Lebanese American University

A Non-'Sextarian' Lebanon

By

Sandra L. Fournouzlian

A thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in International Affairs

School of Arts and Sciences
July 2021

LAU
الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية
Lebanese American University

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: Sandra Fournouzlian   I.D. #: 200902413

Thesis Title: A Non-Sextarian Lebanon

Program: International Affairs

Department: Social Sciences

School: Arts & Sciences

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

MA   in the major of International Affairs

Thesis Advisor's Name: Dr. Bassel F. Salloukh

Signature: ▮▮▮▮   Date: 26 / 7 / 2021
    Day   Month   Year
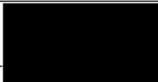
Committee Member's Name: Dr. Sami Baroudi

Signature: ▮▮▮▮   Date: 26 / 7 / 2021
    Day   Month   Year

Committee Member's Name: Dr. Jeffrey Karam

Signature: ▮▮▮▮   Date: 26 / 7 / 2021
    Day   Month   Year

THESIS COPYRIGHT RELEASE FORM

Name: Sandra Fournouzlian - 200902413

Signature: ▮

Date: 05/07/2021

LAU
الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية
Lebanese American University

PLAGIARISM POLICY COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

I certify that:

1. I have read and understood LAU's Plagiarism Policy.
2. I understand that failure to comply with this Policy can lead to academic and disciplinary actions against me.
3. This work is substantially my own, and to the extent that any part of this work is not my own I have indicated that by acknowledging its sources.

Name: _Sandra Fournouzlian - 200902413_

Signature: _____

Date: _05/07/2021_

<u>Acknowledgement</u>

A Non-Sextarian Lebanon

Sandra Fournouzlian

Abstract

Sectarianism has long been the main form of identity in Lebanon, with allegiance to the sect more prominent than allegiance to the state. However, in recent years, Lebanon has been witnessing the emergence of alternative identities contesting the dominant sectarian identity, namely by LGBTQ and feminist groups. In addition to their work as part of civil society advocating for women's and gay rights, the October 2019 revolution was an opportunity for LGBTQ and feminist activists to move themselves and their voices from the margins to center stage. This thesis aims to highlight the emergence and mobilization of these groups to identify which strategies work best to mobilize and politicize alternative identities at the expense of the dominant sectarian ones. An analysis of interviews with LGBTQ and feminist activists alongside the existing literature explains how anti- or cross-sectarian minority groups were able to emerge in spite of the sectarian system's complex ensemble of discursive, institutional and political economic practices obviating the emergence of such alternative identities. The thesis also compares the utility of different strategies deployed by examining the activism of groups advocating for LGBTQ and feminist rights in Lebanon before and during the outbreak of the October 2019 revolution.

Keywords: *Sectarianism, LGBTQ, feminism, October 2019, civil society, sextarianism, consociational, power-sharing, mobilization, activism*

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One

Introduction and Historical Background

1.1 Introduction

In a moment of fearless bravery, with the rifle in full view, she mustered up the courage and gave the politician's bodyguard a good kick on the stomach, simultaneously kick-starting the flood of ideas and calls for change that avalanched into the 17 October 2019 protests (Al-Masdar News, 2019). Concurrently, and with herd loyalty, sectarian factions mobilized and took to the streets with their chants, breaking and burning everything that challenged their sectarian allegiances.

Lebanon has witnessed in the past many ideological and political divisions: The Maronite anti-Palestinian groups against the Muslim pro-Palestinian groups during the 1975 Civil War, the March 14 bloc and the March 8 bloc, and the Sunni Muslim political parties and the Shi'a Muslim ones. But an unprecedented division recently emerged: an alternative anti-sectarian identity versus a sectarian one. The most intriguing representation of this division was the back-and-forth chanting heard around Beirut during the popular demonstrations after 17 October: "Shi'a – so are we!" They were in response to the "Shi'a, Shi'a" slogan chanted by Amal and Hizbullah supporters who prioritized their sectarian identity over alternative socioeconomic, gender, or regional identities. These sectarian slogans were faced with the "so are we!" responses from a mix of anti- or cross-sectarian secular groups who, albeit acknowledged their sectarian

identity, but whose allegiance nevertheless transgresses imposed sectarian identities and binaries.

The term "de-sectarianization" is coined in part to explain this "contestation and apparent erosion of the prevalence of sectarian identities in socio-political life" (Mabon, 2019), which is what the 17 October protests underscored powerfully. Its emergence in Lebanon despite the otherwise institutionalization of sectarian identities is paradoxical and requires explanation lest, as Morten Valbjørn reminds us, the "cure does not end up being almost as bad as the disease" (2020: p. 3).

Certainly, by the end of 2019, Lebanon was witnessing a surge of wide-scale protests that took over the country, where frustrated citizens from different areas took to the streets as an objection to the prevalent sectarian system and political class that had been ruling the country for decades, paralyzing the country in order to make their voices heard. But how did this revolutionary wave come about?

The main catalyst that led to the eruption of these demonstrations was the proposal of new taxes on messaging and call services, such as WhatsApp, in addition to taxes on tobacco and petroleum. While these proposed new taxes seemed to be the trigger that motivated the Lebanese people to protest poor living conditions and the sectarian system as a whole, the cracks of failure in the country's system had started to show months, even years, before October 2019. The WhatsApp tax seemed to be the final straw after years of "corruption, gridlock in government, and the country's crumbling infrastructure" (Sewell, 2019).

Well before October 2019, people had started to notice changes in the Lebanese banking system and their ability to access their money. Unofficial exchange rates

gradually began increasing, while the official LBP to USD rate remained the same, the rate that had been established in 1997. Withdrawal limits were imposed by banks on citizens trying to access their money, ATMs were found to be empty most of the time, and dollars became difficult to receive and access. What was once a common practice for most Lebanese citizens, began to seem difficult to do (Holtmeier, 2019). By September 2019, the economic crisis was being intensely felt in Lebanon, which sparked protests by hundreds of people in the country's capital, including strikes by gas station workers, who were not able to purchase petrol at the official exchange rate. The Lebanese Lira had begun plummeting against foreign currencies, and the financial crisis was well underway (AlJazeera, 2019).

In addition to the country's economic failure that had been boiling for years until the banking system was no longer able to handle it, unprecedented wildfires brushed through the country's mountains and forests, exposing the postwar state's failure to protect the environment due to the lack of maintenance of fire-fighting aircrafts, leaving the people exposed and frustrated amidst their deteriorating living conditions (BBC, 2019).

All these pressures converged on Thursday 17 October. What started as another ordinary day for the people of Lebanon, was quickly transformed into a memorable one that will be one for the history books. By Thursday night, people all over Lebanon began demonstrating and blocking roads by burning tires and garbage, with the largest protest taking place in Riad El Solh, Beirut (Azhari, 2019). While the WhatsApp tax seemed to be the motive for people to take to the streets, the real causes were much more complex. A few hours after the protests began, the newly proposed taxes were cancelled. However,

that did not stop the revolutionary wave that was underway in Lebanon as the cancellation of the taxes was not sufficient to repress the frustration that was being felt for months prior.

Lebanon has a history of mass protests and mobilizations, including the Cedar Revolution of 2005, the Intifada of 2011, and the protests against the garbage crisis of 2015. During the latter two protests of 2011 and 2015, Lebanon witnessed the rise of activist groups such as "You Stink" and "We Want Accountability." The main objectives of the groups demonstrating then were the end of the garbage crisis and to raise awareness about the corruption of the Lebanese political class (Civil Society Knowledge Center, 2015). While the 2015 protests were considered to be a form of precursor to the 2019 protests, the latter took a much more radical turn in terms of holding the sectarian system and ruling class accountable for the financial and political crises the country was going through. With the unemployment rate reaching 25%, the fall of the Lebanese lira against foreign currencies, lack of basic services such as electricity, a high public dept, and a third of the citizens living below the poverty line, the grievances were too massive this time around (BBC, 2019). Indeed, and in an unprecedented manner, the Lebanese October protests were characterized by a form of activism and decentralized dynamic that was not apparent during the previous mobilizations: encompassing different regions and sects, denouncing the sectarian system, and calling for the political elite to step down and be held accountable for driving the country into a massive economic crisis (Chérif-Alami, 2019). With the attachment of the Lebanese to their sectarian identity, the rise of a nationwide anti-sectarian rhetoric accompanied by the "all of them means all of them" chants was unprecedented (Sleiman, 2019). Additionally, one of the main important

features of the October protests was the abundant presence and emergence of grassroots organizations which had an active role throughout the protests, from maintaining communication between people from all across the country, organizing marches, sharing information back and forth, and so on. A distinguishing aspect of most of these organizations is their anti- or cross-sectarian stance.

Indeed, Lebanon is usually presented as the prime example of a country dominated by sectarian identities because of the power these identities possess as primary markers of political mobilization and identification (Cammett, 2019). Rather than refer to themselves based on their class, gender, or regional affiliation, most Lebanese citizens tend to identify themselves based on the sect or religion they belong to, showing the extent to which sectarian identities are deeply embedded (Arab Barometer, 2016). Yet despite the dominance and "stickiness" of sectarian identities (Varshney, 2007: p. 288), other alternative identity groups have emerged, demonstrating that sectarianism in Lebanon is a historical construct rather than a primordial identity. Some of these groups have been able to work within this sectarian system to advance their agendas and achieve their goals for minority rights. Two groups have especially championed alternatives to sectarian identities in postwar Lebanon: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community and feminist groups.

In a region where homosexuality is problematized and even condemned, the LGBTQ movement in Lebanon has made some advancements over the years, even though in sectarian Lebanon the Christian faith considers homosexuality to be a perversion and abnormality, while in Islam, it is forbidden and worthy of punishment (Schmidtke, 1999). Thus, being part of the LGBTQ community is characterized by hurdles, lack of rights and

representation, and political and social exclusion. While this community has been receiving a good amount of support from Lebanese civil society (CS), homosexuality or people with different sexual orientations and behavior are still ridiculed, punished, and humiliated. In 2004, Lebanon witnessed the establishment of the first ever LGBTQ organization, Helem, after years of underground and secret activism. The LGBTQ community members had always shown each other support, well before the establishment of a legal organization advocating for their rights and wellbeing. The establishment of Helem brought about the foundation of other LGBTQ groups and organizations, while taking a more public stance regarding their rights and freedoms and LGBTQ individuals residing in Lebanon. The increased integration and public exposure of LGBTQ members did not eliminate the occasional crackdowns or increase awareness and acceptance. "Today, the LGBTI people in Lebanon stand somewhere in the middle - their very existence is no longer being criminalized, but they still don't enjoy the freedom to exercise their rights" (Mandour, 2019).

Throughout the years, Lebanese activists supporting LGBTQ rights have made central advancements regarding raising awareness on the importance of accepting and protecting members of this community, increasing social integration, setting up sexual health clinics, hosting events and activities, and pushing for the de-criminalization of homosexuality, mainly the abolishment of article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code (Kwatra, 2018). They also gained media exposure which provided them with the opportunity to be more publicly present, in addition to their increased integration within Lebanese civil society. "Over time, the public in general appears to have become used to

the existence of LGBTI[1] individuals amongst them, but that is not to say that they have become more accepting or even ready to endorse or support their struggle for their rights" (Mandour, 2019). Indeed, with the increased exposure and awareness for LGBTQ rights and freedoms came increased crackdowns and oppression by Lebanese security forces on the members of this community, mainly the cancellation of the May Beirut Pride events whereby the organizer was forced to pledge that he would not be proceeding with the event or face criminal charges (Kwatra, 2018).

Thus, the October 2019 revolution was an opportunity for LGBTQ members to move themselves and their voices from the margins to center stage. The phrases "we want to topple homophobia; it must go!" and "faggot is not an insult" were constantly repeated throughout the massive protests all around the country, alongside graffiti drawings on the walls of the Beirut downtown area supporting gay rights against the face of the deeply-rooted sectarianism of Lebanon (Younes, 2019). Certainly, this public act of defiance shows the determinant characteristic of boldness that was present during the protests of 2019, whereby Lebanon witnessed the emergence of a new form of activism that had not been seen before among the Lebanese public.

Another popular phrase that resonated with a large segment of the Lebanese population during the October protests was "the revolution is feminist" – in part, a play on the Arabic term *thawra*[2] which is a feminine term. Indeed, the revolution was female, as Beirut witnessed women from all areas and sects come together and become the face of the revolution. "From all different ages and backgrounds, Lebanese women and girls are shaping the direction and character of the revolution. They are on the frontlines of

---

[1] A different variation of the term LGBTQ. LGBTI is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex.
[2] Revolution in Arabic.

demonstrations, standing in the faces of soldiers and their tanks, and forming buffers between security forces and protestors to prevent outbreaks of violence" (WILPF, 2019). They were advocating for political, economic, social, and environmental causes throughout the demonstrations. The protests allowed women to be more expressive and speak up against the sectarian patriarchal system of Lebanon which has been an obstacle to their rights and freedoms for decades, one of the most important obstacles being the Lebanese Personal Status Laws (PSLs), which give religious courts full autonomy to govern personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody (Mikdashi, 2010). Thus, the demonstrations of October 2019 provided these women with the public forum to make their voices heard and be on the frontlines of the revolution demanding a whole range of reforms.

Albeit women in Lebanon are often considered to enjoy more basic freedoms and rights than their fellow Middle Eastern women, and feminist movements in Lebanon are considered to be the most vibrant and empowered in the region, with educated and eloquent women leading the movements (Avis, 2017), however, Lebanese women face major institutional and social obstacles that deny them very basic rights. Lebanon scores very low on female political and institutional representation compared to other countries in the Global South. In 2017, only 5.5% of local council seats and 6.2% of legislative seats were occupied by women (ESCWA, 2017). Moreover, women in Lebanon are not able to pass on their nationality to their children, and they are governed and discriminated against by a patriarchal sectarian society.

Thus, Lebanese women have been fighting for their rights for decades, including the Personal Status Laws, which reinforce the patriarchal sectarian system, increasing

political representation, and so on. Feminist mobilization in Lebanon can be identified in four waves, pertaining to the country's history and political agendas. The first wave emerged in the 1940s when women demanded mainly the right to vote and education. The second wave of the 1960s was about political representation and humanitarian activism. The third wave began in 1995 with the emergence of feminist civil society organizations (CSOs) advocating for women's rights. Lastly, the fourth wave of the early 2000s focused on social and economic empowerment, aside from the previous focus on political representation and religious matters (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). This thesis identifies itself with the fourth wave of feminism, which advocates "sexual and bodily rights" and "economic empowerment," in addition to advocating and attempting to raise awareness for the vulnerable population, including the LGBTQ (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). Most of the feminist groups and collectives, such as Meem and Nasawiya, which emerged during this period, were not politically affiliated to parties, which determines the path taken by feminist groups from the 2000s and on.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis takes the mobilization and survival of the LGBTQ and feminist groups as evidence of the emergence of alternative identities in Lebanon, despite the dominance of sectarian identities. It aligns itself with the constructivist approach to underscore the historical emergence of sectarianism as the primary mode of political identity and mobilization in postwar Lebanon, and also the institutional approach combined with the political economy of sectarianism to justify the dominance of sectarian identity over all other identities. This thesis aims to explain the strategies used to advance minority rights in postwar Lebanon. Thus, the goal

9

of this thesis is to identify which strategies work best to mobilize and politicize alternative identities at the expense of the dominant sectarian ones. Moreover, what strategies work best to advance minority rights within a power-sharing system? Is it better to adopt a confrontational or an accommodational approach? Is it more useful for groups championing minority rights to work through the existing sectarian system and through existing sectarian groups, or against the sectarian system and through secular grassroots organizations without any political affiliation? These questions have not only theoretical but also policy relevance: How can one achieve change in a power-sharing system where sectarian identity is prevalent?

Thus, this research study will explain how anti- or cross-sectarian minority groups were able to emerge in spite of the sectarian system's complex ensemble of discursive, institutional and political economic practices obviating the emergence of these alternative identities (Salloukh, et al., 2015). It will also examine the strategies leading to the success of some groups as opposed to the failure of others by examining the activism of groups advocating for LGBTQ and feminist rights in Lebanon before and during the outbreak of the October 2019 revolution. The main focus of this thesis is activism, especially pertaining to the groups that promote identities that emerge from outside the dominant sectarian system. Many variables affect the reproduction of sectarian identities, and hence preclude the emergence of anti-sectarian ones. This thesis will focus on the impact of activism by groups championing alternative identities, both before and during the October 2019 protests.

1.3 Methodology

Sectarianism is a "holistic political economic and ideological system that permeates almost every nook and cranny of Lebanese life, undergirded by a clientelist patronage network

and a symbolic repertoire that incorporates large segments of Lebanese society into corporatized sectarian communities" (Salloukh, et al. 2015: p. 3). Thus, in order to comprehend these activist groups in a confessional sectarian system, employing a political economy approach would be beneficial for the research.

This thesis relies on the qualitative research method: structured interviews and an analysis of existing literature including publications, books, journal articles, and reports, in order to shed light on the way these organizations operate, their achievements, and the challenges and obstacles they face as minority rights organizations in a sectarian patriarchal society. The research design is a case study, because it is a detailed observation of the mentioned organizations and individuals operating in a sectarian political system.

This research study distinguishes between feminist and LGBTQ organizations and activists who have adopted an accommodational approach as opposed to a confrontational one, whereby some actors believe in reform and the necessity of working with political and authority figures in order to advance their agendas, while others believe the existing system does not allow any room for change and therefore needs to be dismantled. It highlights three types of feminist actors: state actors, reformist actors, and radical actors, with the focus being on the latter two types of actors. It also places the spotlight on LGBTQ organizations and activists who develop strategies to advocate for their rights, in contrast to those who believe they can achieve their goals by dismantling the system.

The cases examined in this thesis include: 1) Helem, the non-profit organization which actively works on the improvement of the social and legal status of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon (Arab.org, 2004), 2) Kafa the "feminist, secular, Lebanese, non-profit, non-governmental civil society organization seeking to create a society that is free of social,

economic, and legal patriarchal structures that discriminate against women" (KAFA, 2020), 3) Women who identify as feminist activists and are members of women's rights organizations, who participated in the October 2019 protests based on individual initiatives, and 4) Women and men who identify as LGBTQ activists, who are members of an LGBTQ rights organization and participated in the October 2019 protests based on individual initiatives.

As the first legal LGBTQ organization in Lebanon, Helem's approach to achieving their goals in a power-sharing confessional system includes conflicting views, with some members acknowledging the sectarian system as the channel through which they should operate, and other members adopting a more radical anti-sectarian stance as a means to achieve their objectives (Nagle, 2016). Meanwhile, KAFA's nonsectarian secular approach against the legal patriarchal structure (KAFA, 2020) seems to have a firmer stance regarding the patriarchal structure in Lebanon, which in fact is correlated with the dominance of sectarianism.

Since the October 2019 protests in Lebanon had a different note to it than previous movements and mobilization attempts, it will be used as a reference point to signal the change in attitude and approaches towards affecting change in Lebanon. Thus, this thesis will be based on accounts of Lebanese individuals who identify as feminists and/or LGBTQ and were actively participating in the 2019 protests, in order to highlight the difference in approaches and strategies. The absence of organized women's and LGBTQ rights organizations during the 2019 protests and individuals championing these minority rights taking to the streets on a personal initiative basis, already highlights part of the different approaches adopted.

These cases will highlight the biopolitical nature of "sextarianism" in Lebanon as they are both marginalized by sex and sect within Lebanese society.

