh landfill, establishing new landfills, the return of Sukleen SAL, and contracting other companies to ensure quota-sharing among all parties. The “symbolic actions” evolved as phrases such as “civil disobedience” and “general strike”, which are tools for disrupting the accumulation of profit and threatening authorities, became “symbolic” as well, and devoid of their meaning. Participating in strikes now meant wearing a white t-shirt or a white band (Shoufi, 2015), and civil disobedience was limited to partial road closures (Zeaiter, 2016).

Not only actions are “symbolic” in this type of politics, but sometimes the victories are as well. “We were looking for victory at any cost, even if it were symbolic,” a “You Stink” member said. This includes negotiations between a number of “You Stink” activists and the representative of the Minister of Interior, Nohad Mashnouk, about the nominal resignation of the minister, or handcuffing Marwan Maalouf (an activist in the campaign), for show only. An informer videotaped the conversation between Maalouf and General Ayoubi during negotiations for the exit of the protestors who broke into the Ministry of Environment. The tape showed him asking to be handcuffed more than ten times, so that it won’t appear in the media that he surrendered and left the building voluntarily.³²

In this context, I argue that “symbolism” of actions means the failure to exercise pressure, while compensating for it with **theatrical** protests or “media flashes”, thus accomplishments become “symbolic” as well. However, the failure of “politics by coincidence” to exercise pressure does not necessarily mean that traditional organizations would succeed in doing the same.

³¹ Author and academic researcher [Fawwaz Traboulsi](#) criticized the glorification of occupying public squares and spaces in the “Rethinking the Role of the Left” conference at the American University of Beirut, which was held as part of the series of symposia entitled “The Intersectionality of the *Harak*”: “Being in and attempting to reach a public square is a legitimate right. However, what purpose does this presence serve?” This was referenced in a previous part. Make sure you use the same translation for the title of the series.

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUCG-v-0-rw>

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

Trade unions and (independent) leftist parties assume economic structures that no longer exist because of the change in the capitalist patterns of accumulation towards rentierism (Harvery, 2005). Exploitation, and the conflicts resulting therefrom, expanded beyond the production sphere to reach the commodification of subsistence (Dyer-Witherford, 2002). These economic-political changes, including the trend towards informal labor, undermined the ability to organize workers in their workplaces. As such, political parties’ co-option of the traditional organizations was not only due to subjective and political factors, but also to structural ones. In Lebanon, trade unions failed to establish a trade union movement, not only because of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers co-opted it, but also because of the “rentier nature of demands” of the trade union and labor movements. **Please double-check this paragraph**

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

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

3. The Peoples of the *Harak* Protested... and Were not Liberated

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

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

A Political Opportunity on the Pretext of Garbage

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

Field interviews showed that the concerns of financially privileged participants focused generally on the issue of garbage collection, whereas it seemed that the discontent of middle-class and poor categories³³ went beyond the trash crisis. The only exception to this were two participants from

³³ Participants’ class background was based on the area where they live, their monthly income, their career background and their social safety network.

Chiyah and Tariq al-Jadideh who said that they, along with their families, were poisoned by the contaminated air. This conclusion is consistent with Kreichati's research, in which she stated that most of the protests did not revolve around the trash crisis *per se*, but rather on the lack or shortage of public services like water, electricity, housing, education and health care, in addition to unemployment and job (in)security (Kreichati, 2015).

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

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

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

"We, as the residents of Khandaq, have a special relationship with the city center of Beirut. Solidere illegally acquired its property. We feel as if Solidere 'has its eyes on us'. They want to drive us out of our homes, the places where we grew up and lived." (Ali, self-employed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

Despite the multiple priorities and agendas, the majority participated because they saw the "waste crisis" as a political opportunity to impose, or at least, vocalize their demands. To them, the "crisis" showed the weakness of the ruling class that came as a result of an internal conflict within its ranks.³⁴ Unlike previous civil society demonstrations, the latter sensed divisions within the ruling class,³⁵ as seen in hesitant and conflicting official statements, coupled with unprecedented use of force and brutality by security forces to suppress protests. Some even considered the violence an indicator of the seriousness of the protests and authorities' concern.

"I was watching television and I saw people being beaten. So I decided to demonstrate with them. I was 'strangled' and needed to bring out what's inside me, I needed to vent. I needed to scream. Violence encouraged me to demonstrate. I felt that a real thing was

³⁴ "Divisions between the elite" is one of the indicators for "political opportunities," which can contribute to the eruption of demonstrations or conflict policies (Meyes, 2004:132).

