GENDER AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN LEBANON'S ONGOING UPRISING

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Background: Women in Revolution

Feminist scholars have been tasked with the heavy burden of separating the *gender revolution* from namely, all "other" revolutions throughout scholarship and history. This is important to highlight. It is important because work on *gender and revolution* has been a consistent attempt to mend the divisions between the feminist scholarship on *women and revolutions* and the more mainstream study of *revolutions* where the feminist and women's agenda seems to take a back seat – or even more so, a seat at the back of the bus.

Traditionally, women's roles have been emphasized as crucial to the course and outcome of revolutions throughout history; however, many feminist scholars argue that revolutionary movements, perhaps even intentionally, have a history of subordinating women's interests to broader or more "fundamental" revolutionary goals. They further elaborate that revolutions and the states they yield have often continued to marginalize and exclude women from decision-making, often enacting legislation that emphasized women's more traditionally and "socially acceptable" family roles within the household.

On the other end of the stick, and in complete contrast to feminist scholarship, more mainstream studies of revolutions and their ideological agendas were geared toward overlooking women and gender issues throughout their discourses and analysis. Their description and analyses of particular revolutions' drives and consequences highlighted the social injustices, which lie in the notions of economic standing, social class, state corruption, as well as regional and international conflicts. Even more *traditional* definitions of "revolution" throughout the discourse, such as that presented by Skocpol (1979) for example, is one that depicts revolution as a process, which "[...] entailed a fast-paced foundational transformation of a society's state and class structures, including institutions and property relations".[1]

Scholastic work on *gender and revolution* has been centered upon not just integrating gender analysis in the wider discipline of revolution, but also distinguishing revolutions by their gendered consequences and repercussions. It ultimately grew from the evident reality that *all* revolutions had most definitely involved the participation of women in ways that disordered pre-existing social constructions of gender and women's roles. In her review of the social revolutions and various Third World populist revolutions, Moghadam (2018) found two types of revolution and dissected their implications upon women and the gender rhetoric.

According to her research, one group of revolutions fell into the "women in the family" or patriarchal model of revolution; while the other group of revolutions fell under the women's "emancipation", or "egalitarian model of revolution".[2] This differentiation is pivotal when we aim to understand the roles of women in revolutions, as it is important not to assume that "women" is a homogeneous group. It should be subsequently noted that in each revolution there has been variance in the outcomes it yielded, and continues to yield, upon women. This variance is strongly founded upon notions such as socio-economic standing, race, ethnicity as well as ideological divisions and other demographic considerations among women – especially in the MENA region. Nonetheless, revolutionary discourses and policies pertaining to women, the family and citizenship seem to fall into these two broad categories. So where will Lebanon's fall?

According to Moghadam, the *women's emancipation model* links both women's liberation and rights to the revolution's objectives, modernity, or the aim for social justice, development and overall transformation in a political and social system.[3] It constructs *Woman* as a major component of citizenship. She is to be equipped for economic and political action. She is to be freed from gendered roles, patriarchal constructions and societal expectations for her own liberation and active realization of her complete citizenship. The rhetoric of this model is deeply rooted *gender equality*

[1] Skocpol, T. (1979), States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4- 41.
[2] Moghadam, V. M. (2018), Feminism and the Future of Revolutions, Socialism and Democracy, 32(1), 31-53.
[3] Moghadam (2018), Feminism and the Future of Revolutions, Socialism and Democracy.

rather than *gender difference*.[4] Historically, a clear example of this is that of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Although this revolution took place more than a century ago, remains one of the most *revolutionary* revolutions of all time. Its bold and unparalleled approach to raising the legal status and social positions of women at the time still echoes in Russia to this day.[5]

On another note, the *women-in-the-family model* of revolution is one that discounts women from the developments in the definitions and constructions of the revolutionary ideology. Whether in the definition of *independence*, *liberation* and *liberty*, this model tends to maintain the notion of a woman as second-class citizen in complete contrast to the ideology that they promote.[6] This model consequently bases its ideological rhetoric in patriarchal values, false notions of nationalism, as well as more traditional or religious depictions of an "ideal society". It assigns women the conventional roles of wife and mother, and associates women with the family unit, reproduction, *sex*, tradition, culture and religious connotations.