1.4 Map of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter situates the topic in the theoretical literature on sectarianism in Lebanon, including the primordialist, instrumentalist, constructivist, and institutionalist perspectives. It also discusses the literature on the emergence of LGBTQ and feminist groups. The objective of this chapter is to explain the reasons behind the "stickiness" (2007) of sectarian identities despite the rise and vocal nature of the LGBTQ and feminist movements. The third and fourth chapters survey the case studies and discuss the barriers faced by these groups on a daily basis, from institutional, political economic, ideological, to biopolitical ones, and the approaches and strategies implemented in order to achieve their objective as organizations and members of communities seeking to advocate certain minority rights. The fifth chapter sums up the argument and spells out its theoretical and practical implications.

Chapter Two

From Sectarianism to Sextarianism

2.1 Introduction

Identity politics has been predominant in the Middle East for the past several decades, whereby different ethnic and sectarian groups have "coexisted in mosaic-like social environments" (Bahout, 2016). Studies of sectarianism in Lebanon consider it the "antithesis of nation," and attribute its rise to colonialism and the postwar consolidation of the Taif Agreement (Makdisi, 1996). Lebanon is divided into 18 sects, none being a demographic majority, controlled by sectarian elites considered the representatives of the people of their respective sects. Lebanon's consociational power-sharing system institutionalizes this "political sectarianism" (Mikdashi, 2019). Sectarianism is thus the prevalent political identity in Lebanon, with affiliation to the sectarian political party and confessional or sectarian community far more significant than allegiance to the state. "Belonging is to a nation, but in the eyes of some, it is to a religion, nationality, and language" (Fayad, 2016). Based on surveys gathering focused groups from different demographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and examining voting patterns during the 2018 Lebanese elections, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) came to the conclusion that the majority of voters elect their representatives along sectarian lines (Sanchez, 2021). Most of these voters harbor negative feelings towards other sectarian groups and feel the need to protect their own confessional community (Atallah & El-Helou, 2018). Countless studies have tried to explain the power of sectarian allegiances in Lebanon and,

concomitantly, the weakness of alternative non-sectarian identities. Some studies say the clientelistic system and sectarian quotas allow the sectarian elite to distribute institutional positions as part of their network of patronage, thus reinforcing sectarian allegiance (Collard, 2019). Another study states that religious leaders and their hold over their confessions coupled with the weakness of the state, is enough to birth this strong sectarian affiliation (Henley, 2016). How then do alternative non- or cross-sectarian identities contest this dominant sectarian allegiance in postwar Lebanon? More precisely, how were LGBTQ and feminist groups able to contest what is a complex political sectarian patriarchal system? But first, how did this sectarian identity emerge as the dominant type of political identity, and why does it prove so resilient?

2.2 The Origins of Sectarian Identities

Ussama Makdisi locates the emergence of sectarianism as the dominant type of political affiliation in Mount Lebanon in the period after 1861. He thus defies the general claim that sectarianism was a reaction to the French mandate in Lebanon, instead claiming that sectarianism is a by-product of policies introduced in Mount Lebanon by the Ottoman and European powers. He goes back to the Mount Lebanon War of 1860 between the Christian Maronites and the Druze and finds that it displays the early period of sectarian animosity in Lebanon. This atrocious event led to the interference of France as the protector of Christians in Mount Lebanon, which provided the Ottomans with the suitable narrative to believe that the inhabitants of that area had tribal and ethnic origins, and thus would always be caught in sectarian strife. This led to the establishment of a sectarian administration in the new Mutasarifiyya of Mount Lebanon, as a "balance of communities" (p: 609) with administrative posts fairly distributed based on religious affiliation (Makdisi, 2002).

In retrospect, the creation of a sectarian administration during Ottoman rule can be considered to be the origins of the current power-sharing sectarian system in Lebanon. Makdissi also focuses on the Ottoman Tanzimat, a period of reforms which began in 1839. The Tanzimat were put in place in order to modernize the empire and appease European powers, thus including laws that would equate Muslim to non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, whereby the latter Christians would be protected by European powers. This increased the tension between the different religious groups, which, according to Makdissi, later erupted in a sectarian war. This also led to the European Orientalist notion that the Ottoman empire was inferior and needed to be colonized by European powers in order to become a civilized society. Thus, the Ottoman Tanzimat, accompanied by European intrusion in the Levant, gave birth to what Makdissi labels a 'culture of sectarianism', which came about, not due to religious and sectarian differences, but due to political agendas that pinned these groups against each other (Makdisi, 2000). Thus, sectarianism has been the result of political strategies that were put in place well before the French colonial era in Lebanon. However, Makdissi's analysis explains the birth of the culture of sectarianism, but it does not highlight the dominance of sectarian identity in modern day post-war Lebanon. Is this rooted in primordial or, alternatively, institutional and political economic causes? How do different theoretical approaches explain the politicization of sectarian identities?

2.3 Explaining Sectarianism

Primordialists focus on the ethnicity, sect, or tribe as the foundation of identity. They assume that these primordial loyalties come naturally and shape peoples' political loyalties (Varshney, 2007). This essentialist primordial approach has often been rejected by scholars. Alternative approaches include constructivism, instrumentalism, and institutionalism (Cammett,

2019). Constructivists assume that identity is socially constructed, resulting from shared historical and political struggles (Clark and Salloukh, 2013). Instrumentalists attribute the politicization of sectarian identity to political entrepreneurs who mobilize their followers along ethnic, sectarian, or tribal lines in pursuit of political and economic state resources. Political elites are seen as the prominent manipulators in this theoretical approach. Valbjørn (2019) rejects the argument that pure primordialist and instrumentalist approaches are dominant in the literature, and calls instead for alternative eclectic approaches. Finally, institutionalists claim that political institutions contribute to either the politicization or de-politicization of sectarian identities based on the institutional architecture used. Power-sharing is one such institutional arrangement to manage conflict in divided societies. In a consociational system where power is shared along ethnoreligious or sectarian lines, formal institutions distribute power along these lines as well, thus hardening sectarian identities (Cammett, 2019). How do these theoretical approaches explain the persistence of sectarian identities in Lebanon? And can they account for the emergence of alternative identities in postwar Lebanon?

The primordialist approach maintains that identities are fixed and will continually shape the behavior of people, thus they are unlikely to become obsolete (Hanf, 1993). Using this approach as a starting point, Hilal Khashan (2000) attributes Arab political failure to the "Arab mind," stating that Arabs are unable to go beyond their tribal or sectarian loyalties. In his book *Inside the Lebanese Confessional Mind*, Khashan employs a quantitative approach to study Lebanese attitudes towards different sects, and to negatively conclude that Lebanon cannot be reconstructed due to the lack of national sentiment and the prevalence of sectarian hatred (Khashan, 1992). In a similar manner, Samir Khalaf (2002) highlights the resilience of primordial ties as one of the contributing elements in the "problematic interplay" of postwar

Lebanon, shedding light on what he calls the "retribalization and the reassertion of communal and territorial identities, as perhaps the most prevalent and defining elements" (Khalaf, 2002, p. 307). However, if the primordial approach is valid, and if the Lebanese are only primordial, how then can we explain the emergence of alternative identities in postwar Lebanon?

The French philosopher Michel Foucault uses genealogical analysis to "identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us (Foucault, 1977). By deploying Foucault's genealogy, Salloukh et al. (2015) assert that "sectarianism is a modern constitutive Foucauldian socioeconomic and political power that produces and reproduces sectarian subjects and modes of political subjectification and mobilization through a dispersed ensemble of institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices" (Salloukh et al., 2015: 3). On this view, then, sectarianism is a construct rather than a primordial attachment. For example, arguing against the primordial approach to the construction of sectarianism in 19th century Mount Lebanon, Usama Makdisi's (2000) genealogy of sectarianism goes back to Ottoman times, suggesting that rank, not religion, was an indication of power. Makdisi's constructivist approach claims sectarianism is not a mere primordial practice, but a product of colonial authorities, the Ottoman Tanzimat, and local actors, pursuing their own interests. Makdisi does not deny the existence of sectarian identities in Mount Lebanon before 1861, but rather that the emergence of a sectarian order in Mount Lebanon was the result of overlapping local, regional, and international dynamics and not primordial origins (2000).

While this constructivist approach is adequate to explain the historical emergence of sectarian identities, it is not able to justify the dominance of sectarian identities, and how sectarianism has hardened over time, impeding the emergence of alternative identities. Nor can it

account for the emergence of alternative identities in postwar Lebanon. Institutional, state-society relations, and political economic factors offer better explanations, however.

Donald Horowitz (1990) states that power-sharing institutions organized along sectarian lines reinforce sectarian divisions. In this respect, Lebanon is a perfect example. The Lebanese political system, a corporate consociational democracy, is a prime example of the institutionalization of sectarian identities which, in turn, become the foundation of belonging, political representation, and personal status in Lebanese society. For example, Hoda Baytiyeh (2019) attributes sectarian division to the ruling elite's manipulation of the power-sharing system by taking advantage of their strategic positions in the government and public sector. Additionally, through "manipulative schemes," these leaders were able to transfer power to sects and their political representatives, thus reinforcing sectarian divides (Baytiyeh, 2019). Social institutions—marriage, divorce, inheritance, and so on—are subject to the religious courts and laws (Salloukh et al., 2015), formally institutionalizing sectarianism.

Another level of explanations focuses on state-society relations (Migdal 1988) and the role played by sectarian elites or parties at the level of civil society to impede the emergence of alternative identities. Salloukh and Clark attribute the stickiness (2007) of sectarian identity to the recursive relation between sectarian elites and some civil society actors, whereby the former undermine CSOs to advance their own interests and obfuscate challenges to the sectarian order, and the latter instrumentalize the political system for their own advantage. Since civil society actors use sectarian elites to advance their agendas, sectarian leaders also co-opt or take advantage of CSOs for their own clientelist interests (Clark & Salloukh, 2013). Similarly, the Lebanese welfare system is dependent on non-state sectarian actors, especially after public welfare institutions were further weakened by the civil war. The institutionalization of welfare

programs initiated by sectarian and religious communities is partly a response to the failure of the weak state, and partly a strategy to maintain influence over their respective sectarian communities and clients (Cammett, 2015).

Another explanation underscores the role of sectarian elite capture of the postwar political economy and access to state resources. Hannes Baumann states that "the political economy of sectarianism is one where a small politically connected elite appropriates the bulk of economic surplus and redistributes it through communal clientelism" (Baumann, 2016). Salloukh (2019) unpacks the role played by the postwar 'very sectarian public sector' in reproducing sectarian modes of identification and mobilization and hence entrenching the power and influence of the sectarian elite. Public positions and state resources are distributed among the sectarian political elite, creating a system of clientelism and patronage, which is the foundation of the postwar political economy of sectarianism (Salloukh, 2019). Similarly, Jad Chaaban and Nisreen Salti (2010) examine sectarianism by studying the allocation of public funds in postwar Lebanon. They conclude that public funds are distributed according to a sectarian logic rather than socioeconomic needs. While the state should provide its citizens with their basic socio-economic needs, "the Lebanese experience has been tainted by the constraint of confessional balance that allows sectarian identity to supersede citizenship in the scheme of resource allocation" (Salti & Chaaban, 2010, p. 653). Similarly, Melani Cammett and Sukriti Issar conducted a comparative study of two prominent parties in Lebanon: the Future Movement and Hezbollah. Against the common assumption that these parties serve their own people and sectarian communities, Cammett and Issar show empirically that these sectarian parties provide welfare services to sectarian groups besides their own, based on electoral calculations, thus reinforcing the idea that sectarian parties provide socioeconomic services in the absence of state

institutions, further politicizing these services which would lead to an uneven allocation and distribution of resources, thus deepening sectarian divisions (Cammett & Issar, 2010). Nadim El Kak also attributes the failure of "anti-establishment" mobilization efforts against the traditional sectarian parties to the Lebanese electoral law and the political economy of sectarianism, in addition to organizational challenges faced by these anti-sectarian movements (Kak, 2019).

The aforementioned arguments suggest that rather than primordial loyalties, it is actually institutional design, state-society relations, and the postwar political economy of sectarianism that play an important role in the domination of sectarian over other identities in postwar Lebanon. Another important variable to explain the dominance of sectarian identities in postwar Lebanon is the intersection between family, sect, sex and sectarianism.

2.4 From Sectarianism to Sextarianism

Suad Joseph has long argued that "political familism" is important to understand the Lebanese state's organizations and political processes. Where the state has not been present to provide for the population, the family and "familism" have stepped in to fill in this state absence (Joseph, 2011). In another work, Joseph emphasizes kinship and the kin contract. She contends that the weakness of the Lebanese state and its corruption causes citizens to rely on their kin for protection and welfare rather than the state (Joseph, 2005). Additionally, these kin groups have coincided with the sect, and in turn, with the political order. However, this extended kinship reinforces "patriarchal connectivity" where the males in the family are privileged and have control over the family women. Joseph thus argues that the marginalization of women is a result of the extended kin structure (2005).

Michael Johnson (2002) also examines the processes by which ideas of family and confessional ties result in ethnic violence. He asserts that sectarian conflict is the byproduct of modernizing patriarchal family values and "that urbanization is the single most important stimulator of tribal, communal, confessional or, to use the generic term, 'ethnic' identity" (2002: 18). Johnson then establishes a link between sectarian violence and the fear of the other by explaining how confessional parties in Lebanon provide financial and emotional support to their partisans, mainly from oppressive lower and middle class families, thus merging the concepts of self and sect, family and nation. By so doing, these sectarian parties transform their supporters' personal honor into hostility towards the other. "Young men are encouraged to see themselves as belonging to a community that replicates the family but relieves them of its contradictions" (Johnson 2002: 202).

Personal status laws are another important site for identity contestation. In Lebanon, this involves religious laws that handle the personal matters of each sectarian community — marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody, and so on, instead of a unified civil code. These laws, recognized in 1936, deny women from their basic rights as they stem from a patriarchal system, thus institutionalizing patriarchy, making these PSLs assume a discriminatory effect on Lebanese women (Saadeh, 2011). According to a study by Human Rights Watch (HRW), women faced obstacles and limitations, were unfairly treated, and had much less rights as opposed to men due to these PSLs and court procedures, as religious courts did not provide the adequate amount of support for these womens' legal proceedings. In this study, HRW discuss unequal divorce and custody laws which are in favor of men and discriminatory against women. They suggest the adoption of a civil code for such matters and the need for "fundamental changes to existing religious legal codes" (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Under these religious laws, it is much more

22

difficult for women to terminate marriages, gain custody of children, etc. due to their patriarchal nature.

"Because of hormonal changes due to their period, they [women] find it difficult to make the right choices," one court cleric said. "How, then, can they possess the power to divorce?" (Human Rights Watch, 2015: p. 8) This statement represents the inferior image women are portrayed through in the Lebanese society, which in turn has been institutionalized by the Personal Status Laws. This institutionalization has also created further gaps between women across confessions due to the differences in the laws that govern personal matters, from being able to terminate marriages with greater ease to having child custody revoked, and so on.

One of the reasons behind the absence of a unified civil code to handle personal matters and the presence of PSLs under religious laws is the constitutional protection these PSLs have. Article 9 of the Lebanese constitution states that "it shall also guarantees [*sic*] that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected" (The Lebanese Constitution, 1926: p. 5), thus constitutionally allowing religious authorities to maintain control over personal matters while remaining the greater authority in overseeing these matters, and making the adoption of a civil code rather difficult, if not impossible.

Aside from their patriarchal nature, the sectarian nature of PSLs reinforces the factional nature of the country, whereby people are obliged to resort to their respective sects for their personal matters rather than a unified national civil code, which in turn weakens the population's national identity and strengthens their sectarian allegiance while simultaneously granting the sectarian elites more power and hegemony over their respective sects.

PSLs are also where sex and sectarianism intersect (Mikdashi 2010). Thus, aside from belonging to sectarian courts, these PSLs stem from a patriarchal nature (Mikdashi, 2010). "Sextarianism," a term coined by Mikdashi, indicates that sex and sect "operate together to form the legal infrastructure of biolpolitical citizenship in Lebanon" (2010: p. 2). Mikdashi explains how the state ties sex and sect together and does not distinguish between the two. She demonstrates the relations between gender discrimination and sectariansim by giving citizenship law as a prime example. In Lebanon, a woman is unable to pass her citizenship to her children. For Mikdashi, this is directly linked to the sectarian balance because allowing women to pass on their citizenship would allow for the naturalization of Muslim refugees — Syrian and Palestinian — which in turn would lead to the decline of the Christian population, thus referred to as "demographic anxieties" (Mikdashi, 2018). Thus, the 'mutual coexistence' (*al-'aysh al-mushtarak*) mentioned in the Taif Agreement seems to apply to one type of political difference only, namely the sectarian difference (Mikdashi, 2019b), thus consecrating sectarian identities as the only meaningful ones for political activity. There are thus substantial demographic and sectarian implications to ammending the nationality law in Lebanon and thus allowing women to pass on Lebanese nationality to their children. The "obsession with maintaining a sectarian 'demographic balance'" where one sect does not overpower the others, especially since some parliamentary seats are distributed based on population size (Ghaddar, 2017), only further portrays the intersection between sex and sect in Lebanon.

Mikdashi believes in the need to focus on sexual differences alongside sectarianism when discussing citizenship since Lebanese sectarian citizens are bioproduced through laws that also regulate sexual difference, thus the intersection between sex and sect (Mikdashi, 2018). Calls by the sectarian elite for the elimination of political sectarianism and creating a unified PSL are

nothing but a "cynical attempt" (p. 7) in Mikdashi's opinion, as the creation of the latter is not possible without a constitutional crisis. The creation of a unified PSL would entail religious leaders to be removed from all jurisdictions they currently have. Both Muslim and Christian political powers have used the unified PSL against each other: Muslim powers have rejected this idea, especially in relation to a civil marriage law, while the Christians have appeared to be more accepting of a civil marriage law knowing the Muslim religious leaders would reject it (Mikdashi, 2019a).

Lina Khatib's (2008) research on "Citizenship and Agency in Lebanon" compliments Mikdashi's research on the patriarchal character of PSLs, and examines how gender discrimination is institutionalized through PSLs. She considers "the personal is political" (2008) in Lebanon, because what should be a private personal issue, such as marriage and divorce, impacts women's public lives, because private matters are governed by the religious entity rather than the state. By also focusing on citizenship laws, Khatib shows how women have constantly been marginalized in Lebanon. Khatib also attributes the sidelining of women to sectarian elites who define who is marginalized and who is significant in ways that advance their interests (Khatib, 2008). The outdated citizenship law truly represents the ultimate form of discrimination against Lebanese women, and both the sectarian and the patriarchal nature of the Lebanese system. Lebanese women are not the only citizens who have been marginalized and disenfranchised for decades, however. For years, LGBTQ individuals have been struggling to be considered part of the Lebanese society and be able to freely express their identity amidst a dominantly sectarian and patriarchal society that discriminates against them.

2.5 LGBTQ in a Power-Sharing System

Much like women in Lebanon who are stripped of their basic rights as opposed to Lebanese men, homophobic and transphobic sentiments are rampant considering the patriarchal nature of society. LGBTQ individuals are not allowed to be their true selves due to both societal and legal obstacles. In May 2018, the LGBTQ community in Beirut was preparing for the second Beirut Pride event, which included workshops, concerts, and a conference on the legal rights of this community in Lebanon, taking place over a few days. This event was considered to be a crucial step towards sexual minority rights in the rather conservative Middle Eastern region, with Lebanon being considered less conservative than its neighboring countries. However, three days after the start of the event, it was suspended by members of the Lebanese security forces, and the event organizer was detained and released only after signing a document that the event would come to a halt. According to the event organizer Hadi Damien, "the more organized you are, the more attacked you get" (Lautissier, 2018).