³⁵ The leadership of the Progressive Socialist Party had an interest in the closure of the Naameh Landfill in order to negotiate better revenues with Sukleen(Wehbe, 2015).

happening, but I demonstrated because I was already strangled.” (Adnan, street vendor, Chiyah)

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

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

“The authorities were afraid. They were suppressing unarmed demonstrators.” (Afaf, employee, Salim Slem)

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

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

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

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

“My main concern was to get employed in the government because no one gets employed there unless they have connections. This is how my father got employed (with support from the Amal Movement). I cannot become a government employee like him. My hope was to get employed without connections. This is the personal thing that was inside me

when I participated. If our parties had been helping and protecting us, we would definitely not have taken to the streets.” (Hasan, unemployed, Khandaq Ghamiq)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Field data indicates a transformation in the clientelistic sectarian system when taking into consideration the plurality of clientelistic sectarian networks and their distinction. They have not necessarily disappeared, but they are in crisis and are gradually transforming from supplying

social services to providing a security cover. This (preliminary) field data intersects with the supposition raised by Fawwaz Trabolsi in which he asks whether:

“The nepotism (clientelist) system, in light of the centralization of leadership and power and as a result of the war and what came after it, has turned into a mafia-like system, where the role of power, violence and the balances resulting from them respectively in the production of economic interests or acquiring proceeds has turned into an alternative for exchanging services that are based on political influence on one hand and political allegiance on the other” (Trabolsi, 2016: 196-197)

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

Mass Mobilization and its Sectarian, Regional and Class Channels

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

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

Many researchers have addressed the role played by social networks as channels for participation in protests.³⁶ “People participate in protests because they are requested to do so or because they are encouraged by someone with whom they have a personal relationship” (Lim, 2008:961). In the Lebanese context, social networks include family, religious, regional, and partisan/sectarian relationships, which often intersect.

A detailed look at the mobilization channels used by first-time protestors highlights the inaccuracy of labeling the *Harak* as a “non-sectarian or secular movement.” It is clear that many of those who participated did so *through* their secular and regional channels. Dismantling the phrase “I saw people like me (on television)”, which was reiterated by some participants, shows that these “people” are nothing but “the others” who are similar to them. It is as if “I saw people

³⁶ Krinsky and Crossley provide an extensive literature in this regard (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014).

like me” in terms of sect, region, and class, which paved the way or stipulated the emergence of a common “we”. This is how Adnan, a street vendor from Baalbek, who sells CDs of religious and Karbala chants in Chiyah, joined the demonstrations.

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

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

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

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

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

“I didn’t feel comfortable endorsing some groups of infiltrators and vandals on the pretext that every person expresses themselves in their own way. Frankly, I distanced myself when people from Khandaq joined the demonstrations, especially the ones from the Amal Movement. We, the residents of Salim Slem, have a bitter history of intimidation, extortion and threats with the Amal Movement and Hezbollah starting in the 80s up to the events of May 7, including the Memory of Ashura. We have a long history with them.”

Afaf’s testimony indicates how the overlap between class and sect is deeply rooted in historical and social experiences. This overlap does not necessarily deny the possibility of having a cross-sectarian protest movement, but rather points to the need of an in-depth understanding of these complex social relationships in order for such a movement to emerge. Contrary to what mass

mobilization assumes in the homogenous identity of the “we” *the people* vs. “you” *the authorities* (in Laclau’s sense), field interviews show the fragility of this identity that shattered in its first test.

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

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

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

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

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

The “we and you” also turned into “we”, i.e., *home children*, and “you”, i.e., *street children/hooligans* (Kirbaj, 2015). The “infiltrators discourse”, which asked the security forces to “clean” the square from infiltrators, excluded many participants who came from poor/marginalized neighborhoods on the pretext of defending “home children” from the violence of security forces. Hasan, a resident of Khandaq Ghamiq and a supporter of Hezbollah, participated in the demonstrations because the party did not provide him with a job. However, he received two “blows” as a result of his decision: “As far as the *Harak* people were concerned, I was an infiltrator,” Hasan said. “I also became forsaken in my neighborhood by the Movement and the Party. I received one blow from here and one blow from there.” Hasan stopped participating when he felt unwelcome in the demonstrations and because the *Harak* groups started to look like the parties he was protesting against. “They only checked on people they care about [in reference to the campaigns for solidarity with detained activists],” he said.³⁷

The “we and you” also splintered into competing and dissonant campaigns. First-time participants/non-participants, from all classes, regions and sects shared a common outlook towards the *Harak* groups:- that they had become extremely exclusive.