Although historically praised as the accelerator of the development of republics and democracies, The 1789 French Revolution is also seen as the historical precursor of the patriarchal model. Despite its many progressive features, as well as the fact that several of its central documents, such as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, continued to enthuse movements for abolitionism and universal suffrage in the next century, the French revolution had an extremely conservative and traditionalist outcome for women. According to Darton (1989), women's primary duty in the Republic was biological reproduction and the socialization of children in the virtues of the republic.[7]

Feminist Revolutionary Theory and Scholarship

The notion of an international system and subsequently of international relations (IR) may be understood in a number of ways, and through a number of lenses. Furthermore, a number of international relations theories exist – essentially differing from one another in their in explanation of the driving force behind bi-lateral relations, local policies, political will, the interplay between security, power dynamics and actors of IR, etc.[8]

Feminist theory involves looking at the manner through which international politics affects (and is affected) by both men and women, and additionally delves into the manner through which core concepts that are employed within the discipline of international relations such as conflict, war and security are themselves rooted in gendered notions.[9] Feminist approaches to IR have not only encompassed a traditional focus of IR on states, wars, diplomacy and issues pertaining to state security, but feminist IR experts have additionally focused on the importance of tackling the manner through which gender outlines the current global political economy and political movements.[10]

Founding feminist IR scholars refer to using a "feminist consciousness" whilst addressing the intersection between gender issues in politics.[11] In her article *Gender is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness*, Cynthia Enloe urges IR scholars to delve into the issues at hand whilst maintaining a sensitive stance to both masculinities and femininities which constitute them.[12] In this way, the feminist consciousness, together with a gendered lens, allows for IR academics to discuss International Politics with a deeper appreciation and understanding of issues pertaining to gender around the world and how to include it in the development of the rhetoric at later stages.

[4] Moghadam (2018), Feminism and the Future of Revolutions, Socialism and Democracy.
[5] Goldberg Ruthchild, R. (2010), Equality and Revolution, University of Pittsburg Press, 146-147.
[6] Goldberg Ruthchild (2010), Equality and Revolution.
[7] Darton, R. (1995), Censorship, a Comparative View: France, 1789-East Germany, 1989, Representations No. 49, Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989, 40-60.
[8] USC Libraries (2020), Research Guides: International Relations, Retrieved at: https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=234935&p=1559228
[9] Ackerly, B. A., & True, J. (2008), An Intersectional Analysis of International Relations: Recasting the Discipline, Politics and Gender, 4(1), 1-18.
[10] Ackerly & True (2008), An Intersectional Analysis of International Relations: Recasting the Discipline.
[11] Ackerly & True (2008), An Intersectional Analysis of International Relations: Recasting the Discipline.
[12] Enloe, C. (2004), 'Gender' Is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness, International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), (80) 1, 95-97.

Enloe describes just how the IR discipline proceedes to move forward and develop amid a major and fundamental lack in analysis of the experiences, actions and ideas of women in the international arena.[13] She further insists that this has proactively and indefinitely excluded them from the discussions in the theory of IR, as well as the rhetoric surrounding it.[14] To further elaborate on this point, Enloe describes Carol Cohn's (Founding Director of the Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights and a Lecturer of Women's Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston) experience in using the notion of a "feminist consciousness" while participating in the drafting of a document which outlines the actions undertaken in negotiating ceasefires, peace agreements and new constitutions.[15] Initially, the word "combatant" was used to describe those "in need" during these highly sensitive negotiations. The use of "combatant" in this context is particularly problematic as Carol points out, namely due to the fact that it implies one type of militarized individuals, mostly adult men carrying guns, and excludes the women and girls deployed as porters, cooks and forced "wives" of male combatants. This is a pivotal example of just how sensitive the inclusion of a gender component can be when negotiating a converging period – and the Lebanese case is no different. In the aforementioned example, the term "combatant" effectively rendered the needs of these women and their profiles *invisible*, and excluded them from the particularly critical IR conversation regarding "who needs what" in the highly pivotal and delicate period following a conflict. And this discussion is crucial. It is crucial not only for the analysis of the manner through which a range of masculinities are at play in the rhetoric and jargon of International Politics, but also for the comprehension of how those masculinities affect the women's agenda during conflict and peace periods.