The LGBTQ community in Lebanon is yet to be recognized and accepted by the majority of Lebanese society. According to a poll conducted by Pew Research Center in 2007, 79% of the Lebanese population involved in the study believed that homosexuality should be rejected, as opposed to a meager 18% who believed homosexuals should be accepted in Lebanese society (Pew Research Center, 2007). Considering the advancement and interconnectedness of the world, the general perception would be that populations would become more tolerant of differences, but that does not seem to be the case regarding homosexuality in Lebanon. A more recent poll conducted by Pew research center in 2019 showed that the percentage of the survey population who believe homosexuality should not be accepted by society increased to 85% as opposed to 79% in 2007 (Poushter & Kent, 2020). Article 534 in the Lebanese penal code

specifies that "any sexual intercourse contrary to nature leads to a sentence of prison up to one year" (Lebanon Penal Code, 1943), problematizing and criminalizing homosexuality, while being indicative of the patriarchal nature of the Lebanese system. The main debate here is the definition of being "contrary to nature," while questioning the reason behind the problematizing of homosexuality and normalization of heterosexuality. Foucault is one of the most prominent philosophers who dedicated part of his work to demystifying and normalizing homosexuality.

Foucault's genealogy of the subject and his study of Greco-Roman antiquity in *The History of Sexuality* was aimed at showing the fact that man was not defined by his sexual orientation in ancient times, instead, sexuality was used for pleasure, unlike modern times, when sexual orientation served as labels for identity (Davidson, 2001). Sexual conduct was problematized by Christianity which later transformed into the problematization of sexual desire (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2016). In the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* under the subtitle "The Use of Pleasure," Foucault discusses the origin of the problematization of homosexuality through the distinction between the image of sexuality between the Greeks and Romans, and Christianity. Monogamy and procreative sexual acts were the principles of the Christian religion and same-sex relationships were completely refused as they were considered an illness and harm to society, whereas the Greeks and Romans welcomed this type of relationship as they believed homosexuality was not a problem to be troubled about and they were not very much concerned with moral codes (Foucault, 1990). Foucault also observes how the sexual ethics of same-gender relationships transformed over time: "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault's main theory is that homosexuality is a 19th century phenomenon constructed by power within discourses, with the main discourse being medical. Thus, homosexuality is not inherent (Willett, 1996). What Foucault tried to discuss in his writings is that this phenomenon has been regarded as a problem that requires a solution, when in fact, this perception on both sexuality and homosexuality was a socially constructed phenomenon in order to problematize sexuality. He focused on the demystification of homosexuality by studying its genealogy, taking it back to Greco-Roman times and to show its socially constructed aspect.

This Foucauldian take on the discourse of homosexuality allows us to reconsider the case of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon. Based on Foucault's genealogical analysis, the problematization of homosexuality and sexual orientations different from heterosexuality is thus a construct, as the latter is not the norm. On this basis of problematization, members of the LGBTQ community face marginalization, discrimination, and ostracization on a daily basis in the Lebanese social and political grounds.

The leading reason behind the problematization of homosexuality in Lebanon is religion. For Christians, homosexual practices are condemned and seen as perversions and abnormalities. For Islam, homosexuality is forbidden and punishable (Schmidtke, 1999). Although Lebanon is a relatively open and liberated country compared to the surrounding countries in the region, and although the LGBTQ community has been receiving an increased amount of support from the civil society, especially from the young and freethinking generation, homosexuality to this day is considered irregular and worthy of ridicule, humiliation, and even punishment. Yet paradoxically, and despite the aforementioned institutional, state-society relations, political economic, and biopolitical factors producing and sustaining sectarian identities, Lebanon has

nevertheless witnessed the rise of a new discourse of secular and non-sectarian movements throughout the past few years.

Most of the emerging grassroots movements and civil society groups promote a non-sectarian agenda with the aim to raise awareness and fight the current sectarian system (Karam, 2017). Lebanese activists firmly believe that the personal status system should be abolished and a secular approach to citizenship should be developed to restructure the Lebanese people's national identity and relationship with the state. Letting go of primordial affiliations, such as sects, is a request made by activists, especially when it comes to sexual minorities, such as transsexuals and women (Mikdashi, 2014). John Nagle is a pioneer in the research on the mobilization of these non-sectarian movements, shedding light on the LGBTQ community and gender rights.

Nagle (2016) argues that Lebanon's corporate consociational power-sharing arrangement excludes non-sectarian groups from representation, such as members of the LGBTQ community and women who promote gender equality, thus legitimizing homophobia and gender inequality (Nagle, 2016). Gender equality is not a priority for sectarian political parties, as political and sectarian matters seem to have greater importance. Doreen Khoury (2013) focuses on women's participation in political positions to highlight the patriarchal structure of political participation. She states that the electoral process in itself is an unwelcoming institution for women, as it is tailored to produce sectarian political elites. According to Khoury, while the constitution states that all citizens are equal, "patriarchal structures" —family, sect, and state— interfere with women's rights to equality (Khoury, 2013). Nagle points out that the emerging groups who defy sectarianism do not only focus on the political identity of ethnic groups, but rather on issues such as gender equality, issues that are not considered by sectarian parties and groups (Nagle, 2016).

On an institutional level, religious courts are prioritized over civil courts in familial matters via PSLs. These courts classify the male as dominant in the family and regularly issue rulings that are discriminatory against women (Khoury, 2013).

The lack of representation in this corporate consociational system indicates the disregard for LGBTQ and gender rights. After all, and according to the logic of sectarian groups, sexual minorities "threaten" the reproductive structure of the nation and in turn the survival of the ethnic group, while women are to remain vulnerable in order to maintain the existing sectarian balance, thus they "can only exist in the registry as daughters of men or wives of men" (Nagle & Fakhoury, 2018, p. 92). Nontheless, this lack of representation of marginalized groups in society was not an obstacle for their work and mobilization, especially visible during the 2019 protests which provided the people with the public platform and arena for their activism. The October 2019 protests were distinguished from previous movements in that they encompassed a wider range of the Lebanese population, whereby the distinction between people and activists was blurred. While activism was somewhat restricted to middle-class students and workers decades ago, the 2019 movements included minorities, refugees, domestic workers, low-income workers, and so on, united under an anti-sectarian Lebanese nationalist umbrella, unlike previous protests such as the You Stink movement (Ipek, 2020).

"Trans Power," "God is a woman," "LGBTQ Rights," are only a sample of the graffiti writings on the walls of Beirut that appeared during the October 2019 protests (Vartanian, 2019). Aside from the many anti-sectarian and anti-political class slogans during the revolutionary movement, Lebanon witnessed a wave of a new slogans and chants by oppressed and marginalized identities who had been sidelined and discriminated against for attempting to express their voice in a confession-dominated country. What was different this time around was aside from the call to

topple the sectarian system, there were calls to topple the patriarchal system, homophobia, transphobia, classism, racism, and so on (Younes, 2020). Marginalized groups in Lebanon had been silenced and excluded from the political scene for years, which resulted in internal division and further marginalization. The 2019 revolution provided them with the shared space to voice their anger and frustration at the clientelistic, sectarian, and patriarchal system that had excluded these alternative identities for decades in order to guarantee the continuity of the ruling political class. While women had been active throughout the years during movements and protests, the feminist image had not been preceived this way previously, especially with the emergence of feminist organizations over the years, changing the image of the revolution to a feminist one, from organizing women's marches to standing on the frontlines of the protests, fearless and daring, rejecting the current status quo and calling for change (Halabi, 2019). The next chapter discusses the status of women in Lebanon, in addition to feminist movements and their mobilization over the decades, and the impact of the 2019 protests on feminist mobilization while highlighting the different approaches adopted by women's rights organizations and actors in order to improve the status of Lebanese women.

Chapter Three

The Reformists and The Revolutionaries

3.1 Introduction

"Listen to your father, respect your brother, obey your husband, do as you are told." These are phrases that aren't too unfamiliar for women, especially those living in the Middle East. When the term "Arab" or "Middle Eastern" woman is mentioned, the stereotypical image would be that of a veiled woman, isolated, obedient to the male figure in her family, whether it is her father, brother, or husband, devoted to her home and/or children. The way the Middle East is perceived in the West has reinforced this image of feminine oppression in the region, whereby Westerners believe feminism and the Arab world are two incompatible concepts (Golley, 2004). While that image is considered to be true considering the dominance of the patriarchal system in the Middle Eastern region, Arab women are also the revolutionaries, the ones who fight for their rights, and the ones who stand against the patriarchy amidst a society that does not operate in their favor.

Lebanon is considered to be the most liberal country in the Middle East with regards to women and their rights. Constitutionally, all Lebanese citizens, regarldess of gender, are considered to be equal. Article 7 of the Lebanese Constitution states: "All Lebanese citizens, shall be equal before the law. They shall equally enjoy civil and political rights and shall equally be bound by public obligations and duties without any distinction" (p: 5). Article 12 from the Lebanese Constitution states: "Every Lebanese shall be [*sic*] the right to hold public office, no preference shall be made except on the basis of merit and competence, according to the conditions established by law" (The Lebanese Constitution, 1926: p. 5). Thus, Lebanese women

are considered to enjoy more freedoms and rights than their counterparts in neighboring Arab countries. However, and despite Lebanese women's constitutional equality, their freedoms and rights in the Lebanese society still remain limited by the patriarchal and sectarian nature of the Lebanese system. The lack of a unified civil code in Lebanon allows the religious/sectarian courts to govern the population's personal matters. Issues ranging from marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody, are governed by sectarian Personal Status Laws (Mikdashi, 2010). Each sect implements its own laws to govern personal matters, allowing men to benefit from more freedoms, rights, and power as opposed to their female counterparts. Thus, the Lebanese system obliges woman to be dependent on the male patriarchal figure of the household. Aside from PSLs, the Lebanese nationality law denies women the ability to pass down their nationality to their children, as the Lebanese nationality may only be passed down by the father and not the mother. This nationality law has multi-layered sectarian implications whereby Lebanese women are instrumentalized in order to maintain the existing sectarian status quo (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

However, and with all the obstacles Lebanese women face as part of their daily lives, feminism has been on the rise in society, and Lebanese women have found themselves under the spotlight. For decades women have been fighting for a unified civil code to govern personal matters and for equal rights (Rachidi, 2019). Different feminist organizations and movements have emerged throughout the years with different approaches, but with the common objective of defending women's rights. Some organizations aim to raise awareness on issues such as domestic violence, harassment, and gender-based violence and abolish laws harmful to women. Other organizations promote increased female political participation, while others are advocates

of a unified civil code to govern their personal lives. All these organizations operate under the umbrella of abolishing a sectarian system that is discriminatory against women.

"The revolution is female" was the highlight of 2019 in Lebanon, when the revolutionary Lebanese woman was in the spotlight. During these protests, we saw women on the frontlines of protests, confronting security forces, shouting into loudspeakers, calling for the fall of the patriarchal sectarian system, and becoming the face of the Lebanese revolution (WILPF, 2019). What is noteworthy about Lebanese women during the protests is the approach they adopted in trying to reach their objective. While we witnessed organizations before the protests adopting a more accomodational approach, women and feminist organizations had a far more confrontational and oppositional anti-sectarian stance.

This chapter draws a comparison between feminist organizations and women who have been active before and during the October 2019 protests to highlight the differences in approaches and shed light on the effectiveness of each of the approaches and strategies in affecting change in Lebanese society. This chapter argues that considering the rigidity of the Lebanese confessional system and deep-rootedness of sectarianism as an identity, advocating for change while working within the system provides the opportunity to push for gendered rights. Although the Lebanese system is not the ideal ground for civil societies to operate, an anti-sectarian radical approach will lead the sectarian political elite to reject any attempts at changing the existing system. The next section provides an overview of the intersection between sex and sect in Lebanon and the impact this has on Lebanese women, then goes over feminist movements throughout history in order to highlight the four waves of feminism and discuss the current mobilization of these feminist movements, in order to draw a comparison between the two types

of approaches adopted by feminist activists and organizations, which are the accomodational and confrontational in order to advocate for feminist rights in the Lebanese system and society.

3.2 Sextarianism in Lebanon

One of the most attention-grabbing terms to describe this institutionalization of sectarianism and gender in Lebanon has been the term "sextarianism," coined by Maya Mikdashi (2018). It is "the study of Lebanese statecraft that is situated at the intersections between sect and sex, 'sextarianism.' Sextarianism allows the study of the Lebanese state without separating or privileging sectarian difference from sexual difference" (Mikdashi, 2018: p. 1). Sextarianism is where sex and sect meet, which is the case in Lebanon and in Personal Status Laws.

As previously mentioned, PSLs rather than a unified civil code govern the Lebanese population's personal matters, thus religious authorities govern issues from marriage to land ownership. PSLs are discriminatory against women given the patriarchal nature of Lebanese society. Mikdashi (2018) highlights the sexual differences between men and women in these laws. In the Lebanese census, women are part of the household male's registry, whether it is her father or husband. In case of marriage, a woman is moved from her father's registry to her husband's, and in the case of a divorce, she is moved back to her father's registry. Abortion is not legal in Lebanon since personal matters are governed by religious beliefs, thus prohibiting the woman from having a choice when it involves her own body and decisions. Custody of minor children is mostly given to men, unless the child is breastfeeding or in other exceptional cases, which is when the woman maintains custody of her children. By default, the right to initiating a divorce belongs to the man, unless in some exceptional cases where the woman is granted the right to request for a divorce (Mikdashi, 2018). These examples constitute merely a few of the

discriminatory laws against women in Lebanon, further reinforcing the intersection between sectarianism and patriarchy.

Feminists in Lebanon, alongside many advocacy organizations and NGOs, have been attempting to raise awareness regarding the discrimination Lebanese women face in the country. This unfair distinction between males and females mainly arises from PSLs and the Lebanese laws, but also from the need to resort to religious courts and abide by their procedures for personal matters. According to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the expensive court fees, lawsuits that are stretched over an extended period of time, and absence of assistance during legal proceedings, among other factors, were obstacles for women to access religious courts and at least attempt to ask for the little rights they have. Women do not receive any legal or social assistance when dealing with these religious courts regarding personal/family matters (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Another instance where citizenship is gendered in Lebanon is the Nationality Law. In Lebanon, a woman is unable to pass on her Lebanese nationality to her children, restricting national affiliation to the father only. Also, they are unable to pass on their Lebanese nationality to their foreign husbands. Furthermore, we see discrimination between Lebanese mothers, and foreign mothers who acquire the Lebanese passport, where the latter are able to pass on the Lebanese nationality if their husband passes away, while this right is absent for mothers of Lebanese origin. The nationality law has much larger implications on families where the father is not Lebanese, as it is an obstacle for opportunities and equal rights with the rest of the population (Sharafeddine, 2017).

This nationality law has direct sectarian implications, especially pertaining to the existence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. A Lebanese mother is not able to pass on her

nationality if she marries a stateless Palestinian man, thus forcing the children to be stateless as well. If women were allowed to pass on their citizenship to their children, especially if from a Palestinian father, it would disrupt the country's sectarian balance (Human Rights Watch, 2018), hence utilizing the woman as a tool to maintain the existing status quo. Not only is the nationality law discriminatory against women on the grounds of the patriarchal nature of the Lebanese system, it also has sectarian implications. This simply reinforces the fact that sex and sect are intertwined in Lebanon. Moreover, female political participation in Lebanon is considered to be one of the worst on a global scale. According to the Global Gender Gap Report in 2018, out of 149 countries, Lebanon ranked 147th in terms of female political empowerment, rendering it among the lowest rankings in the world (World Economic Forum, 2018). During the latest parliamentary elections in 2018, many women participated as candidates, however, women do not occupy even 5% of the total parliamentary seats in Lebanon. "The low rates of women's political participation are attributable not only to women's underrepresentation in formal political positions, but are equally a consequence of women's position in Lebanon as 'second class citizens'" (Nassif, 2020: p. 2).

Given the lack of a unified civil code to govern personal matters, the inability for women to pass on the Lebanese nationality, and minimal female political empowerment and participation, the Lebanese woman is considered a second-class citizen (Ghaddar, 2017). Nonetheless, and despite the major obstacles placed by the patriarchal sectarian nature of the Lebanese system, Lebanese women have been constantly fighting for equal rights as Lebanese citizens. The feminist movement is not a recent occurrence, as women's mobilization in Lebanon dates back to the early 20th century and has evolved since. The coming section goes over the four waves of feminist activism and the history of women's mobilization in Lebanon.

3.3 History of Women's Movements in Lebanon

Women have always captured the spotlight in Lebanon with their achievements and vigorous fight for their rights amidst what is a patriarchal sectarian and sextarian system. Women's activism and mobilization in Lebanon dates back to the 1920s with the formation of organizations and unions advocating women's right to vote and participate in politics, identified as the first wave of Lebanese feminism. "The 1920s were a time when feminist activity began to take institutional shape, and Lebanese women's societies began to thrive" (Hivos, 2021). During the period between the 1920s and 1940s, Lebanese women's movement gained momentum, making them pioneers in pushing for women's political participation in Lebanon specifically, and the Arab region generally (The Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). A good example for this would be the female Régie[3] workers, who came from different religious, geographical and political backgrounds, and were known for their radicalism and their demonstrations against the management and the government. These women became pioneers with their contribution to the history of the labor movement in Lebanon. These workingwomen even constituted an important part of a renowned strike organized by the Régie workers in 1946 in order to push for labor demands, marking the early crucial stages of women's mobilization in Lebanon (Abisaab, 2010).

The second wave of the Lebanese feminist movement started in the late 1960s with the rise of leftist feminism adopting a nationalist ideology. This involved the emergence of a rather humanitarian objective, such as organizing charities and aiding war victims, especially during the Lebanese Civil War which broke out in 1975. Yet it was not until the 1990s when the third wave of feminism in Lebanon saw the light with the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), "often described as an international

---

[3] Lebanese manufacturing plantation of tobacco.

bill of rights for women" (UN Women, 2009), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Consequently, feminism in Lebanon began adopting a more international organizational character, with new advocacy concepts surfacing, such as "gender-based violence, full citizenship, and positive discrimination" (The Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019).

The fourth and current wave of feminism, which began in the 2000s, had a rather sexual ambience to it, with the emergence of sexual rights advocacy, raising awareness for vulnerable minority groups, such as LGBTQ and domestic workers, in addition to female economic empowerment. Here we see the materilization of globalization, with feminists using social media platforms to connect internationally with other feminists and form communities. Thus, the fourth wave of feminism shifted its attention further towards socio-economic issues and female empowerment, and less towards political issues (The Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019).

However, and despite the headway made by women in Lebanon over decades, their activism did not manage to break away from the nation's sectarian paternal traditions. Feminist organizations during these four waves were molded by Lebanese history and events. The earlier feminist organizations, which were founded within the Lebanese republic, were divided along class and sectarian lines, with only elite citizens and the bourgeoisie, both male and female, participating in these movements (The Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). Without a detachment from hierarchy and sectarianism during the earliest wave, feminism at the time was exclusive to upper class women, excluding the working class from the narrative. Maintaining the sectarian status quo in an attempt to appease the religious authorities was also significant at the time (Stephan, 2014). Feminism during the later waves was either intertwined with the national identity, adopted an international character, or characterized by the country's political differences. A female agenda was never considered to be a priority, especially during the second

wave, whereby feminist movements became involved with male-dominated political parties, and the main narrative revolved around nationalism. With the Lebanese Civil War, women's feminist efforts were translated into humanitarian ones, especially that women were concerned with taking care of their male counterparts. However, this period also witnessed the NGOization of feminist organizations, as in the professionalization and institutionalization of these CSOs, thus maintaining the elite status of these movements. And albeit the fourth movement seems to have a more leftist tone to it, "like their predecessors, the new generation of feminists continued to operate in elite circles" (Daou, 2015: p. 12). Thus, all waves of feminism were compatible with the Lebanese status quo and society at the time of their emergence.