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

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

“The guys split up quickly. They split up even before accomplishing anything! They didn’t give us a chance to support them. We were the ‘couch party’.”³⁸ (Afaf, employee, Salim Slem)

“The guys were working as they pleased. They [‘You Stink’] stormed the building [of the Ministry of Environment] without informing anyone. Marwan Maalouf wanted to do a

³⁷ Most detainees in the first phase of arrests (from August 22 to September 1) were from low/middle-income families with no experience in demonstrations and activism, whereas activists dominated the second phase (from September 16 to October 8). The detainees of the first phase served longer times in prison compared to those of the second phase. They were not taken into consideration in the solidarity campaigns and media coverage which contributed to the immediate release of the activists (a lawyer in the Lawyers’ Committee to Defend the *Harak* Detainees).

³⁸ “Couch party” is an expression borrowed from Egypt. It refers to the silent majority of social groups that are negatively affected by the political, and socioeconomic situation but is inactive politically. This majority only observes the political situation from its “couch” behind the TV screen and does not seek to change its reality.

certain thing, so he did it. Assaad Thebian³⁹ wanted to do a certain thing, so he did it. It can't be like this! We didn't know what they wanted anymore. There wasn't a unified decision." (Nawal, inactive financially, Raouche)

However, was this fragmentation a result of the plurality of the "groups' adversaries", whether by blaming the "people" for not participating or excluding the "hooligans"? Participants' testimonies show that it was more complicated than that. The exclusion of certain segments of the population was demanded by some social categories before "You Stink" transformed it into a political position. Roy, a bank employee from Naqqash who participated in the August 29 demonstration, withdrew from the September 9 demonstration. "The second time it was different," he said. "I didn't participate after that. I felt that there were people who didn't participate in order to protest, but rather to cause trouble. You could tell from their looks." Nawal, inactive financially from Raouche), shares his aversion to the "uncivilized people". "The second time I participated, it was during the storm," Nawal said. "I felt that there was a strange atmosphere that was different from the one on August 29. It was the last time I participated." Carla's testimony is not that much different from Roy's and Nawal's.

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

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

Just like the infiltrators discourse, the "Everybody Means Everybody" slogan comforted an audience and alienated another. While a woman from Salim Slem was attracted by this slogan, a resident of Chiyah was worried and considered it "a direct targeting of Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah and the resistance movement." A similar logic applied to violence. While it was an attracting force for all groups before August 29, it contributed to the decline of some groups after "You Stink" members stormed the Ministry of Environment on September 1. It is worth noting that although violence was linked to the authorities' oppression, and thus its weakness, it encouraged

³⁹ Marwan Maalouf and Assaad Thebian are leaders in "You Stink". The former later withdrew from the campaign and established the "For the Republic" campaign.

the “peoples” to participate. However, when violence became interlaced with authorities closing their ranks after August 29, and when the identity of the *Harak* broke into “peoples” and “movements”, violence contributed to the withdrawal of numerous people. To them, violence was related to the post-August 29 period, and they associated this violence with the division in the groups when they condemned the *Harak* and justified their withdrawal. It seemed as if they were refusing the use of force by some groups as a tactic to compensate for the lack of vision.

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

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

The state of tension between the “peoples” and the “*Haraks*” sometimes went beyond circumstantial and subjective factors and took on a pure sectarian dimension. In our conversation, Mousa, a self-employed man from Rouways, stopped when he saw an interview on live TV to ask me:

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

This data raises questions surrounding the emergence of a cross-class social movement: Can “everybody” be recruited by a loose discourse? If so, can “politics by coincidence” or the protest state itself be surpassed by a loose discourse? Can an intellectual and organizational alternative be materialized without establishing alliances and making enemies? The toughest question lies in identifying the classes that will bear the social change in light of the social transformation and fragmentation.⁴⁰ This conceptual discussion, despite its importance, falls outside the scope of this research. What’s for certain in the participants’ testimonies, especially those with party affiliations, is that the lack of an alternative political vision for the *Harak* was crucial in their inability to transform from *protesting against* the leaders to *being liberated from them*.

⁴⁰ There are a lot of on-going academic discussions about class transformation around the world. For example: this issue was raised in the *Socialist Register* regarding the “Worker Classes, World Facts” (2001); “Registering Classes” (2014) and the “Transformation of Classes” (2015). In addition to the *Labor and Development Journal* regarding the “Issue of Work in Contemporary Capitalism” (2014).

“I have no interest.”