In a similar approach, feminist IR scholar Charlotte Hooper effectively applies the notion of a "feminist consciousness" whilst taking into account the manner through which "IR disciplines men as much as men shape IR".[16] Instead of concentrating on "what and whom" IR discounts from the conversation, Hooper focusses her efforts on the manner through which masculine identities are preserved and are products of the practice of IR itself.[17] Hooper insists that a more in-depth look into the ontological and epistemological manners in which IR has been inherently "a masculine discipline" is necessary.[18] Ultimately, the inherent masculinity of IR is due to the fact that men constitute the vast majority of modern IR scholars across discourse and history. Moving from this reality, their masculine identities have ultimately been socially constructed across history through a number of pivotal political progressions. To elaborate on her point, Hooper tracks the masculine identities across history, where "manliness" is essentially measured in notions such as: militarism, public service and citizenship, ownership; authority of the fathers as both heads of states and households; and finally, competitive individualism and reason – all which she insists lay the foundation for the exclusion of a gendered rhetoric particularly in a post-conflict or an ongoing revolutionary setting.[19]

Women in Revolution in Recent History

More recently, in twentieth-century across developing countries such Mexico (1910-1920), Algeria (1954-1962) and Iran (1978-1979) revolutions had quite evidently patriarchal outcomes for women. Women were consigned to the *private* domain despite the significant roles women had assumed in the aforementioned revolutionary movements. In cases where the *women-in-the-family model* applies, men assumed power and monopolized the decision-making process, putting legislation in place which codified patriarchal-gender relations, and set the women's movement back centuries. If we are to move a little closer in both time and geography, the Arab Spring revolutions in their *first wave*, put women on the back burner and the patriarchal model triumphed in countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.[20]

[13] Enloe (2004), 'Gender' Is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness.
[14] Enloe (2004), 'Gender' Is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness.
[15] Enloe (2004), 'Gender' Is Not Enough: The Need for a Feminist Consciousness.
[16] Hooper, C. (1999), Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics, Review of International Studies, 25(3), 475-491.
[17] Hooper (1999), Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics.
[18] Hooper (1999), Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics.
[19] Hooper (1999), Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics.
[20] Esfandiari, H. & Heideman, K. (2015), The Role and Status of Women after the Arab Uprisings, Strategic Sectors: Culture and Society, 303-306.

So what determines each type of revolution or democratic transition and its gender outcomes? Simple, the consistency in the upward transition in the roles of women prior, during and after this process. This is where the true importance of women's participation in the 2019 Lebanese Revolution lies. In answering this question ideology and social structure are equally relevant. Often enough, where "revolutionaries" or the leadership of a transition are steered by a modernizing ideology, where reformist "leftist" parties are prominent, and chiefly where women and their organizations have had a strong presence, the aftermath of the revolution is more probably going to be emancipatory for gendered roles and structures.

In contrast, in the cases where these circumstances are not existing, and particularly where revolutions or political movements have been guided primarily without a strong female presence, *patriarchal* tendencies and ideologies are more likely to find new strength as a result. Despite momentary *distractions* throughout the period of the revolution, as women participate in the demonstrations and protests, pre-conceived and instilled patriarchal gender dynamics are often carried over in the post-revolutionary period, as the voices of these women and the feminist agenda is sidetracked and overlooked in the quest for the "greater good".

Political, economic and environmental crises in Lebanon have each been intersecting and deepening for decades now. Corruption and sectarianism amongst the ruling political class are devastating the country's social fabric, and it has been years since Lebanon has seen a functioning central government.[21] As people took to the streets for what they refered to as having had "enough of nepotism and a political system that is based on sectarian identities", the country continues to grapple through power cuts, the closure of of small and medium businesses, running water which is undrinkable in a number of neighbourhoods, as well as more than 25% of Lebanese citizens living in poverty at the moment.[22] Additionally, more than half of refugee communities in Lebanon live in extreme poverty, and the country's health system is "broken and very expensive" making even a basic check-up a financial hurdle for the majority of the country's population.[23]

Moreover, in Lebanon, this is an opportune time to turn the tables on the formerly oppressed feminist agenda – one which remains unaddressed amid taping the women's rights issue together by giving them their basic freedoms, as though these basic freedoms are to be "given" or as though they can be taken away in the first place. The women's agenda in Lebanon has been reduced to the provision of basic freedoms; however, women have entered the public sphere (although mildly) in the pre-revolutionary situation, one of the fundamental circumstances Moghadam argues where change is more likely to take place. Couple this, with the fact that incredibly overwhelming numbers of women took part in the revolution and assumed leadership roles in multiple civil society movements. In the cases of the Arab Spring revolts, one can apply this observation perfectly. These conditions were present Tunisia for instance, where the revolution shaped a woman's "role" in quite an unprecedented fashion in the county, but this was not the case in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen for instance, and as touched upon earlier.