Feminist organizations in Lebanon are categorized into having either a top-down approach or a bottom-up approach. Decision-making relies on the organization's higher authority in the former, whereas the latter provides the lower level members with a share in the decision-making process. Organizations that have an involvement in and accommodation with the Lebanese system tend to have a top-down approach, while organizations that are aligned with oppositional or leftist principles and values have a rather bottom-up method in their decision-making process (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). Examples of top-down organizations would be the National Commission For Lebanese Women (NCLW), while an example of a bottom-up organization would be KAFA. The NCLW is representative of the Lebanese sectarian system, evident in the commission's arrangement and by-laws. Paradoxically, while the NCLW is an association for women's rights, it does not aim to reform laws that violate women's rights and operates on a sectarian basis, even having an electoral law based on confessional representation (Salloukh, et al., 2015). Nevertheless, feminist movements have not had a large impact on the decision-making process in Lebanon, whether it is via political participation or

activism itself. The Lebanese woman remains regulated by her gender and sect, especially in a country where sectarianism and sex are institutionalized.

However, and despite the many obstacles faced by women in the Lebanese society, this did not hinder the emergence and mobilization of a feminist discourse, aiming to gain equal rights amidst a sextarian society. The next section goes over the mobilization of women's rights actors in Lebanon while differentiating between different types of actors and the approaches they employ in order to improve the lives of women in Lebanon.

3.4 Mobilization of Feminist Movements in Lebanon

Over the decades, we have seen the mobilization of feminist movements fighting for equal rights for women using different approaches and strategies: from organizations focusing on women's socioeconomic status to their political status. The long history of women's movements in Lebanon has not translated into major advances in regards to women's rights, however. This is due to two main factors: the state's confessional clientelistic system, and the conflicts within these movements, i.e. the organizational structure, funding, and disagreements within the organizations. Do these women's rights organizations aim to challenge the dominant system and make way for the emergence of an alternative society, or do they reinforce the clientelistic sectarian political system which is the root of gender discrimination?

The discussion below sheds light on a feminist rights group, KAFA, and a feminist activist who is a member of a women's rights organization but practices her activism under personal initiative. Both actors have been active throughout the years in an attempt to bring about equality for women as Lebanese citizens and break down social barriers. It examines the scope of work and position both these actors have vis-à-vis the confessional system. The reason behind

this comparison is noteworthy, since KAFA has a visible public image, while feminist activists who participated during the 2019 protests were not representing any organizations due to several reasons that are discussed in this chapter. This research is timely in the sense that two years ago, specifically in October 2019, Lebanon witnessed these barriers being broken down by feminist organizations and individuals in an attempt to alleviate the status of women in our society. However, we notice a shift in the approach between advocacy and activist groups before and after these protests took place. While feminist activist groups, including NGOs promoting social reform, took on a rather accommodational approach in Lebanon's postwar civil society, female activists and organizations had quite a radical confrontational approach during the October 2019 protests. This comparison helps investigate whether operating through the Lebanese confessional clientelistic system is more effective in pushing for change than a confrontational approach which calls for a change in the overall Lebanese system. This comparison employs Catherine Moughalian and Zeina Ammar's distinction between feminist organizations in Lebanon for Rootslab (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019), "a social innovation lab to advance young women and trans youth's rights, leadership, and collective action (Rootslab, 2017). They divide feminist movements into three categories: State actors (such as NCLW), reformist organizations (such as KAFA), and radical actors. Table 1 further elaborates the distinction between these feminist organizations, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Table 1: Typology of Feminist Movements in Lebanon[4]

Category	State Actors	Reformist Actors	Radical Actors
Description	Government institutions with exclusive gender focus	Mainly big WROs – with few exceptions	Small NGOs and unregistered groups
Type of involvement	Employment	Mainly employment, sometimes activism	Mainly activism, sometimes employment
Focus	Legal reform Gender mainstreaming	Legal reform Service Provision	Community organizing Alternative knowledge production
Funding	Government of Lebanon and international non- state donors	International state and non-state donors	International feminist funds, revenue- generating products and services
Strengths	State power	High visibility, high reach, mainstream discourse	Community organizing, Constituency are organizers
Barriers to Movement Building	State inherently at odds with movement building	Beneficiary-type relationship with their constituencies	Socioeconomic constraints, inaccessible discourse, limited reach

The following sections focus on reformist and radical actors because they are more pertinent to the timeframe of this research. State feminist actors are a mere representation of the Lebanese confessional system and will not be discussed further here as it is irrelevant to the feminist movements examined in this thesis and have been examined in previous research, such as the study on women's movement in Lebanon by the Civil Society Knowledge Centre, and the study by Rootslab referenced in this section.

---

[4] Extracted from the Rootslab report by Catherine Moughalian and Zeina Ammar, p. 15.

3.4.1 Reform as a Means to an End

Reformist organizations opt for gradual and slow reform instead of deploying a revolutionary stance and demanding swift change. They are non-political and focus on specific socioeconomic gender-related issues, such as gender-based violence, female exploitation and trafficking, family violence, and so on. They often gain high media exposure with their movements and awareness campaigns, have access to resources and funding from different donors for their projects and campaigns, and have governmental support. Their high media visibility makes them seen and heard in the society, which is part of the reason they are able to influence change in Lebanese society (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019).

KAFA presents itself as a "feminist, secular, Lebanese, non-profit, non-governmental civil society organization seeking to create a society that is free of social, economic and legal patriarchal structures that discriminate against women" (KAFA, 2005). Since its foundation in 2005, KAFA's main campaigns include domestic violence, sexual violence, and child protection, and they have been advocating for a unified personal status law for years (KAFA, 2005). According to a member of KAFA's support center unit:

> At KAFA we consider that the support center is the foundation that we go from to see what problems there are, or to see what prejudices are present against women's rights so we can demand and lobby for the amendment and ratification of new laws that could be for the advantage of women and children. This is generally speaking. And this lobbying takes shape, alongside advocacy and following up on these issues, through our campaigns that we come out with via social media and via testimonials from women who are going through certain types of prejudices. All these matters come together when we advocate for the amendment or ratifications of existing or new laws.[5]

KAFA employs several methods, including online and offline campaigns, in order to advocate for women's rights. From social media campaigns to organizing marches for supporting a cause

---

[5] Interview with a KAFA member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

or making a demand, KAFA has been one of the prominent women's rights organizations in Lebanon. However, being a reformist organization working within the system does not negate KAFA's vision of being nonsectarian and against the patriarchal system. KAFA was one of the feminist organizations present during the October 2019 protests. As one of the activists explains, while KAFA works with political parties in order to advocate for a unified civil code, they also participated during the October 2019 protests in Lebanon, as these two activities are not mutually exclusive:

> The idea is that of course we are working through political parties to be able to call for the amendment of laws and endorse new laws, knowing that we took to the streets on the 17th of October against this system, because we do not believe in a sectarian system. And when we say that we want a unified personal status law, and the state is based on sectarian fundamentals and all these issues, we strike while the iron is hot.[6]

The fact that KAFA works through the system and with political parties in order to endorse and amend laws does not indicate an acceptance of the status quo. KAFA, alongside other reformist organizations, uses the current system in order to alleviate the status of women in Lebanon, while working on changing said system. However, radical actors believe the current system does not allow for any change to take place, thus the need to dismantle it. The next section highlights these radical actors and the scope of their work, and their mobilization during the 2019 protests.

3.4.2 Against All Authorities

Radical organizations are known to have a far more rigid anti-sectarian, anti-state, and anti-patriarchal stance as opposed to reformist actors. Their scope of work encompasses that of other types of organizations in the sense that they tackle a wider range of issues that are not necessarily related to gender. Rather than focus on direct issues affecting women, as is the case with

---

[6] Interview with a KAFA member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

reformist organizations, these radical organizations/actors focus on the root causes of issues and aim to highlight them in order to affect change in society. These actors are funded through feminist donor organizations or through services and products that generate revenue (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019). Whether they are registered or unregistered organizations, they are radical in their rejection of an accommodation to the status quo and working through the system to impact change in Lebanon.

These radical organizations or actors have been present for years advocating for women's rights, however. They gained exposure and momentum during the October 2019 protests, making the Lebanese female the face of the revolution. With anti-sectarian and anti-patriarchal slogans, this radical stance was put in motion, and women were on the frontlines of these protests. While the main objective of these movements was to dismantle the existing political system, the women who were in the revolutionary spotlight took advantage and managed to endorse issues relating to women's rights during the rebellious protests[7]. The main October 2019 slogan was "all of them means all of them," expressing a rather rigid and unaccommodating stance against the Lebanese political leaders, sectarian elite, and anyone involved in the sectarian patriarchal political system. The women on the frontlines of these protests became known as the "women of *thawra*," organizing marches and mobilizing women, helping out protesters by gathering donations and handing out food, and using themselves as protective shields between the army and security forces and other protesters (Lamirande, 2020). This momentum created a snowball effect with women expressing their radical views and opinions regarding the Lebanese sectarian and patriarchal system on social media platforms, calling for the toppling of the system as a whole. Thus, we saw the rise of outspoken women, who have been vocally critical of the

---

[7] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

sectarian patriarchy in Lebanon, making statements such as "the system won't go down unless patriarchy goes down" (Aghnatios, 2019).

The next section emphasizes these different methods in approaching women's rights in Lebanon, which have been a point of dispute for years, whether these activists or organizations should be accommodational or confrontational in dealing with such a system.

3.5 Point of Dispute: Accomodational vs. Confrontational Approach

The aim of this section is to highlight the differences between actors willing to operate within the system and those who have a confrontational position and reject advocating through the Lebanese parliament or other government institutions. It tries to pinpoint the most effective approach to advocating for change with regards to women's rights in Lebanon. Disagreements between reformist and radical actors, and within these reformist organizations internally regarding this issue is a long-standing problem.

The Lebanese state is a mere representation of the patriarchal familial construct. The political elite pass down their titles to their children, and even loyalty to leaders is dependent on family ties (Joseph, 2005). Thus, with the state and other authority figures being representative of the patriarchal structure of our system, the main point of dispute between these two types of actors is their stance regarding the state, religious authorities, and mainstream political parties.

This section demonstrates that the accommodational approach and working within the Lebanese system, its political parties and sectarian leaders, and religious authorities, in order to achieve change is far more effective than a confrontational strategy. With a state structure this deeply-rooted and rigid, organizations need state support in order to be able to achieve the

change required for women to live as equal citizens. To do so requires comparing the merits of the positions of the reformist organizations and radical actors.

3.5.1 Accommodational Approach: KAFA the Reformists

While radical organizations and groups are against cooperating with state institutions, including political parties and religious authorities, reformist groups are not as rigid when it comes to accommodating the existing system. After conducting interviews with a number of activists with contradicting views on the approach to promote women's rights in the Lebanese system, the findings revealed that radical feminists believe the state and religious institutions represent the sectarian and patriarchal system they are fighting against. Meanwhile, the latter believe collaborating with these institutions is a strategy and an effective approach to advocate their cause in relation to gender issues and women's rights. Many women's rights activists see that having a relationship with state institutions and authorities can be beneficial in the long-run, especially in regards to policy change and legal action. Although the majority of these activists do agree with the radical group's anti-state institutions discourse, they do believe that cooperation is a mere strategy to advance their own agendas. These sentiments come out clearly in the following quote from an interview with a member of KAFA, who believes involving political parties in their work is needed for the time being:

> Before the 17th of October, and currently, we as KAFA consider that you need to work with all the parties and talk to all the parties not to take consent from them, but to involve them. In Lebanon we have political parties as much as you want, thus if you are not able to get through to them you are not able to amend laws, or ratify laws.[8]

In Lebanon, laws are passed in the predominantly male parliament, and according to the Lebanese confessional system, parliamentary seats are distributed based on sectarian divisions.

---

[8] Interview with a Kafa member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

Consequently, members of parliament are also members of political parties, which are also sectarian-based. Thus, in order to pass new laws or amend existing ones, only the members of parliament have the power to do so. Female representation in parliament to advance women's rights can be beneficial. However, less than 5% of the parliamentary seats are occupied by women (Nassif, 2020), thus necessitating lobbying and reaching out to male-dominated political parties and legislative authorities.

While reformist women's rights organizations are mainly against the sectarian patriarchal system, accommodating this system in order to impact policy change has been the most employed approach. In 2017, the Lebanese NGO ABAAD launched a campaign targeting Article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code, otherwise known as the rape law. This law stated that if a rapist married his victim, then it would exempt them from punishment. Through online and offline campaigns, stunts, and lobbying, ABAAD's activism was successful, not in abolishing Article 522, but in allowing MP Saad Hariri at the time and members of parliament to support this repeal. "We were happy to receive the support of key decision-makers, including MPs or religious leaders" (Anani, 2017). Thus, ABAAD's campaigning and lobbying with the political figures of Lebanon led to abilishing the rape law.

In 2014, the case of Tamara Harisi made headlines when her husband physically abused her in a brutal manner. The case was taken on by KAFA, who found success through campaigning, organizing marches, lobbying and working closely with political figures in order to pass a bill for domestic violence. "Kafa mobilised and worked closely with women in different political parties. They also met with each of the 128 members of the House of Parliament" (Merhi, 2014). According to a member of KAFA, the advocacy campaigns and lobbying with

political parties were the main drivers behind the passing the bill criminalizing domestic violence:

> In 2014, we had been calling for ratifying a law for the protection of women for a long time, around eight years. Through our work and follow-up with the political parties, and alliances with other organizations specified in advocating against violence against women, we were able to put pressure, until in 2014, we were able to ratify a law against domestic violence, the Protection Law 239/2014. This law is not ideal and we requested an amendment of this law, and these amendments took place around a year ago.[9]

"Women's rights campaigns, particularly KAFA's domestic violence bill and CRTD-A's push for a new nationality law, have successfully penetrated public consciousness with consistent action and both have managed to get their bills onto the cabinet's agenda through persistent lobbying of MPs and ministers" (Khoury, 2013), showing that lobbying and campaigning are effective methods in impacting legal change in support for women.

However, changing laws is not sufficient. Educating society in order to improve behavior towards women is of equal importance. Not only do organizations such as KAFA work on changing and drafting laws, they also aim to change and educate patriarchal mentalities, since they believe in the importance of education and awareness in order to reach an end goal of ending discrimination against women:

> We also work on the mentalities through our daily work with GBV[10] cases, we found that there is an essential need to work with men who want to change their violent behavior. This patriarchal society we live in is being a burden on men, and simultaneously it is the source of prejudice against women's rights. Thus, it is very essential to work on the patriarchal mentality in order to change these understandings, and once these understandings are changed, then surely, we would be able to reach a society free from discrimination against women. [11]

---

[9] Interview with a Kafa member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.
[10] Gender-based violence.
[11] Interview with a Kafa member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

According to a member of a reformist group, "when you're working on advocacy for an issue in the Lebanese parliament, whether you like it or not, you can't dismiss a political party that supports your cause because they are the ones who will lobby for the law. Does this mean that people who work on advocacy with the system or political parties like the system? No. But we believe that providing protection for girls is achieved through legal protection, which means that these people in the parliament have to vote on it. At the same time, we differ with other organizations that are working with religious authorities. We don't engage with religious authorities" (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019 p: 17). This quote suggests that while these reformist organizations work closely with political figures, it does not negate the fact that they are nonsectarian entities who are against the system as a whole. They believe that currently, in order to provide protection for women, they need to navigate through the system in order to push their agenda. According to KAFA regarding the organization's accomodational approach on the matter and its bottom-up structure,

> At KAFA, at the service center, the majority of the employees abide by that way of thinking as well, but that does not negate the fact that if someone has a different way of thinking, we hold discussions within the organization. Our decision-making approach is horizontal.[12]

Thus, reformist organizations such as KAFA believe in the necessity of working within the system, at least for the time being, in order to achieve goals related to policy and law changes in order to advance their women's rights agendas. Nevertheless, even within reformist groups, disagreement occurs regarding collaborating with political and religious authorities, but especially the latter. While most reformist actors are in agreement regarding working with state institutions to address gender issues and possibly pave the way for change, working with religious institutions is an even more problematic challenge (Interview with a feminist activist,

---

[12] Interview with a Kafa member who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

May 2021). This is noteworthy and indicative of the institutionalized sectarianism and patriarchy that these religious figures represent, who are the main authority that regulates women's personal affairs in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, there are actors who do not believe that maneuvering the system is an effective method in advocating for women's rights, as sectarianism and patriarchy are too engrained to allow enough space for reform and feminist rights. The next section highlights the feminist actors who prefer taking an oppositional stance against the state institutions rather than accommodating to the existing status quo.

3.5.2 Confrontational Approach: The Revolutionary Feminists

> I went down to raise feminist demands, for me it was about the whole political system. I was inside these protests wanting the bigger umbrella, I did not want to be considered part of something specific, I wanted to identify myself as a feminist, a political activist, who is not leaving the streets because she believes in the intersectionality between all the demands that were being raised during the protests, and I wanted to focus on all the demands.[13]

These are the words of a feminist political activist who participated in the 2019 protests. She, along with the majority of the women who were on the frontlines of the protests, raised their feminist demands loudly, while denouncing the Lebanese sectarian and patriarchal system. This statement is indicative of the melting pot that was the uprising. Different demands and end goals by different activists were combined under one umbrella, where demands weren't being singled out, but called for by everyone protesting together.

Radical actors, as the name indicates, call for the complete change of the political and social system in Lebanon, a movement mostly evident during the 2019 revolutionary wave. These

---

[13] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

organizations and individuals are characterized by advocating for all demands, unlike reformist actors who are more single-issue oriented. The intersectionality between demands, whereby there was an interconnectedness between different demands by different activists, is a key characteristic of radical actors. They advocate for a multitude of rights for different gender identities in Lebanon, and not only women. As Moughalian and Ammar contend, it is "irrelevant whether a group is an NGO or not, what's relevant is intersectionality versus focusing on single-issue organizing, and looking at the root causes of problems" (2019: p. 16). This suggests that these actors are creating an interconnectedness between different rights movements. Rather than exclude feminist movements, they are involved with different marginalized communities and different problems, based on the notion of "the feminist movement in Lebanon is all-encompassing, all-encompassing of our pains and our struggles, creating the conditions to help us heal through solidarity, the conditions to help us win through solidarity" (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019: p. 27).

Nasawiya was the first organization to assume a confrontational and radical approach when it came to issues related to feminist rights. Alongside the different types of inequality faced by different identities, this underscored the intersectionality of these organizations. Founded in 2010, during the fourth wave of feminist movements in Lebanon, "Nasawiya is a group of young feminists who are working together to recreate a world free from sexism, and all other forms of exploitations and discriminations that collaborate with it: classism, heterosexism, racism, capitalism, etc." (Daleel Madani, 2020). However, the organization had a short-lived career in activism as it closed down in 2012 due to political differences between the members (Hivos, 2021). Henceforth, we saw the emergence of smaller radical groups rather than a large collective such as Nasawiya.