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

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

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

Unlike activists, who mostly live in relatively safe, religiously diverse neighborhoods, the ones who violated their party’s decision paid a heavy price for their participation. Some of them were subjected to harassment and physical abuse at their work places, while others were threatened with their jobs and the services they received from their parties. For example, Basem (unemployed, Chiyah) was beaten in his area by sympathizers of the Amal Movement after he criticized President Nabih Berri in the media. On the other hand, matters with Mahmoud (unemployed, Chiyah) did not develop into physical abuse after his father talked to one of his friends in the Amal Movement and they were limited to him hearing “some words and provocations”. However, when he went to pay his university tuition, he was surprised to learn that he had to pay the full amount, as his party (he refused to state which one) refused to pay part of the tuition after he stopped attending party meetings and joined the demonstrations. Pressure and threats sometimes take an ambiguous or implicit form. Perhaps that is what scared sympathizers more than direct threats:

“A second-rank leader in the Amal Movement will not come out to threaten you directly. Threats come arbitrarily. For example, if someone said something offensive about Nabih Berri, then this second-rank leader, and in order to fawn over his leadership, would teach

him a lesson without necessarily obtaining a central decision.” (Mousa, self-employed, Rwayyes)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nobody can just come and say ‘we want a civil state,’ out of the blue, while everything else is based on sectarianism: your upbringing, lifestyle, education, work, and health care. This political class keeps us in pain in order for us to stay under its control. You have to

provide me with an alternative so I can set myself free from it.” (Roy, bank employee, Naqqash)

These concerns are not limited to sectarian minorities; various other groups share them. Some people expressed their concern over the domination of one sect over the others, if the regime fell apart without materializing an alternative for it.

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

While some people expressed their concern over the absence of political organization and vision, others voiced lack of trust in the organizers. The lack of trust between activists groups themselves undermined their credibility among participants. Sandy, a director from Broumana, for example, was not reassured when they issued a position and then retreated it or when some leaders were taken out of the scene ambiguously (like Marwan Maalouf).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

“Home children didn’t go to the streets and street children went back home. Garbage was not taken off the streets and the regime is not worried anymore.”⁴¹ In this research, I sought to analyze the factors that motivated “street children” as well as “home children” to mobilize and demobilize. I argued that the “*Harak’s* groups”, which adopted “politics by coincidence” confronted the “peoples of the *Harak*”, especially the “street children”. This confrontation did not stem from exclusion solely, but from surpassing the reality of the “peoples” that should attend but not engage. The *Harak’s* confrontation with sectarian leaderships included their “audience” as well. It did not address their concerns about the theatrical protest, which does not guarantee an alternative. In this regard, first-time participants did not differentiate between the various *Haraks*, be they liberal or leftist. The *Harak* that confronted them was the group or groups whose discourse, actions and agenda dominated the streets and TV screens. Even the disputes between the “groups” were treated individually by the “peoples” by saying that “the *Harak* is lost and dispersed.”

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

Although open mobilization allowed for the establishment of connections between the activists’ circles and participants by default, it did not go through independent civil organizations. Therefore, it wasn’t able to create strong relationships with these organizations. Unlike the activists’ civil and secular circles, gatherings of participants are dominated by regional and sectarian relations (even if they are not sectarian in essence). These people took to the streets with people “like them” in terms of sects, regions and classes, and most often withdrew from the streets due to similar dynamics. Thus, the process of identifying a political program seemed excessively complex in light of the “organizational flexibility” of a semi-closed leadership. The various interests, values and biases of the “peoples” were not consistent with the demands, slogans and activities put forward by the “*Haraks*”.

Although the theatrical protest helped create an energy of demonstration that motivated a lot of people to take to the streets, this energy also contributed to their withdrawal when the *Harak*

⁴¹ These are some of the conclusions of the author and journalist Mohamed Zbib in a symposium entitled “The *Harak* in its Class Dimensions” at the American University of Beirut, as part of a series of symposia entitled “The *Harak* in its Intersectionality”.

could not go beyond “symbolic” activities. The inability of “politics by coincidence” to achieve “victories made numerous people withdraw from the streets. Even the violence, which was an attracting power for most participants before August 29, contributed to their subsequent decline afterwards. When violence was linked to the crack in the *Harak*’s identity and when it was used to compensate for the organizers’ confusion, it also contributed to the demobilization of some.

These results do not necessarily mean that materializing a political vision based on a democratic organizational structure was easy or feasible within a context of “open mobilization” and a limited timeframe. “I don’t want to be organized. I demonstrated and that’s more than enough” or “We will become just like the parties if we join groups” some said. Some participants refused to join the *Harak*’s groups, but at the same time they held them accountable for their organizational dispersion and the ambiguity of their demands and political vision. The refusal to organize and the demand for its political characteristics may seem contradictory, however, it is not necessarily the case. It may indicate their refusal of corrupt traditional organizations that are impotent or domesticated and their need for alternative organizational forms. The latter needs political imagination that is based on certain experiences and contexts, however, the same deduction gives hope for a remaining space between the impotent *old* and the instantaneous *new*. “Coincidence” alone is not enough to change the positions of some and threaten the interests of others.

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

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