Moving from this point, Lebanese women's role in the revolution which is currently "ongoing" across Lebanon, as well as currently setting a strong foundation for eagerly watching neighboring countries' own aspirations is evident, strong-willed and fundamentally important for the outcomes of these difficult times. It is fundamentally important toward the struggle for the feminist and women's agendas not to be overridden or stampeded under "broader" demands. It is fundamentally important because this is the wave of change women have been demanding for generations. And it is fundamentally important because the women's movement in Lebanon has already built such strong foundations for itself, this is the time where it gets to reap the benefits.

The Role of Women in Lebanon's Revolution

For months between late 2019 and 2020, Lebanon's capital has been hit with a triple-fold conflict – the likes of which it had not witnessed in years. Protestors from all factions of society demonstrated in the country's capital, as families, young people, women, and children stood against the sitting political elite, decades of perpetuated corruption, as well

[21] Salameh, R. (2014), Gender politics in Lebanon and the limits of legal reformism, Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support, DOI:10.28943/CSR.001.007.
[22] Gemayel, F. (2019), More Than One Million Lebanese in Poverty, Le Commerce, Retrieved at: https://www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/29443-more-than-one-million-lebanese-in-poverty
[23] Gemayel (2019), More Than One Million Lebanese in Poverty.

as an escalating economic crisis.[24] Now, after an ease in Coronavirus restrictions, the revolution is brewing once again in several cities across the country.[25]

As the revolution swept across the country, women have been at the forefront. They have created an atmosphere of security that has allowed families with young children to return day in day out to the protests though their own civil society networks, non-governmenal organizations as well as grassroots movements.[26] Following months of protest, the serving political class eventually settled upon the resignation of then-serving Prime Miniser Rafik Hariri, and the establishement of a new "technocratic" government of "experts" under the leadership of Lebanon's new Prime Minister, Hassan Diab.[27] And despite its eruption into random unorganized violent incidents in recent months, the entire revolution largely remained peaceful, with women playing an essential role in keeping it as such according to multiple reports from the ground. At the forefront of the marches and focus groups, sit-ins and roadblocks, women have been a key driving force behind the movement according to an employee from the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality who wished to remain anonymous for the purpose of this paper.[28] She insists: "In an 'outdated' political system where women are unceasingly underrepresented, revolutions like this one are where women make themselves, their rights and their demands heard. This has been the case in every revolution throughout history. And the case in the women's revolution of the 1950s and 1960s as well".[29]

One of the lasting symbols of Lebanon's 2019-2020 revolution, and one of its earliest, was infamously taken on its first night, during an altercation between a former Minister's bodyguard and a female protester. As one of the bodyguards waved and reportedly pointed his gun, a woman by the name of Malak Alaywe delivered a swift kick to his groin – now seen in almost every report of the protests around the world.[30] And the image of a woman lashing out at this representation of the country's corrupt and patriarchal political class is an enduring reality even if it has only recently been cemented visually in the discourse, served as a major catalyst in bringing more women out on the streets, and in instilling the image of the revolutionary woman in this part of Lebanon's history.[31]

However, one of the most fundamental impacts women have had on the protests is making them more peaceful. The first two nights of demonstrations in October 2019, were marked by violent clashes between police and protesters that continued deep into the night. But on the third evening, a group of women decided to form a human shield to separate the two sides. They called it the women's front line.[32] The clashes stopped immediately, and the protests continued to escalate over the coming days.

As a protestor who wishes to remain anonymous for the purpose of this paper states, "[…] when armed forces insisted on removing peaceful road blocks set up by protesters around Beirut by force, women stood on the frontlines to provide a peaceful baracade between police and protestors – insisting not to 'lose sight of why we are here'".[33] As the interviewee depicts, groups of women took it upon themselves to physically stand in the front line because police forces were "less likely to harm a woman".[34] And the role of women may be reduced to this if one were to address