As I was preparing for this research and looking for radical feminist organizations that were active during the 2019 protests, I did not come across any organization that had a confrontational approach. Instead, I found feminist activists who represented themselves during the revolution but did not take to the streets under any specific organizational umbrella. One feminist political activist voiced her opinion during our interview this way: "I was part of the protests as myself. I did not leave the streets. The organization I am part of participated in some areas, but I didn't leave the streets as a person."[14] She is a member of an organization but did not participate in the protests as a member, instead opting to participate as a feminist political activist. When asked why she participated on an individual initiative, she gave this answer which is reproduced here at length:

> As an organization it's a bit hard to do that, I can't, as an organization, politically fire at these political figures and others, because in all honesty, we know that we work with them, they are in the parliament, they are, in certain places, it is the reality. Therefore, if I were under the umbrella of the organization, this would have a grave impact on the image of the organization, even though the cause is very positive and very rightful, but it would reflect negatively and limit my freedom of expression, no matter how feminist my organization is. You know what I mean? Because in some places you need to think that I'm cursing let's say at I don't know who, by cursing I don't mean profanities per se. So, let's say I have a law I need to amend and I need to sit with them in the parliament and tell him I'm from this feminist organization, I need you to do I don't know what. He will tell me: "*Habibti*, a few days ago you were cursing at me in the streets, now you're sitting with me?" Thus, I preferred, in order to have freedom of expression as a political activist, I should have no compromise for any message I wanted to deliver during this revolution, because I believed in it from the first moment, I was at the Ring from when we were five to six people and we didn't believe that it would grow and become this big. I believed in this revolution and I still insist that this revolution accomplished many things. But unfortunately, what we are facing is a very large octopus and stronger because it has the tools and the power, I am talking about them all, not a specific political party.
> When we would get beaten up by Banque Du Liban, we would be beaten up because we are activists, not because we were an organization.[15]

---

[14] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.
[15] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

The sentiments voiced by this activist suggests that despite being the root of many problems, including gender inequality, sectarian political authorities and parties currently seem to be women's best chance at achieving gender equality through lobbying for the amendment or abolishment of laws. The Lebanese sectarian elite has been employing the country's confessional and clientelistic system efficiently, whereby they have maintained control over their designated sects through these socioeconomic practices and institutions. When asked about her position regarding having a reformist or radical approach as a female activist in order to achieve women's rights demands in Lebanon, this same activist referred to KAFA and ABAAD as two organizations who work within the system, mentioning that it is not her approach per se, but also comprehensible considering the current political system:

> To me that is understandable, because at the end of the day, we have girls and women counting on us to sort of change something in their current reality. In our current reality, we can be making a change or we can go and curse at them and at the end not change anything for these women. So, I understand the orientation of these organizations in this specific issue.
> So neither [approach] by itself, they complete each other. We need both, we need to name and shame. You know when you have two people playing the roles of good cop bad cop, but here this is from a positive perspective. For example, as myself and as an organization, we never worked with religious leaders. Never. However, I wouldn't have a problem forming an alliance with KAFA or ABAAD who work with religious figures. If they see, in specific situations, that they are able to impact change related to women, I am with any tactic used, as long as I am not compromising a certain demand. If there is a discussion with a religious authority, I would not compromise any demand so that he remains happy. They can sit with him, but personally, I wouldn't.[16]

The combination of a weak state unable to support its population through its institutions, and the strong patron-client relations the sectarian elite has created, is a main hindrance for the civil society and alternative identities to emerge against these relations. However, aside from the

---

[16] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

nature of the Lebanese system which hinders the advancement of women's rights, the internal issues within our civil society are another impediment for advocates of minority equality:

> The problem in Lebanon, in all honesty and clarity, is that there are no linkages between organizations, they don't work together and they don't coordinate with each other. The idea is that we have a problem as a civil society. All we care about are achievements and who won which award. How are we supposed to work? Unfortunately, this is happening among activists as well, this hate speech among each other.
>
> From my perspective, we have a very strong civil society in Lebanon, from the strongest in the Arab region. However, if they play their cards right and distribute their roles among each other in a correct manner, they can have a far greater impact than they do now, and they would be able to put pressure on stakeholders by a million times more than now.[17]

Despite Lebanon's vibrant civil society, communication among CSOs is yet to be established. A lot of these organizations do interact, but they do not necessarily cooperate (Abou Assi, 2006), which was reiterated by many feminist activists during the interview. Table 2, taken from a study assessing CSOs in Lebanon clearly shows that most respondents consider communication between these organizations to be average or limited (Abou Assi, 2006).

Table 2: Communication between civil society actors[18]

---
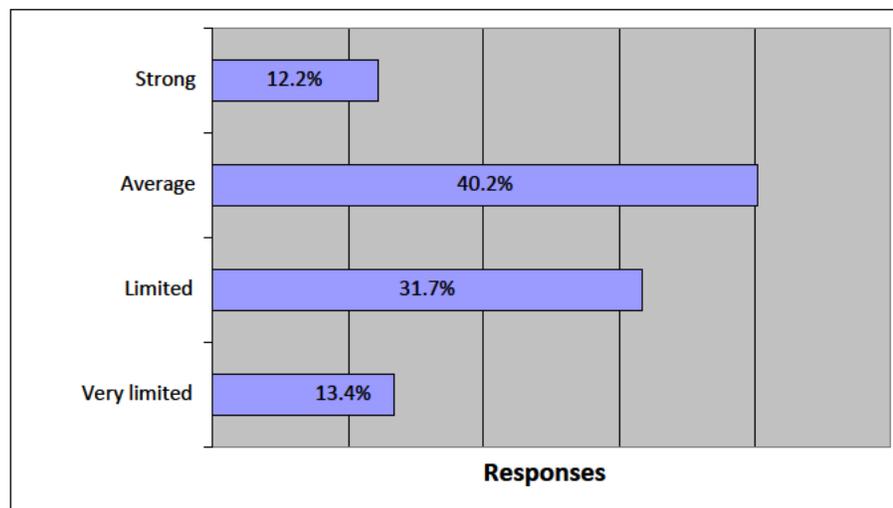
[17] Interview with a feminist activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.
[18] Extracted from "An Assessment of Lebanese Civil Society" by Khaldoun Abou Assi, p. 48.

There lies a distinction between different CSOs and the values they uphold, those who actually aim to impact change and improve the lives of those they are fighting for, and those who are simply mouthpieces for certain sectarian political agendas and individual interests, and they all coexist under the same system. CSOs face many obstacles, including but not limited to the state's ineffectiveness in allowing civil society to fulfill its role, the involvement of sectarian leader and politicians who "twist the efforts of the CS to serve their interests" (2006: p. 125), the centralized system in Lebanon, corruption, lack of lobbying, and the lack of communication and disagreement among different CSOs. Additionally, the sectarian narrative is not absent from the Lebanese civil society, especially when it comes to funding, whereby CSOs who have sectarian affiliations have financial advantage over others (Abou Assi, 2006).

Thus, with the sectarianized political and socioeconomic nature of the Lebanese governance, and the above-mentioned obstacles among CSOs and different feminist actors, a radical confrontational approach, while beneficial in some areas, is not sufficient for policy change.

3.6 Conclusion

While feminism is the foundation of women's movements and mobilization in Lebanon, the approaches to feminism differ. While some CSOs and activists believe in the importance of engaging with the ruling class to achieve demands and push for policy change, other believe they will not be able to achieve much by working with the system, and the only way to advocate for their rights is by removing the system itself to make way for an equal society discrimination-free society.

Much like feminist movements and their mobilization, LGBTQ activists and organizations have also emerged among the Lebanese civil society, calling for equal basic rights and the ability to live in a prejudice-free society. Their movement gained momentum over the years, with Lebanon home to the first official LGBTQ organization in the region. However, similar to the feminist movements, disagreement lies among these different actors and organizations on which approach is considered to be more effective in achieving minority rights in a sectarian patriarchal society.

The next chapter discusses the LGBTQ community in Lebanon and the discrimination they face, both socially and legally. It also tackles the emergence and mobilization of LGBTQ organizations throughout the years, up until their presence and participation during the October 2019 protests, where they joined the masses in advocating for better living conditions. Finally, this chapter examines the different approaches adopted by LGBTQ organizations and activists, and their effectiveness in achieving minority rights in postwar Lebanon.

Chapter Four
"Queer Is Not an Insult"

4.1 Introduction

"Little Lebanon has long been the hailed liberal island in an autocratic Arab neighbourhood" (Jacinto, 2020). In a region surrounded by conservative neighboring states, Lebanon is known to be the least conservative nation in the Middle East. However, the country remains defficient when it comes to equal rights encompassing all its citizens and identities. This is mainly due to the sectarian patriarchal nature of the Lebanese system. Negative sentiments regarding alternative political or gender identities, as opposed to those sanctioned by the sectarian patriarchal system, are rampant in the Lebanese society (Pew Research Center, 2007). Being LGBTQ in Lebanon is often faced with mockery, aggression, and even violent behavior, aside from the legal consequences for having an alternative sexual orientation. It was only a few years ago, specifically in 2013, when it was announced that homosexuality was not an illness by the Lebanese Psychiatric Society (The Economist, 2013). Even though the Lebanese society may appear to be tolerant and open to some social activities, Western ideals of LGBTQ rights have not infiltrated the whole society. Homosexuality is still considered wrong and abnormal to some, to an extent where homophobia is a common phenomenon among the Lebanese citizens.

The Preamble of the Lebanese Constitution states that "Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception. Lebanon is a parliamentary democratic republic based on respect for public liberties, especially the freedom of opinion and belief, and respect for social

justice and equality of rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination" (The Lebanese Constitution, 1926: p. 1). However, despite the non-discriminatory nature of the constitution, this is not the case in practice. LGBTQ members are discriminated against on a daily basis, both in social and legal settings, with no laws banning this discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. Harassment, blackmail, everyday mockery, arrests, etc. are consequences LGBTQ individuals face in Lebanon for having homosexual or alternative sexual identities. While these individuals do face negative sentiments by their Lebanese counterparts, the main discrimination is perpetrated by the state, mainly the Internal Security Forces (ISF), who are nothing but a mere representation of the intersection between sectarianism and patriarchy. Nightclub raids, random arrests, invasion of privacy and police abuse are common incidents faced by LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon, without any law protecting them against these violations of their basic human rights.

The main violation of LGBTQ individuals' rights is the existence of Article 534 in the Lebanese Penal Code, stating that "any sexual intercourse contrary to nature leads to a sentence of prison up to one year" (Lebanon Penal Code, 1943). Activists, both LGBTQ and intersectional, NGOs, and CSOs have been advocating for the abolishment of this article. This law was adopted in accordance with the French Penal Code which criminalizes same-sex conduct involving individuals below the age of 21, recognized as minors. However, due to faulty translation from French to Arabic and neglecting the part of the article stating that this conduct is criminalized if performed with a minor below 21 years old, the Lebanese Penal Code article 534 was adopted criminalizing same-sex behavior, disregarding the issue of the involvement of minors. Since then, article 534 has been used to criminalize same-sex behavior, even among consenting adults in Lebanon (Proud Lebanon, 2017).

Albeit Lebanon is a relatively open and liberal country compared to many surrounding Arab countries, and although the LGBTQ community has been receiving an increased amount of support from civil society, especially from the young and more liberal generation, homosexuality to this day is considered irregular and worthy of ridicule, humiliation, and even punishment in Lebanon. This chapter examines the discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon, while highlighting the different strategies employed by CSOs and activists in Lebanon in regards to calling for gay rights, especially the demystification and decriminalization of same-sex conduct. The following section discusses how LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon are maltreated, involving both societal and legal discrimination.

4.2 The Problematization of LGBTQ

"Both the Egyptian and Lebanese repressive campaigns invoked a new public enemy of the state – the homosexual" (Makarem & Rizk, 2015: p. 1). The early 2000s marked the beginning of a newly emerged form of activist groups in Lebanon, more involved with sexual and bodily freedoms. Thus we saw the rise of newly-formed organizations, such as Helem, involved in a rather professional form of activism after being marginalized from public spaces for years because of their non-conforming identities and sexualities (Makarem & Rizk, 2015).

Religious patriarchy is the leading reason behind the problematization and demonization of homosexuality and alternative sexual identities in Lebanon. For Christians, homosexual practices are condemned and seen as perversions and abnormalities. For Islam, homosexuality is forbidden and punishable (Schmidtke, 1999). Both conservative and fundamentalist Christians and Muslims are outspoken and vocal regarding their opposition towards homosexuality or any different sexual identity. "Whether they believe that it is an inherently sinful urge that can be

overcome through the power of faith and prayer, or that it is an imported Western behaviour, fundamentalists want to purify the world of homosexuality" (Nadine M., 2010: p. 6). The political elite aim to appease the religious figures in order to maintain power and influence over their respective sects, while religious authorities aim to "cure" or punish homosexuals (Nadine M., 2010). This, in turn, translates into public policy that hurts those who possess alternative gender identities – i.e., alternative to those sanctioned by the sectarian system. Thus, and much in the manner in which it governs Lebanese women through the PSLs, sectarianism also offers a breeding ground for differences and intolerance towards one another when it comes to sexual differences.

Several discriminatory incidents have taken place in Lebanon against LGBTQ individuals and events under the deceptive pretext of defending religious morals. In 2017, Lebanese LGBTQ were forced to quietly celebrate the closing of the first pride event in Lebanon in fear of backlash from conservative Islamists. Seminars related to LGBTQ rights have been cancelled due to threats of protests by conservative Muslim scholars (RFI, 2017). However, the two most notable incidents have been the cancellation of Mashrou' Leila's event during the Byblos Festival in 2019 and the crackdown by the Lebanese Internal Security Forces on the Beirut Pride event in 2018 celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). In the former case, after facing great pressure from online groups, political figures, and religious authorities, the festival organizers cancelled the controversial band's event, after Christian groups claimed the band was "defaming Christianity" through their music, and their presence in Byblos would be "directly contrary to Christian faith and religious and human morals" (Kranz, 2019). In the case of the 2018 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

(IDAHOT), the Lebanese Internal Security Forces arrested the organizer, Hadi Damien, on the basis of a "breach of public morality" (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Beyond these acts of violence against LGBTQ activists, political institutions have always been linked to and dominated by the sectarian patriarchy. Historically, as Suad Joseph discusses, patriarchy is often integrated in state institutions, as a result of kin leaders exerting their hegemonic patrilines on the family and the state. She defines patriarchy as the dominance of men over women, especially in Arab societies, "the dominance of male kin and elders, however, is culturally sanctioned by Arab societies at large and is reinforced by state institutions, ideologies, and processes" (Joseph, 1993: p. 460). According to Joane Nagel, the concept of nationalism goes hand in hand with masculinity, whether it is in political institutions and offices, the military, imperialism, and colonialism. "Nationalist politics is a major venue for 'accomplishing' masculinity" (Nagel, 2010: p. 251). The institutionalization of masculine patriarchy is evident in the dominance of men in the political field. "This is, after all, the country where former sectarian warlords, all men, and their allied clientelist class, overwhelmingly men, continue to maintain near-complete control over the country's political and socio-economic life. They are our president, prime minister, speaker of parliament, most of our MPs and all leaders of political parties" (Ayoub, 2018). Thus, the masculine patriarchal face of the Lebanese system, coupled with its sectarian nature, has been an obstacle for LGBTQ rights.

Mashrou' Leila has been instrumental in constructing a homosexual discourse in Lebanon through their music. They have created a storm with their openly homosexual lyrics, consequently problematizing the existing phenomenon of homophobia in an Arab society. This homophobic sentiment was especially witnessed when the band was banned from performing in Jordan in 2017 mainly because of the homosexual content of their songs (Kuttab, 2017). Another

incident the same year took place in Cairo during a concert when some Egyptian members of the audience were arrested and put in jail for raising rainbow-colored flags, something that goes against the Egyptian government's strict campaign against homosexuals, which is not even illegal, but condemned (Walsh, 2017). Known as the country with the worst reputation in terms of LGBTQ violations, police in Egypt arrest and torture LGBTQ individuals on a regular basis without concrete justifications, reinforcing homophobic behavior and sentiments (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Homophobia is rampant in the Middle East, and Lebanon is no exception, where LGBTQ individuals are judged and discriminated against because of their non-heteronormative sexual orientation. LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon are no strangers to getting arrested without valid reason, abused, detained without access to a phone call or a lawyer, with their basic rights violated, simply because of their sexuality (Proud Lebanon, 2021).

In a country where homosexuality is frowned upon and can have you sent to jail or even killed, and where sex is still considered taboo and something that should not be discussed freely, Mashrou' Leila have continued releasing songs with controversial content, thus becoming the pioneers in leading the discourse of homosexuality in Lebanon and the surrounding region, and providing a platform for liberated cultural expression. With their untypical lyrics about same-sex love, relationships, and sex, they have caused people to talk about sex, and specifically, homosexuality, constructing a new form of discourse on homosexuality. "I would have liked to keep you near me, introduce you to my parents, have you crown my heart. Cook your food, sweep your home. Spoil your kids, be your housewife" (Mashrou' Leila, 2009). According to the mindset people live with, these lyrics would seem to be of a girl singing to her male lover. But that's not the case here. These lyrics are from the song "Shimm El Yasmine" (Smell the Jasmine) sung by Hamed Sinno, the lead vocalist of Mashrou' Leila, to a male. In the song "Kalaam s/he,"

Sinno addresses his male lover singing "if you touch the way you dance, come dance a little closer…my word upon your word, as my body upon your body, flesh-conjugated-words, you feel me feeling what you feel, so why all the shame? Just feel what you feel" (Mashrou' Leila, 2015). Living in a conservative region, where homosexuality to this day is considered an abnormality and an "unnatural act," the nature of Mashrou' Leila's lyrics is ground-breaking.

Lebanese public sexual discourse has also witnessed a shift from shamefulness to one of support, mainly among the civil society and the younger generation. The following chapter discusses LGBTQ mobilization in Lebanon which has been gaining momentum due to their activism and advocacy campaigns.

4.3 The Diversity of LGBTQ Mobilization in Lebanon

"If the sky is raining during summertime or if we have hot weather during winter or if a tree is giving unusual fruits, all these can be according to and in harmony with nature and are part of its rules themselves" (Ghoshal, 2018). This is a statement made by a judge who ruled that same-sex sexual behavior is not unnatural. Albeit the many crackdowns LGBTQ individuals and activists face on a daily basis in Lebanon, CSOs, activists, court rulings, and even political authorities have been a beacon of hope for LGBTQ rights.

Aligned with the fourth wave of the feminist movement, Lebanon saw the emergence of sexual rights activism and mobilization in the 2000s. Makarem and Rizk identify the beginning of sexual rights activism as "subversive activism," as in providing support and aid to individuals who advocate for the overthrowing of governments. This type of activism was replaced in a later phase by "demobilized professionalization and NGOization" (Makarem & Rizk, 2015: p.2) identified as the transition from having a bottom-up member-based approach to having a top-

down staff-based one. This type of organizational approach was more focused on donor agendas and delivering services, such as social and health. It also prioritized "a politics of respectability, value mass professionalization of the leadership and membership, and ultimately create activist spaces that are exclusively middle-class arenas" (Makarem & Rizk, 2015: p. 13). The two most noteworthy organizations discussed in this chapter regarding the early phase of LGBTQ activism in Lebanon are Helem and Meem.

A discussion of these two social movement organizations (SMOs) requires exploring their approaches in organizing themselves as organizations defending LGBTQ rights in a region such as the Middle East. Although both these organizations call for LGBTQ rights and employ Western concepts of sexual identities, Helem and Meem have different organizational approaches and cannot be grouped under the same homogeneous umbrella. According to Meem, non-heterosexual women face different layers of discrimination in the Lebanese society: "sexism, classism, homophobia, racism and sectarianism" (Nadine M., 2010: p. 8), while the male-dominated Helem does not face similar discrimination, thus the decision of Meem to remain underground and not as visible as Helem, in order to provide the adequate support and protection for Lebanese non-heterosexual women. Consequently, the different intricacies, diversities, and strategies in the activism approaches of these two organizations must be taken into account, while taking into consideration that both these organizations have tried to remain established in the local Lebanese context, despite also applying a Western definition of sexual identities. "LGBTQ groups in the Global South have to translate, redefine and appropriate these concepts so that they can be intelligible and useful in their local contexts" (Moussawi, 2015: p. 594). Hence, and although they operate in a similar political system, both Helem and Meem have different strategic and organizational approaches. While they locate themselves within Lebanese

society as local organizations founded in Lebanon, they also position themselves within the LGBTQ international community as part of the Western way of LGBTQ organizing and even funding at times. This section elaborates the different organizational methods of Helem and Meem under the scope of LGBTQ mobilization in Lebanon.

Following the footsteps of the underground group previously known as Club Free, and restricted to LGBTQ individuals, Helem is considered to be the first open and above-ground LGBTQ rights organization in the Middle East. Contrary to their previous direction as Club Free, Helem is not restricted to individuals identifying only as LGBTQ. Gaining international support as a gay rights movement, Helem registered in Canada and began operating in 2004 in both Canada and Lebanon, having support groups in Australia, USA and France, with their main goal being the annulment of Article 534, in addition to fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic alongside other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Moussawi, 2015). As Tarek Zeidan, executive director of Helem, explains:

> [Helem's] mission is to lead a peaceful struggle for the liberation of LGBTQ and queer individuals in Lebanon and in the Middle East region from all forms of human rights violations, including civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. It works along 3 lines, it engages in advocacy, efforts, whether through public awareness, legislative efforts, policy change, and a sort of cultural impact. It works on community, we have the largest community center, non-commercial space for queer people in the region, and that's what we work a lot on, power-building, community-building, and communal support and mobilization, and finally we also have a protection and services department and this is where we offer a lot of services for queer people in crisis including economic relief, shelter, and employment opportunities and obviously case management, psychosocial support, mental support, etc.[19]

Helem conducts awareness campaigns, establishes hotlines to provide support to LGBTQ individuals, develops sexual health educational material, and hosts many events in support of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon. In addition, they are politically and socially active with the aim

---

[19] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021

to abolish Article 534 and end the stigma surrounding alternative sexual identities in Lebanon (MOPH, 2008). However, Helem is not yet officially recognized by the Lebanese state, with the consociational system being one of the main obstacles against minority rights, as it pushes for hegemonic submission to its nature and way of functioning. A helem activist had mentioned that creating a sect was the only way to mobilize through our sectarian system, since it doesn't leave much room for sexual minorities to take part in the Lebanese political arena. The sectarian system is a masculine patriarchal one, with limited freedoms given to people of sexual orientations different than homosexuality. Helem is also unable to open bank accounts in Lebanon, impeding its ability to receive funding and donations (Nagle, 2017). However, while Helem is not officially recognized by the state, it is not completely rejected as well. The absence of state recognition has not been a detrimental obstacle for Helem to exist as an organization and carry out its mission, showing the acceptance of its existence within the Lebanese system and society.

Meem, a movement of lesbian and bisexual women founded in 2007, was defined as "a support community for non-heterosexual women and transgendered persons" (Nadine M.: p. 8). Meem was preceded by "Helem Girls," a support group within Helem in order to focus on girls' and women's issues within the organization, before some of them separated completely from Helem and founded their own CSO. Male dominance, the adopted hierarchical structure of Helem, and the latter's visibility were the main reasons behind this separation, as some of the female members felt their issues were not foregrounded enough within the organization, and thus opted for a different, less hierarchical, organizational structure, and aimed for less visibility in order to maintain the safety of the members. Anonymity and privacy were the main pillars at Meem, with their main goal being the creation of a safe space for women of different sexual

identities, rather than publicly outspoken political and social activism (Moussawi, 2015). This split is indicative of the patriarchal nature of Lebanese society. A male-dominated organization such as Helem has the ability to be public, not only in Lebanon, but in the region as well, and be vocal regarding LGBTQ rights advocacy, despite the absence of official state recognition. By contrast, a female LGBTQ organization feels the need to create a safe space for its members in order to maintain their security. This is an example of the intersectionality involved in this social violence: a woman with an alternative sexual identity faces the discrimination of being both a female and LGBTQ in the Lebanese society, thus the need to seek safety and security. Meem currently does not exist as an organized support group, as they have no longer identified as such since 2014. The members of Meem decided to branch out in order to "create new spaces and initiatives" (Outright International, 2017: p. 25) and are currently considered as individual activists amidst the feminist LGBTQ community in Lebanon (Hamdan, 2015). However, albeit the breaking up of Meem, it was not a hindrance for LGBTQ activism in the country.

Lebanon also plays host for numerous organizations who have been pushing for sexual minority rights. CSOs and NGOs such as The A Project, Beirut Pride, Haven for Artists, Mosaic, and so on, have emerged during the recent years as organizations advocating for minority rights, mainly individuals who identify as LGBTQ. While Helem and Meem are considered to be the pioneers of LGBTQ activism in Lebanon, and with the presence of a multitude of LGBTQ NGOs and CSOs, the country has recently been witnessing the emergence of a new LGBTQ discourse, especially with the eruption of the 2019 revolutionary protests.

The next section examines how the October 2019 uprising in Lebanon provided the LGBTQ community with the arena and platform to become more publicly vocal with demanding

the rights of minorities and marginalized peoples in the Lebanese society, thus having a snowball

effect and resulting in the development of the LGBTQ discourse in the country.

4.4 "Queer Is Not An Insult"

The October 2019 protests provided an arena for Lebanese activists to be vocal regarding

their anti-sectarian anti-patriarchal stance. Similar to the revolutionary feminists who became the

face of the uprising, the LGBTQ community and activists used this space for their advocacy and

demand for rights as well. "There's a newfound openness of thinking and we should push it to

the end. All forms of exclusion aim to divide us, whether under the fraud of sectarianism or the

fraud of homophobia" said one of the many demonstrators who used the uprising as a space to

denounce the sectarian homophobic system (Harb, 2019). A previously shy LGBTQ discourse

surfaced during the revolt, whereby individuals began employing tools such as public spaces and

social media in order to raise awareness on minority rights and highlight the clientelistic

sectarian nature of the Lebanese system, while calling for the toppling of the power-sharing

arrangement and calling for a civil code. The 2019 uprising set the stage for these activists to be

vocal about challenging homophobia, sectarianism and corruption since according to them,

challenging homophobia in the Lebanese society involves the bigger picture of combatting

sectarianism and prejudice. LGBTQ activists were present in large numbers during the protests,

chanting, conversing, and being part of the larger Lebanese community.

The 2019 political economic collapse brought out a form of solidarity among many

Lebanese, where people from different sects, genders, sexual orientations, races, and so on, came

together and revolted (Harb, 2019). This was especially the case among the LGBTQ community.

"All the filth I had been taught about myself – everything I was told that made me hate myself –

I am now using in this revolution to accept myself" (Younes, 2019) is one of the many statements made my LGBTQ individuals describing how empowering the revolution was for them as a marginalized group. This section highlights the recent vocal emergence of an LGBTQ discourse within Lebanese society, whereby both people who identify as LGBTQ and those who do not have become outspoken concerning their support for different sexual identities.

One of the prominent and controversial social media figures and LGBTQ activists who has been creating a liberal sexual discourse is the Lebanese lesbian comedian Shaden, who goes by the username Shadyonshka on social media platforms. Apart from live stand-up comedy shows, Shaden has been using comedy in order to push for sexual minority rights in a male-dominated society. By posting satirical videos on Instagram, she tackles different topics, from criticizing the corrupt Lebanese political system, to attempting to normalize sexual identities aside from heterosexuality. She has posted videos of her getting blasted with tear gas during the 2019 uprising, while being on the frontlines as an activist. In an interview conducted with Shaden by Sonia Caballero, she says "I am a stand-up comedian in a male-dominated field. The comedy sector in Lebanon is very fresh, we are creating it now and yes, there are not a lot of women in it, so I would like to think that I give voice to women and the LGBTIQ community, but also to any minority that feels isolated in this country" (Shaden, 2021). As a lesbian in Lebanon, Shaden has been breaking constructed societal norms in regards to female sexuality.

The October 2019 uprising is considered to be the turning point in pushing boundaries in regards to alternative identities in Lebanon. The inclusivity of these protests was significant in bringing together people from different areas and sects all of them against the status quo. Taking back public spaces to vocalize demands and call for minority rights was one of the highlights of the uprising. Tarek Zeidan, the executive director of Helem, argued this way in an interview:

"We have taken the same sense of ownership over our own future as the rest of the people on the streets. Our community is also suffering from poverty, homelessness, lack of health care and unemployment, which is the same as the rest of the people living in Lebanon and therefore we belong on the streets with them" (Dardari, 2019). Zeidan has mentioned that the uprising "could be a major driver for change," not in changing homophobic sentiments and attitudes, but in providing the LGBTQ community with the space to resume their work on advocating for their rights (Greenhalgh, 2019). During the October 2019 protests, Helem was the only LGBTQ organization which set up a tent in Martyrs' Square, with a large banner on the front of the tent reading "all of us means all of us," in Arabic, with the last word using the rainbow colors, indicating the presence of the LGBTQ community and activists during the protests. Helem's tent was not branded under the organization's name, however, as it was intended to be a "safe and inclusive organizing space."

In another interview, Zeidan adds: "The creation of the tent city was 'extremely organic.'A few people volunteered to help with logistics, and people donated their time and their cars for transport and helped purchase tents at cheap prices. It became a space in a decentralized format that never existed in Beirut, certainly not in the heart of the city" (Chehayeb, 2019). The ability to set up a tent during the largest uprising in the country's history is telling of the public face Helem has adopted throughout the years. When asked about their presence during the 2019 uprising, Zeidan adds:

> We were absolutely an active organization in the protests, we were very visible, we set up a tent right in the middle of the revolutionary square, which was destroyed unfortunately along with the other tents, but our participation was particularly to encourage queer people to take part in the protest. One of the things we also encouraged is for queer people to sort of raise the banners of the demands that all of the protesters were having, so if you notice during the protest, there was a lot of queer people, queer visibility was very tangible, along with women, but you couldn't see a single rainbow flag, that was deliberate. People were not demanding rights for queers, they were demanding rights for

everybody. They were demanding jobs, end to corruption, development, fair wages, that was what was being demanded by queer people on the ground same as everybody else, and that's exactly how we wanted it. We didn't organize events, we organized protests, we organized protest groups, chanting groups, we also made sure there was a queer presence in all of the different discussions and dialogues that were taking place in the revolution square, in order to constantly highlight a queer perspective in all of the issues that were being said, so that any ideas, any sort of interventions for change also kept in mind people who were historically marginalized in the community, such as queer people, people with disabilities, racial minorities, you name it, it was important that everybody be included.[20]

However, not all LGBTQ organizations have adopted a similar public image and have the ability to openly protest against the sectarian system and call out authority figures in public spaces. During the course of the research for this thesis, and while attempting to find gay rights organizations that actively participated in the October 2019 protests, Helem was found to be the only organization participating as one. LGBTQ activists who were also members of organizations participated in the protests under personal initiatives instead of demonstrating under the representation of their respective organizations. In an interview, one cultural and social activist, who preferred to remain anonymous, discussed organizational visibility in the context of the 2019 protests:

We also don't believe in putting our logo on everything, it's not why we do it, so we always believe that if the fundamental point of this, let's say, *maseera*[21], is for women's rights, why would [the organization's] logo be there? Women should just be there. We try to remove that concept of NGO visibility that's usually forced on organizations by donors, so we try the best that we can wherever we can work without logos, that's what we do.[22]

All this suggests that there is a difference in mobilization approaches among organizations and activists advocating for LGBTQ rights, whereby organizations such as Helem adopted more of a strategic approach in pushing for rights in order to reach optimal results, while

---

[20] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.
[21] March in Arabic.
[22] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

other activists believe that adopting strategies is a failure, and the dismantlement of a system would be more effective, especially a confessional patriarchal system such as Lebanon's. The next section delves into the different approaches adopted by different LGBTQ CSOs and activists to advance equal rights and a discrimination-free society.

4.5 LGBTQ Advocacy Approaches

One of the main aspects to take into consideration in regards to mobilizing as LGBTQ is the nature of the Lebanese system, the consociational power-sharing system, which is one of the main obstacles in advancing LGBTQ rights. According to LGBTQ activists, this power-sharing system has legitimized and institutionalized sectarianism to an extent that the majority of the Lebanese population considers sectarianism to be a matter of fact. Thus, this power-sharing system impedes change, thus rendering it "intrinsically homophobic, racist, sectarian" (Nagle, 2017: p. 8). The main question that arises here is what would be the best approach to navigate the rigid consociational system and push for sexual minority rights. This section highlights the differences in approaches adopted by LGBTQ organizations and activists in order to advocate for minority rights.

Consociationalism and power-sharing impose a level of hegemonic compliance with its rules and system. Nagle suggests that some LGBTQ activists claim that it is not possible to push for minority rights while being outside the sectarian system in Lebanon, especially that clientelism is a fundamental aspect of the system, and funding is detrimental for CSOs' survival. He also discusses the way other LGBTQ activists, mainly middle-class men, have found a positive aspect in the confessional system, pointing out that this system provides a certain restricted level of freedom to sexual minorities, because the sectarian divide has allowed for a

certain level of tolerance for the LGBTQ community as long as they are not publicly displaying their sexual tendencies (Nagle, 2017). The confession or sect plays a prominent role in prohibiting any intrusion in the lives of people from other confessions or sects, whether they are LGBTQ or not, since "with autonomy, the main ethnic groups in Lebanon are cautious of intruding in the internal communal matters of other groups as this would be in contrary to the spirit of peaceful coexistence undergirding power-sharing" (Nagle, 2017: p. 9). However, differences arise over the effective approaches to be adopted in order to maneuver around this system.

4.5.1 Strategizing as Activism: Helem

The agreement that lies between all minority rights activists in Lebanon is that the system is a difficult one to move around, and certain strategies or ways of operating need to be adopted in order to carry on their work in a deeply-rooted sectarian and patriarchal country. In order to be able to break this system, it will take plenty of time, effort, and engagement. However, while some organizations or activists have been utilizing a strategic approach in order to advance their rights and liberties, others have been aiming to dismantle the system.

As an organization, Helem has adopted a rather strategic approach as part of their activism in order to reach certain goals. This is evident in the following quote from an interview with the executive director of Helem, Tarek Zeidan:

> As an organization, as an official position, we use strategy a lot more than ["aggressive" interventions], but at the same time we don't sensor or we don't stand in the way of whatever kind of activism or whatever kind of messaging or public narrative or discourse that our members choose to do for themselves, but they do it in their own name, they don't necessarily do it in the name of others, and that's what's so difficult about maintaining a public space because it has to hold all of that diversity.[23]

---

[23] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.

According to Helem, they have adopted a confrontational approach, however their definition of confrontation differs from that of radical actors:

> When we say confrontational approach, we don't mean hurling insults over social media. Confrontation to us means creating spaces of engagement. That's what confrontation does, it creates space for others and for you to speak, as opposed to conflict which erases spaces of engagement and you just sort of go back to your own people and you go to war.[24]

In fact, Helem has adopted a sort of case-by-case approach, whereby they have tailored their strategies and ways of dealing with different adversaries, while they focus on engaging with different people and communities, they would resort to conflict if needed, however, they do believe tailored engagement is the efficient approach in order to advocate for LGBTQ rights. Here it is noteworthy to underscore the fact that activism is not binary, and grey areas do exist, whereby organizations and activists tailor their approaches based on the existing issue at hand and the objective they plan on achiecving.

> So, the way we work is that we tailor our interventions precisely for maximum impact, we don't just use one approach and do it always all the time with everybody, we don't think that's smart, we don't think that's a good use of our time and anybody's time, and we actually have a lot of proof given our 20-year history doing this work, that it doesn't work. So, we really adopt different approaches, when we want to be confrontational and incredibly aggressive, we can, but that's because we know that's the only way to deal with this, or that's a way to deal with it to gain the maximum results that you need or that you want to implement. We don't do it because it exonerates our own outrage, or because it just feels good, it's calculated, it's studied, it is discussed, and rehearsed, before we make such interventions, and indeed all kinds of interventions not just "aggressive" ones.[25]

Helem believes in the power of lobbying and effective advocacy, and while the main goal is the abolishment of Article 534, the organization also aims to work on the stigma and discrimination surrounding alternative sexual identities, decrease the number of LGBTQ arrests, and offer

---

[24] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.
[25] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.

protection and safety to member of the community. "Helem has found effective ways to pursue these ambitious goals. It invites supportive lawyers, bloggers, media workers and activists to round table discussions and hosts one-on-one meetings with political or religious leaders (mostly under the radar so these public figures won't risk being associated with such a sensitive group)" (Hivos, 2018). For years, Helem has been discussing with legal experts the right approach and lobbying efforts to make with law and decision makers regarding Article 534. The organization has been dependent on meeting with decision makers, media outlets, and community in order to make their voices louder.

The LGBTQ organization does not limit its activities to solely Beirut, but also advocates for goals based on the context of local and regional governance, culture, and religion. "In our region, you cannot talk about gay marriage when we don't even have civil marriage here in Lebanon. So how can I demand the same as in the west? The goals maybe are similar but the ways to reach the goals differ" (O'Broin-Molloy, 2018). They do not deny its existence in a larger Lebanese community, and believe in assuming a role as part of this community rather than confronting it. As one Helem member notes, "in order for there to be rights there has to be a community" (Nagle, 2016):

> You need to build power to oppose power, and you can't build power just by being an organization and doing programs and campaigns, you have to mobilize people, so a lot needs to change including our own understanding of our role in society and not just in Lebanon, in the globe, in the region and our connection with other parts of society.[26]

Indeed, and in collaboration with other organizations and lawyers, Helem has resorted to lobbying judges for arrests and cases concerning Article 534. It found success when a judge ruled "not guilty" for a case of consensual sex between two same-sex adults under the basis that

---

[26] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.

the article cannot be used on homosexual cases as consensual sex is not "unnatural," using "a legal model created by Helem years ago" (Hivos, 2018). Thus, Helem has adopted a strategic approach in tackling LGBTQ discrimination in Lebanon and the region. It has operated as efficiently as possible in order to advocate for sexual minority rights, especially in a deeply-rooted sectarian and patriarchal society, and has made good progress in this regard. Not all LGBTQ organizations have adopted this "non-aggressive" approach in advocating for minority rights, however. As the next sections demonstrates, other activists do not believe in the effectiveness of lobbying and working with governmental figures in order to advance LGBTQ rights.

4.5.2 "Going to the Core of the Disease"

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, the most notable statement that stood out is that "the most potent example of reform is like giving an Advil pill to a cancer patient,"[27] sarcastically mentioned by a female social and cultural activist and member of an LGBTQ organization when asked about her stance regarding an effective approach in pushing for marginalized people's rights. Much like radical feminist movements, there are also LGBTQ activists who believe in the dismantlement of the whole sextarian system as opposed to adopting strategies and engaging with authority figures. These tend to "align themselves with radical nonsectarian movements that call for political 'de-confessionalism' or the abolition of power-sharing" (Nagle, 2016: p. 11). They link their fight for LGBTQ rights with the broader fight against the sectarian patriarchal system, which Helem does as well, but using strategy rather than opposition. By employing strategy, Helem plans according to their demands and according to the context they are working in. According to Zeidan, there is a need to understand the nature of

---

[27] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

your demands and the audience you are attempting to engage, thus the strategy involved: "You have to understand that there are multiple different ways of engaging depending on which kind of audience you want to reach and what their role is in the system."[28] Thus, while Helem has no issue engaging with different types of audience, from disenfranchised people, to homophobes and transphobes, to authority figures, oppositional actors have a stricter stance regarding engagement, especially with the latter. Their rejection for engaging and attempting to reform is what sets them apart from reformist organizations and actors. According to an intersectional LGBTQ activist: "I think that a radical approach, a big overhaul of the way everything is structured and starting from scratch, is a much better way to go."[29] According to an LGBTQ activist, the power-sharing sectarian system in Lebanon has minimal space for homosexual rights as this system enforces a social order linked to sectarian identities to an extent that it will not allow the existence of organizations calling for sexual rights (Nagle, 2016). This opposition was evident in the fact that CSOs who advocate for LGBTQ rights were present during the 2019 protests, but they were not visible. They facilitated meetings, provided space for the civil society, provided equipment, did interventions, and so on, but without being as visible as Helem, and with participants being part of the protests under personal initiatives rather than representing an organization.[30]

One activist mentioned how she believes in the ineffectiveness of aiming for reform in a system such as the Lebanese one, simply because of the engrained nature of this system:

> If I believe women and LGBTQI individuals can achieve change in a patriarchal sectarian system, I think it's very difficult for us to continue to consider the concept of reformist, it's obviously not working, there's a systemic injustice that's so well-embroidered into most countries, most governments, the way they function, whether we like it or not, colonial imperialism and white supremacy and capitalism. They seep into your everyday,

---

[28] Interview with Tarek Zeidan from Helem, Beirut, June 2021.
[29] Interview with an intersectional activist, Beirut who wished to remain anonymous, May 2021.
[30] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

so there's no way to consider reforming something without dismantling the system, because whether we like it or not, reform is kind of like giving a Panadol to a cancer patient, you know, it's not enough, it's not fundamentally strong enough to change.[31]

This statement is indicative of the oppositional stance developed by many activists because of the rigidity of the system, whereby they believe change cannot take place without a complete dismantlement of the system itself. They believe the injustice caused by the sectarian patriarchal system is too fundamental and engrained to allow room for any change or reform to occur. Thus, these activists do not believe in reform and working within the system to achieve goals for the time being. On a state level and global level, sectarianism and patriarchy, and colonialism and imperialism, respectively, are too deeply-rooted to be able to make way for change or any form or reform:

> So the whole premise is to create an alternative space, to say that we can continue to exist within this system would be ironic, contradictory, and basically furthering colonial white supremacy, so it's about slowly dismantling it, absolutely, reforming it, if you could fix it we wouldn't be in the position that we're in. like I said I think that the most potent example is reform is like giving an Advil pill to a cancer patient, whereas dismantling is actually going to the core of the disease, going 'this is what we need to fix, this is the system.' And it churns, you know, there isn't one thing that's disconnected from the other, they're all interconnected so you can't just go let's say into politics and take one stance against something because you're most likely going to have to compromise on a lot of things, on a lot of other things. And this compromise in itself is the weakening facet of the form, right? Because whether we like it or not, it's not really compromise, it's the lesser of two evils, and I'm ready for no evil at all.[32]

Resistance and radical opposition seem to be the main approaches LGBTQ activists have adopted throughout the years, and they believe the protests were a "now or never" moment to have their voices heard against the oppression and marginalization they had been facing all their

---

[31] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.
[32] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

lives. However, they also believe in the necessity of educating people and raising awareness, especially because the nature of the system itself is unjust. As one activist noted:

> The justice system automatically disenfranchises people of color, women and LGBTQI, so it automatically is not a conscious system, therefore you need to have conscious persons, and that's why it's imperative that laws and policies go hand in hand with mentalities and vice versa. You can't work on one end, you sure as heck can't consider a law and a policy the only step towards reform in the sense of societal reform, I don't want to talk about systemic reform. But you can't do that without the other and that's why it's imperative that conversations are at the epicenter of all of this, because everything else goes around it, but representation, communication, networking, and raising awareness and advocacy, being physically present in spaces you're not allowed to exist in, I think that'll change both laws, policies, and mentalities.[33]

However, the stickiness of the power-sharing system and institutionalized sectarianism has been a key obstacle to the implementation of any change within this system. The political sectarian elite have taken advantage of the weakness of the state in supporting and providing for their citizens, whereby people from different sects have been resorting to their sect leaders for decades for services and distribution of resources. These sectarian leaders have built a clientelist system and strong patron-client relationship with their sectarian subjects, further reinforcing the sectarian identity, thus increasing the difficulty of de-rooting this identity to replace it with a nonsectarian one, which is what these radical actors aim to do. This is evident in the fact that while the 2019 protests succeeded in publicizing the demands for marginalized peoples, it did not succeed in materializing this into concrete change and reform, and improving the life of the disenfranchised people. Despite the unity we saw among activist groups during this nationwide movement, it was a spontaneous one that showed the civil society a form of communal spirit and coordination, but not sufficient enough to reach any change or reform (International Alert, 2020).

---

[33] Interview with a cultural and social activist who wished to remain anonymous, Beirut, May 2021.

An established organization such as Helem develops strategies such as campaigning, lobbying, raising awareness, and setting up a community center in order to achieve its main goal of abolishing Article 534 and paving the way for more changes that could protect the LGBTQ community, while simultaneously integrating itself as part of Lebanese society rather than remain a marginalized community. On the other end, there are organizations, such as Haven for Artists and The A Project, and activists who do not believe that a non-aggressive approach is effective in achieving their goals, considering the rigidity of the power-sharing system. They believe that challenging this system would make way for a more inclusive society.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the problematization of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon and the discrimination they face on a daily basis, both societal and legal. Homophobia and transphobia are rampant among the majority of the Lebanese population, in addition to lack of protection and support by the state itself, whereby Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code is utilized to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals. The chapter also discussed the different approaches and strategies adopted by LGBTQ organizations and activists whose goal is to advocate for gay rights, some by acknowledging the system and working within it as a tool to advance their agendas, while others determined to oppose the system in order to advocate for better living conditions for their marginalized community. The next chapter engages the main theoretical and practical implications of this study.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

5.1 Summing Up the Argument

Lebanon is no stranger to mobilization and civil society movements. Its permissible culture and system have provided CSOs with the public platforms to advocate for different issues, be it political or socioeconomic. In a predominantly conservative and religious region, Lebanon is nevertheless considered to be tolerant of different ways of life, where liberties and freedoms are far more visible than in many neighboring countries. Yet events that go back to the Ottoman period and the French mandate, along with the current consociational power-sharing model, clientelism, and the political economy of sectarianism, all this has led to the construction and dominance of sectarianism as the main identity marker for most Lebanese, where people identify themselves primarily based on sectarian loyalties over a range of other identities. Nevertheless, and despite the rigidity of the Lebanese sectarian system, we have witnessed time and again the emergence of alternative identities, and citizens mobilizing against the sectarian status quo and adopting different types of identities. These identities mainly came about from feminists and LGBTQ individuals, who are against the sectarian framework of the nation and do not believe in identifying themselves as part of a larger sect or religion, but rather organize around a national identity while fighting for their equal rights as Lebanese citizens. They fight against the injustice and lack of rights they experience as women and LGBTQ individuals under Lebanon's sextarian system.

Numerous organizations and activists have created a feminist and sexual discourse over the years, in an attempt to break the status quo and fight for women's and LGBTQ rights. Their

activism was put under the spotlight during the 2019 protests in Lebanon when women emerged as the face of the revolution and LGBTQ individuals were visibly and loudly advocating for gay rights. However, disagreement between these CSOs and activists is widespread regarding the effective approach in advocating for these rights. While some activists believe in adopting an accommodational approach, working within the system, and lobbying with state and authority figures, others have adopted a rather confrontational and oppositional approach, calling for the dismantlement of the system as a whole as a way to be able to reach their goals.

This thesis explored the thorny and often controversial topic of how best to navigate a sectarian patriarchal system as marginalized minority groups using feminists and LGBTQ groups and activists as case studies. The preceding analysis was based on secondary sources but also interviews with a member of KAFA, a feminist activist, Tarek Zeidan, the executive director of Helem, and LGBTQ activists. With regards to feminism, this research highlighted the work of KAFA and its reformist stance towards advocating for women's rights.

As a local CSO established for many years now, KAFA has launched awareness campaigns, lobbied with politicians and decision-makers, set up support centers for women, took part in the 2019 demonstrations, in addition to numerous other activities and events in order to advance the status of women in Lebanon. Their main goals are protecting women and advocating for their rights in a sextarian system, mainly via the creation of a unified civil personal code as opposed to the existing personal status laws that strip women of their basic rights in a society where the paternal mentality is rampant. While KAFA still has a long way to go in achieving its goals within such a system, it has succeeded in lobbying for a law against domestic violence, supporting women and GBV cases who are in need of protection, accessing political parties and authority figures in order to push for changing or ratifying existing laws. Although KAFA is a

secular nonsectarian anti-patriarchal organization, it has comprehended the rigidity and engrained sectarian patriarchy of the Lebanese system. it has concluded that the most effective way to advance women's rights is by accommodating the existing system and working alongside politicians, political parties, and authority figures in order to try and provide women with the required support, while simultaneously actively working towards changing the existing laws and raising awareness.

On the other side of the marginalized coin, the LGBTQ community has been fighting for its sexual freedoms for years. As individuals with different sexual orientations than the heterosexual norm, they are stripped from the right to liberally express their sexuality among their Lebanese counterparts. While Lebanon is assumed to be the tolerant country in an otherwise not-so-tolerant Arab region, in reality it is still rather conservative when it comes to accepting different sexual tendencies. Although in recent legal proceedings the judge refused to consider homosexuality as unnatural, nevertheless Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code criminalizes sexual behavior considered to be unnatural, placing same-sex conduct under this category. The main goal of LGBTQ activists is to first and foremost abolish Article 534, hence making way for the de-problematization of homosexuality.

As the first LGBTQ organization in Lebanon, Helem has come quite a long way in championing gay rights, providing support for LGBTQ individuals, raising awareness through discussions and campaigns, lobbying, working on effective strategies to advance its agenda, and being publicly visible and outspoken in order to achieve the goal of abolishing Article 534. Helem has also worked hard to provide LGBTQ individuals with a society free from discrimination and contempt. Their approach involves strategizing and planning in order to try

and achieve their goals in a society that rejects their very nature, and doing so in a very visible manner in order to raise awareness and tolerance.

On the other hand, the October 2019 protests showed a different side of feminist and LGBTQ activism, one that was different than that of reformist organizations. While most of these activists are part of CSOs, they were present during the protests as part of much more limited personal initiatives, rather than as representatives of their respective organizations. The aggressive approach of chanting, shouting slogans and even profanities at politicians, was one adopted by these oppositional activists. However, they were doing so as individual activists and not under the umbrella of an organization because their organizations prefer lobbying and working with politicians in order to advance women and gay rights, rather than confronting them aggressively. Yelling profanities at these politicians was deemed a useless strategy in this case, and would not be feasible for the work these CSOs have been doing. This approach has nevertheless allowed the emergence of both a feminist and LGBTQ discourse with activists becoming more vocal on social media, organizing awareness campaigns, and finding creative ways to advocate for women's rights, such as using artistic methods as a way to create a shock within society. Nonetheless, in a society where these alternative identities are discriminated against on a daily basis as a result of the dominant sectarian patriarchal system, advocating for equal rights is detrimental in improving the living condition of Lebanese women and LGBTQ individuals.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Since its inception, Lebanon has had a power-sharing consociational system, distributing power and representation based on a predetermined sectarian quota. In this system, sectarian

identity is considered the main form of identity for Lebanese citizens. Numerous theories attempt to explain the emergence and dominance of this form of identity: namely, primordialism, constructivism, instrumentalism, and institutionalism. This thesis aligned itself with the constructivist approach to underscore the historical emergence of sectarianism as the primary mode of political identity and mobilization in postwar Lebanon, but also the institutional approach combined with the political economy of sectarianism to justify the dominance of sectarian identity over all other forms of identities.

This thesis contributes to a growing literature covering activism in the period after the 2019 protests. According to a report by UN Women, the presence of females during the protests was nearly equal to men, constituting half the protesting crowd. Their presence was also intersectional: it encompassed different sectarian, cultural, geographical, and sexual identities, reflecting the country's active civil society and feminist movement (Wilson, Zabaneh, & Dore-Weeks, 2019). LGBTQ activists' "visible contribution has sparked new possibilities for the recognition of their rights and identities in Lebanon" (Human Rights Watch, 2020), considered a crucial step in a majorly homophobic society. These protests created the space for dialogue and the emergence of discourses and a possible change in perception that would pave the way for a discrimination-free society.

The cases examined in this thesis suggest that identities are not primordial nor are they simply instrumental. Primordialism has an innate connotation, whereby primordial identities are not easily changed or alternated, since the theory suggests the identity at hand is natural and inherent. On the other hand, the instrumentalist approach tends to be too rationalist in attributing the stickiness of sectarian identity to the strategies of political entrepreneurs. While the instrumentalist approach is adequate in explaining the method with which the sectarian elite have

been able to maintain a grip over their subjects in our clientelistic society, it is not sufficient in explaining the firm loyalty of the majority of the Lebanese population to their sectarian identity. Rather, the stickiness of sectarian identity is better explained as a result of institutional design, state-society relations, and the postwar political economy of sectarianism. State resources and public positions are often controlled and distributed by the sectarian elite, resulting in the institutionalization of sectarianism and creating a system of clientelism and patronage, further reinforcing and making room for the dominance of the sectarian identity among the Lebanese population. Consequently, the ability for alternative identities to develop in a system as rigid as the Lebanese confessional clientelistic system is suggestive of the malleability of this identity. Indeed, this is supported by a common theme that emerged among all the interviews conducted for this thesis: the nonsectarian stance they possessed, from the reformist organizations to the radical actors. Whether they had an accommodationist approach or a confrontational one, the end goal for these marginalized communities is living in a society free from sectarianism and its consequences. Their struggles to demystify feminism and homosexuality are battles in the complex war to liberate Lebanese society from the shackles of sectarianism and patriarchy. Thus, and despite the above-mentioned sextarian structure, not only did these alternative identities emerge in a rigid power-sharing system, they emerged against the sectarian status quo. This confirms that sectarianism is a mere construct, and its dominance is attributed not to primordialism, but to an intricate combination of political, economic, social, and discursive practices that have engrained this identity further in Lebanese society, making it both rigid and malleable simultaneously.

The research undertaken in this thesis has also uncovered a number of practical implications to activism in Lebanon. Years of activism and advocacy have been spent to improve

the status of two marginalized communities within Lebanese society: women and the LGBTQ community. Both are discriminated against on a daily basis, whether on a societal level or a legal one. All the activists who were interviewed for this research agree on the systemic injustice women and the LGBTQ community face in Lebanon. Their activism was mostly evident during the 2019 demonstrations. However, many challenges arise concerning feminist and LGBTQ activism and rights in Lebanon, adding even more obstacles to the existing ones.

The main challenge facing CSO activism in Lebanon today is the disagreement over the best approach to adopt. All feminist and LGBTQ organizations unanimously agree on the deep-rootedness of sectarianism, the violence of the patriarchal culture, and the consequences of the power-sharing system in Lebanon. They all strive to live in a society free from discrimination and sectarian divisions, and free from the interference of religion and sect in private matters. However, the strategies and approach to be used in order to achieve these goals remains a bone of contention between different activists, with dire implications for the prospects for social change. The aim of this thesis was to explore the strategies that work best to improve minority rights in a confessional system, and whether it would be better to adopt an accommodationist or confrontational approach, whereby the former entails working within the sectarian system as a means to an end, and the latter involves working in opposition to the system and completely rejecting being politically affiliated with it.

This thesis distinguished between two types of civil society actors: reformists and radicals. Reformists, such as KAFA and Helem, aim to strategize and plan in order to advance their agendas. Both organizations resort to lobbying, campaigning, raising awareness, working alongside other organizations, and working with politicians and authority figures, in order to impact policy-change as well as social change. While both marginalized communities have a

long way to go, these organizations have made some advancements for women and LGBTQ individuals using this accommodational approach. Yet activism is not binary, and there are certain grey areas in regards to the approaches adopted by these organizations and activists. Most activism in a power-sharing system is undertaken based on the context of the goal, the objective to achieve, the type of adversaries dealt with, regardless of the general stance they adopt as organizations and activists, whether accommodationist or confrontational. However, this thesis focused on the latter two broader approaches.

KAFA has set up support centers for GBV cases and women who need immediate support and shelter, providing them with medical care and legal assistance if needed. It has on-going campaigns for domestic violence, migrant workers, personal status laws, and child protection. It also succeeded in pushing for a law against domestic violence in 2014, and provided training to Lebanese internal security forces on how to deal with domestic violence cases. They also worked with other reformist organizations that succeeded in abolishing Article 522 from Lebanese Penal Code, one that exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim. KAFA was also organizing discussions and awareness sessions during the October 2019 uprisings, where they highlighted and attempted to raise awareness on the importance of having a unified civil code rather than the existing PSLs.

Similarly, Helem, through strategizing and planning, was able to become the first official LGBTQ organization in the Middle East. Helem's visibility is an achievement in itself, considering the conservative, religious, and patriarchal society it operates in, where the majority of the population still discriminates against homosexuals and individuals who have different sexual orientations. Thus, Helem was able to create a safe space for LGBTQ members, work with media outlets to prevent them from using derogatory terms when talking about queers, issue

informative publications, and make media appearances as a way to increase acceptance for LGBTQ individuals. The organization is also active and vocal on the streets, present during protests to demand rights and reject any form of discrimination. Most importantly, Helem was successful in impacting court rulings concerning Article 534 by lobbying and working with lawyers. This led judges to rule against said article, a small yet noteworthy victory for queer individuals.

Both KAFA and Helem are against the existing status quo and sectarian system. However, they believe that for the time being, the most effective approach to advance minority rights is through working with influential people and decision-makers from within the sectarian establishment. This is how they pursue their larger goal of secularism and abolishing the power-sharing system itself.

By contrast, the other type of actor is the radical one, with the same end goal as the reformists, but taking a rather different approach. These CSOs and activists oppose the system, as in they oppose working with the system to achieve their goals. They rather aim at dismantling it to create a discrimination-free society. They were mainly visible as individual activists during the 2019 protests, shouting and chanting profanities at the regime, voicing their frustration against the inequality they face on a daily basis, whether within society or from the law. These activists were able to achieve a level of unprecedented outspokenness, mainly during the protests and later on social media, where people found it easier to criticize politicians and make fun of them. That impact is also visible today, on platforms such as Twitter, where demonstrating contempt and disapproval of the ruling class has become the norm for a large number of people. This underscores how much these activists do place an importance on changing mentalities and cultural values. However, one needs to take into account that the 2019 protests lacked

organization and leadership; the protesters were also divided among themselves. Moreover, and considering the grave implications that accompany societal and legal discrimination against women and the LGBTQ community, immediate support and policy change has proven to be much more beneficial and useful than trying to topple a sectarian regime, especially one as engrained as Lebanon's power-sharing system. This was evident in how feminists and LGBTQ activists were shouting profanities during the protests under individual initiatives rather than any organizational umbrella. They understood the consequences of "upsetting" the ruling class in such a deeply-rooted system, one that is difficult to change at the moment.

In sum, gradual policy change in a rigidly sectarian system may be the most effective strategy to pursue by marginalized communities such as women and queers. For policy change to take effect in a power-sharing system such as Lebanon's, organizations and activists should accommodate themselves to the existing system and use it as a means to an end, in order to achieve present-day changes that would improve the lives of those embracing alternative identities. The timing of the research undertaken for this thesis was pivotal for comparing the two approaches to activism described above. After all, this research was undertaken after the 2019 protests, when we witnessed the tensions between these two approaches, and divisions among organizations and activists who disagreed on how to strategize. Those who have spent years making long-term plans and building connections with decision-makers continue to assume a long-term strategy, despite the loss of the momentum of the protests in 2020. They understand just how difficult it is to achieve policy change.

Lebanon may be a complex and intricate country to study and explore. Conservative yet liberal, traditional yet avant-garde, it has witnessed colonial rule, been ravaged by a 15-year war, and has a divided population. Being a woman or a queer in the Lebanese society is no easy task,

faced with discrimination and inequality on a daily basis is difficult to maneuver around. Yet they found a way to emerge and be vocal in trying to claim their rights as equal citizens. These marginalized communities have come a long way throughout the past few decades, but they still have a long way to go.

Bibliography

Abisaab, M. (2010). *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation.* New York: Syracuse University Press.

Abou Assi, K. (2006). *An Assessment of Lebanese Civil Society.* Beirut: CIVICUS Civil Society Index.

Aghnatios, R. (2019). لن يسقطَ النظامُ إن لم تسقط فيه الأبوية Retrieved from Sawt Al Niswa: http://sawtalniswa.org/article/634

Alert, I. (2020, October 17). *Lebanon protests one year on: Outlooks for recovery and change*. Retrieved from International Alert: https://www.international-alert.org/news/lebanon-one-year-on-october-protests

AlJazeera. (2019, September 29). *Lebanon: Protests over worsening economic crisis.* Retrieved from AlJazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/09/29/lebanon-protests-over-worsening-economic-crisis/?gb=true

Anani, G. (2017, September 22). *Abolishing Lebanon's "rape law": spotlight on ABAAD's campaign*. Retrieved from Girls Not Brides: https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/abolishing-lebanons-rape-law-spotlight-on-abaads-campaign/

Arab.org. (2004, February 11). *Helem*. Retrieved from Arab.org: https://arab.org/directory/helem/

Atallah, S., & El-Helou, Z. (2018, March). *Lebanese Elections: Clientelism as a Strategy to Garner Votes*. Retrieved from The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies: https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=134

Avis, W. R. (2017). *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Lebanon.* Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Ayoub, J. (2018, December 20). *Lebanon's militarised masculinity.* Retrieved from Media Support: https://www.mediasupport.org/lebanons-militarized-masculinity/

Azhari, T. (2019, October 18). *Thousands of protesters force govt to drop WhatsApp tax.* Retrieved from The Daily Star: https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Oct-17/493754-hundreds-take-to-streets-to-protest-new-taxes.ashx

Bahout, J. (2016). THE UNRAVELING OF LEBANON'S TAIF AGREEMENT: Limits of Sect-Based Power. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 1-26.

Barometer, A. (2016). *AB Wave IV - 2016*. Retrieved from Arab Barometer: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-analysis-tool/

Baumann, H. (2016). Social protest and the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon. *Global Discourse, 6*(4), 634-649.

Baytiyeh, H. (2019). Lebanon's Power-Sharing System and the Rise of Sectarianism. *Peace Review , 31*(2), 223-230.

BBC. (2019, November 7). *Lebanon protests: How WhatsApp tax anger revealed a much deeper crisis.* Retrieved from BBC News: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50293636

Cammett , M., & Issar, S. (2010). Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon. *World Politics, 62*(3), 381-421.

Cammett, M. (2015). Sectarianism and the Ambiguities of Welfare in Lebanon. *Current Anthropology, 56*(S11), S76-S87.

Cammett, M. (2019, April 10). *Lebanon, the Sectarian Identity Test Lab.* Retrieved from The Century Foundation: https://tcf.org/content/report/lebanon-sectarian-identity-test-lab/

Center, C. S. (2015, June). *Social Movement responding to the Lebanese Garbage Crisis.* Retrieved from Civil Society Knowledge Center: https://civilsociety-centre.org/party/social-movement-responding-lebanese-garbage-crisis

Center, P. R. (2007). *The Pew Global Attitudes Project.* Washington: Pew Research Center.

Centre, C. S. (2019). *Women's Movements in Lebanon.* Retrieved from Civil Society Knowledge Centre: https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-_1920s-womens-union-established-in-lebanon-and-syria

Chehayeb, K. (2019, October 31). *Beirut's Protest City Is a Rebuke to the Privatization of Public Space*. Retrieved from Bloomberg: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-31/beirut-s-protesters-assert-their-right-to-the-city

Chérif-Alami, A. (2019, November 6). *Twenty Days of Lebanese Protests: Between Continuity, Innovation and Uncertainty.* Retrieved from Arab Reform Initiative: https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/twenty-days-of-lebanese-protests-between-continuity-innovation-and-uncertainty/

Clark, J., & Salloukh, B. (2013). Elite strategies, civil society, and sectarian identities in postwar. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 45*(4), 731-749.

Code, L. P. (1943, March 1). *Lebanon Penal Code.* Retrieved from Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/uploads/res/document/lebanon-penal-code_html/Lebanon_Penal_Code_1943.pdf

Collard, R. (2019, December 13). *How Sectarianism Helped Destroy Lebanon's Economy*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/13/sectarianism-helped-destroy-lebanon-economy/

Constitution, T. L. (1926, May 23). *The Lebanese Constitution.* Retrieved from The Lebanese Constitution: https://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf

Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: after proving loyalty to the "Nation", will the "Body" rise within the "Arab Spring"?* Beirut: Civil Society Knowledge Centre.

Dardari, S. (2019, November 14). *Lebanon: A Revolution — Inside/Out*. Retrieved from Anera: https://www.anera.org/blog/lebanon-revolution-inside-out/

Davidson, J. (2001). Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex. *The Past and Present Society*, 3-51.

Economist, T. (2013, July 20). *Gays in Lebanon: They're Not Ill*. Retrieved from The Economist: https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2013/07/20/theyre-not-ill

ESCWA. (2017). *Women's Political Representation in the Arab Region.* Beirut: United Nations.

Forum, W. E. (2018). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018.* Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (pp. 139-164). New York: Cornell University Press.

Ghaddar, S. (2017). *Second-Class Citizenship: Lebanese Women Fight to Pass Nationality to Children and Spouses.* Beirut: The Century Foundation.

Ghoshal, N. (2018, August 28). *Success to Savor but More Challenges for LGBT Rights in Lebanon.* Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/28/success-savor-more-challenges-lgbt-rights-lebanon

Golley, N. A.-H. (2004). Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women? *Third World Quarterly, 25*(3), 521-536.

Greenhalgh, H. (2019, November 14). *Lebanon protests seen as an 'opportunity' for LGBT+ community*. Retrieved from Reuters: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-conference-lgbt-trfn-idUSKBN1XO08N

Halabi, F. (2019, December 18). *From "Overthrowing the Regime" to "All Means All": An Analysis of the Lebanonisation of Arab Spring Rhetoric*. Retrieved from Arab Reform Initiative: https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/from-overthrowing-the-regime-to-all-means-all-an-analysis-of-the-lebanonisation-of-arab-spring-rhetoric/

Hamdan, S. (2015). *Becoming-Queer-Arab-Activist: The Case of Meem.* Retrieved from Kohl Journal: https://kohljournal.press/becoming-queer-arab-activist

Hanf, T. (1993). *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation.* London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies and I B Tauris & Co Ltd.

Harb, A. (2019, November 13). *'This Revolution Has Raised the Bar.' How Lebanon's Protests Have Created a Surprising Space for LGBT Rights*. Retrieved from Time: https://time.com/5726465/lgbt-issues-lebanon-protests/

Henley, A. D. (2016, December 16). *Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Retrieved from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/16/religious-authority-and-sectarianism-in-lebanon-pub-66487

Hivos. (2018). *Resilience Under Oppression*. Retrieved from Hivos : https://mena.hivos.org/story/resilience-under-repression/

Hivos. (2021). *The History of The Women's Movement in Lebanon*. Retrieved from Hivos: https://womeninleadership.hivos.org/timeline/

Holtmeier, L. (2019, October 7). *How Lebanon's dollar shortage sparked an economic crisis.* Retrieved from Al Arabiya English: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2019/10/07/How-the-Lebanese-pound-peg-began-to-crack-under-pressure-

Horowitz, D. L. (1990). Making Moderation Pay : The Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management. In J. V. Montville, *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (pp. 451-475). Washington DC: Lexington Books.

International, O. A. (2017, August 1). *Activism and Resilience: LGBTQ Progress in the Middle East and North Africa.* Retrieved from Outright Action International: https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/MENAReport%202018_100918_FINAL.pdf

Ipek, Y. (2020, November 24). *Activists-in-Becoming: Lebanon's October 17 Revolution and Its Afterlives.* Retrieved from Society for Cultural Anthropology: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/activists-in-becoming-lebanons-october-17-revolution-and-its-afterlives

Johnson, M. (2002). *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon.* London: I.B.Tauris.

Joseph, S. (1993). Connectivity and Patriarchy among Urban Working-Class Arab Families in Lebanon. *Ethos, 21*(4), 452-484.

KAFA. (2005). *About KAFA*. Retrieved from KAFA: https://kafa.org.lb/en/about

KAFA. (2020). *About KAFA*. Retrieved from KAFA: https://www.kafa.org.lb/en/search/node?keys=revolution

Kak, N. E. (2019, July 25). *A Path for Political Change in Lebanon? Lessons and Narratives from the 2018 Elections*. Retrieved from Arab Reform Initiative: https://www.arab-

reform.net/publication/a-path-for-political-change-in-lebanon-lessons-and-narratives-from-the-2018-elections/

Karam, J. G. (2017). Beyond Sectarianism: Understanding Lebanese Politics through a Cross-Sectarian Lens. *Middle East Brief, 107*, 1-10.

Khalaf, S. (2002). *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Khashan, H. (1992). *Inside the Lebanese Confessional Mind.* Lanham, Maryland: University Press Of America.

Khashan, H. (2000). *Arabs at the Crossroads: Political Identity and Nationalism.* Florida: University Press of Florida.

Khoury, D. (2013, September 22). *Women's political participation in Lebanon*. Retrieved from Heinrich Böll Stiftung: https://lb.boell.org/en/2013/09/23/womens-political-participation-lebanon

Kwatra, R. (2018, May 16). *More to Activism Than Just Pride in Lebanon.* Retrieved from Outright International: https://outrightinternational.org/content/more-activism-just-pride-lebanon

Lamirande, A. (2020). *The Women of Thawra: Feminism and the Lebanese Revolution.* Retrieved from Socialist Forum: https://socialistforum.dsausa.org/issues/winter-2020/the-women-of-thawra-feminism-and-the-lebanese-revolution/

Lautissier, H. (2018, May 19). *Beirut Pride's Hadi Damien Q&A: Lebanon's LGBT movement is 'growing'.* Retrieved from Middle East Eye: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/beirut-prides-hadi-damien-qa-lebanons-lgbt-movement-growing

Lebanon, P. (2017). *The LGBTIQ+ Community in Lebanon, Documenting Stories of Torture and Abuse.* Beirut: Proud Lebanon.

Lebanon, P. (2021, March 17). *Arbitrary detention of LGBTI individuals in Lebanon: specific vulnerabilities and international ways of recourse*. Retrieved from Proud Lebanon: http://proudlebanon.org/arbitrary-detention-of-lgbti-individuals-in-lebanon-specific-vulnerabilities-and-international-ways-of-recourse/

Leila, M. (2009). Shimm El Yasmine [Recorded by M. Leila]. Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon.

Leila, M. (2015). Kalam s/he [Recorded by M. Leila]. Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon.

M., N. (n.d.). *Arab Queer Women and Transgenders Confronting Diverse Religious Fundamentalisms: The Case of Meem in Lebanon.* Beirut: Awid.

Mabon, S. (2019, August 19). *De-Sectarianization: Some Initial Thoughts.* Retrieved from SEPAD: https://www.sepad.org.uk/announcement/de-sectarianization-some-initial-thoughts

Madani, D. (2020). *Nasawiya*. Retrieved from Daleel Madani: https://daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory/nasawiya

Makarem, G., & Rizk, A. (2015). *Masculinity-under-threat": Sexual Rights Organizations and the Masculinist State in.* Beirut: Civil Society Knowledge Centre.

Makdisi, U. (2000). *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Makdisi, U. (2002). After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 34*(4), 601-617.

Mandour, S. (2019, May 17). *Fifteen years of LGBTI community activism in Lebanon: A story of existence and oppression.* Retrieved from Amnesty International: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/05/lgbti-community-activism-in-lebanon-a-story-of-existence-and-oppression/

Merhi, N. (2014). *Kafa, Lebanon: protecting women*. Retrieved from Impact Journalism Day: http://impactjournalismday.com/story/1218/

Migdal, J. S. (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World.* Princeton, New Jersy: Princeton University Press.

Mikdashi, M. (2010, December 3). A Legal Guide to Being a Lebanese Woman (Part 1). *Jadaliyya*, pp. 1-13.

Mikdashi, M. (2018). Sextarianism: Notes on Studying the Lebanese State. *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle-Eastern and North African*, 1-39.

Mikdashi, M. (2019a, December 4). *Beyond the Lebanese Constitution: A Primer*. Retrieved from Jadaliyya: https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40318/A-Primer-on-The-Lebanese-Constitution

MOPH. (2008). *A Case Study of the First Legal, Above-Ground LGBT Organization in the MENA Region.* Beirut: Ministry of Public Health.

Moughalian, C., & Ammar, Z. (2019). *Feminist Movement Building in Lebanon: Challenges and opportunities.* Beirut: Rootslab.

Moussawi, G. (2015). (Un)critically Queer Organizing: Towards A More Complex Analysis of LGBTQ Organizing in Lebanon. *Sexualities, 18*(5/6), 593-617.

Nagel, C. R., & Staeheli, L. (2015). International Donors, NGOs, and the Geopolitics of Youth Citizenship in Contemporary Lebanon. *Geopolitics, 20*(2), 223-247.

Nagle, J. (2016). Crafting radical opposition or reproducing homonormativity? Consociationalism and LGBT rights activism in Lebanon. *Journal of Human Rights*, 1-14.

Nagle, J. (2017). Beyond ethnic entrenchment and amelioration: An analysis of non-sectarian social movements and Lebanon's consociationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1-20.

Nagle, J., & Fakhoury, T. (2018). Between Co-Option and Radical Opposition: A Comparative Analysis of Power-Sharing on Gender Equality and LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland and Lebanon. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 24*(1), 82-99.

Nassif, G. (2020). *Women's Political Participation in Lebanon and the Limits of Aid-Driven Empowerment.* Beirut: Lebanon Support.

News, A.-M. (2019, October 18). *Al-Masdar News*. Retrieved from Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgCMgnUvnbM

O'Broin-Molloy, F. (2018, March 28). *Acting Out in Beirut: LGBT Activism and Advocacy in the Heart of the Middle-East*. Retrieved from DFID Inclusive Societies: https://medium.com/@DFID_Inclusive/acting-out-in-beirut-d76c13741b7c

Poushter , J., & Kent, N. (2020, June 25). *The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/

Rachidi, S. (2019, July 18). *Lebanese Mothers Fight to Pass on Citizenship to Children*. Retrieved from Inside Arabia: https://insidearabia.com/lebanese-mothers-fight-to-pass-on-citizenship-to-children/

Rootslab. (2017). *About Us*. Retrieved from Rootslab Global: http://rootslabglobal.org/lebanon/#/home/en

Saadeh, D. S. (2011, September). *Emerging Voices: Young Women in Lebanese Politics.* London: International Alert. Retrieved from International Alert.

Salloukh, B. F. (2019). Taif and the Lebanese State: The Political Economy of a Very Sectarian Public Sector. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 25*(1), 43-60.

Salloukh, B., Barakat, R., Al-Habbal, J., Khattab, L., & Mikaelian, S. (2015). *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon.* London: Pluto Press.

Sanchez, D. G. (2021). *Understanding Tunrout in the Lebanese Elections.* Beirut: The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

Schmidtke, S. (1999). Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 62*(2), 260-266.

Sewell, A. (2019, October 24). *How Lebanon's 'WhatsApp tax' unleashed a flood of anger.* Retrieved from The World: https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-10-24/how-lebanons-whatsapp-tax-unleashed-flood-anger

Shaden. (2021, February 28). Shaden: Comedy For Resilience in Lebanon. (S. Caballero, Interviewer)

Sharafeddine, D. F. (2017). *Discrimination against Women in the Nationality Law: Its Impact on Lebanese Families and Issues of National Integration.* Beirut: UNDP.

Sleiman, A. (2019, December 6). *A Moment for Change: The Lebanese Uprisings of 2019.* Retrieved from Democracy Reporting International: https://democracy-reporting.org/dri_publications/a-moment-for-change-the-lebanese-uprisings-of-2019/

Stephan, R. (2014, November 7). *Four Waves of Lebanese Feminism.* Retrieved from E-International Relations: https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/07/four-waves-of-lebanese-feminism/

Valbjørn, M. (2019). Beyond the beyond(s): On the (many) third way(s) beyond primordialism and instrumentalism in the study of sectarianism. *Nations and Nationalism, 26*(1), 91-107.

Valbjørn, M. (2020). Be careful what you wish for −The Multiple Strategies of De-Sectarianization. *POMEPS Studies (Challenges to the Middle East North Africa Inclusionary State), 37*, 22-27.

Varshney, A. (2007). Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict. In *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (pp. 274-295). Oxford: Oxford University.

Vartanian, H. (2019, October 22). *Signs and Banners From the 2019 Protests in Downtown Beirut*. Retrieved from Hyperallergic: https://hyperallergic.com/524108/beirut-protest-signs-and-banners/

Watch, H. R. (2015). *Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session.* Human Rights Watch.

Watch, H. R. (2015, January). *Unequal and Unprotected: Women's Rights under Lebanon's Religious Personal Status Laws.* Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/lebanon0115_briefer_ForUpload.pdf

Watch, H. R. (2018). *Lebanon: Discriminatory Nationality Law.* Beirut: Human Rights Watch.

Watch, H. R. (2018, May 18). *Lebanon: Police Shutter Pride Events.* Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/18/lebanon-police-shutter-pride-events

Watch, H. R. (2020, October 1). *Egypt: Security Forces Abuse, Torture LGBT People*. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/egypt-security-forces-abuse-torture-lgbt-people

Watch, H. R. (2020, May 7). *Lebanon's LGBT People Reclaim Their Power.* Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/07/lebanons-lgbt-people-reclaim-their-power

Watch, S. (2019, November 21). *Wicked Politics and Shaken Socio-Economy.* Retrieved from Social Watch: http://www.socialwatch.org/node/18372

WILPF. (2019, December 11). *In Lebanon, the Revolution Is a Woman*. Retrieved from Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: https://www.wilpf.org/in-lebanon-the-revolution-is-a-woman/

Wilson, C., Zabaneh, J., & Dore-Weeks, R. (2019). *Understanding the Role of Women and Feminist Actors in Lebanon's 2019 Protests.* Beirut: UM Women.

Women, U. (2009). *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Retrieved from UN Women: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

Younes, R. (2019, December). *"If Not Now, When?" Queer and Trans People Reclaim their Power in Lebanon's Revolution.* Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2020/05/07/if-not-now-when-queer-and-trans-people-reclaim-their-power