[24] Mackinnnon, A. (2020), Why Lebanon's Protesters Are Back, Foreign Policy, Retrieved at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/01/lebanon-protests-back-streets-economic-crisis-debt-default-lockdown/
[25] Mackninnon (2020), Why Lebanon's Protesters Are Back.
[26] Kowal, C. & Stoumann Fosgrau, S. (2019), Women are on the frontlines of the Lebanese protests, Beirut Today, Retrieved at: https://beirut-today.com/2019/12/02/women-frontlines-lebanese-protests/
[27] DW News (2020), Lebanon announces new 'expert' government, Retrieved at: https://www.dw.com/en/lebanon-announces-new-expert-government/a-52102252
[28] Personal Communication (2020).
[29] Personal Communication (2020).
[30] Matar, M. (2019), NAYA| Woman of the Month: Malak Alaywe Herz, Lebanon's uprising icon, Annahar, Retrieved at: https://en.annahar.com/article/1065303-naya-woman-of-the-month-malak-alaywe-herz-lebanons-uprising-icon
[31] Personal Communication (2020).
[32] Anderson, A. & Cheeseman, A. (2019), Women stand defiantly at the vanguard of Lebanon's protest movement, Middle East Eye, Retrieved at: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/women-stand-defiantly-vanguard-lebanons-protest-movement
[33] Personal Communication (2020).
[34] Personal Communication (2020).

this throw a shallow lens, but also carries ideological weight in itself. Revolutions across history have been at the center of exerting a "woman's role" in the society these women live in, and have subsequently served as an outlet for both political expression and well as political and agenda setting.[35] As demonstrators stood to face the country's corrupt political class in its entirety, each of the factions in place were forwarding a more centralized agenda as part of a larger theme – the women's agenda being one that has been a common denominator in the calls for reform across Lebanon for decades.

Hayat Arslan, President and Founder of the Committee for Women's Political Empowernment and Participation was front and center during these protests. She insists: "[…] it is essential to note that Lebanese women have gathered hand-in-hand to free themselves not only from sectarian divides, but also to unify against the inequality and oppression that comes with being a woman – no matter what faction of society you belong to".[36] She elaborates, "[…] one of the most notable and unique aspects about this Lebanese uprising is the participation of women in unprecedented numbers, but that should not come as a shock to anyone because women in Lebanon have been organizing themselves and mobilizing for change for decades – always waiting for the opportunity to ride a wave of change in the right direction, to ensure that what comes after this wave includes women's voices just as much as it includes the voices of the men participating in this movement".[37]

Civil society activist and gender rights advocate Bshara Samneh, Board Member of MOSAIC, the MENA Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration and Capacity-building, insists that Lebanese women:
"[…] from all different ages and backgrounds are shaping the direction and character of the revolution so as to include a clear direction for the women's agenda. As the case generally is, that despite the fact that women are active participants in forwarding the change itself, they are often isolated from the decision-making and reform processes that follow. They are at the center of demonstrations, standing in the faces of armed forces, and serving as a reminder of their essential role in the political process. Lebanese women, still burdened by the Civil War era, have been insisting that this time around the revolution must be first and foremost about both national unity and gender equality. Women are protesting for an equal seat at the decision-making table. Because if this does not take place now, their voices will be silenced once more with superficial reforms"[38]

As Samneh insists: "I unquestionably am certain that our revolution in Lebanon is feminist at its center. Not only due to the fact that it evidently demands real transformative change, but also because it is intersectional, in that it is aiming to tackle multiple forms of oppression and human rights violations beyond economic inequalities. The revolutionaries on the ground are calling for an end to classism, patriarchy, racism, sexism and homophobia".[39]

As the system regulating personal status laws (marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance) in Lebanon remains un-unified by one comprehensive civil code, and rooted in 15 various denominational legal systems governed by religious leaders, the impact of these laws are disproportionate upon the women they impact.[40] Additionally, Lebanon's Nationality Law infamously still denies a Lebanese woman the right to pass on her nationality to her children if her husband is not Lebanese, while it allows a Lebanese man to do so.[41]

Lebanon has only six female lawmakers in its most recent Parliament (constituted of 128 members in total). Lebanon currently ranks at 140 out of 149 in the global Gender Gap Index ; and its ranking in terms of women's participation in the labor force is one of the lowest globally.[42] Women in Lebanon are also underrepresented in the political sphere:

[35] Personal Communication (2020).
[36] Personal Communication (2020).
[37] Personal Communication (2020).
[38] Personal Communication (2020).
[39] Personal Communication (2020).
[40] Human Rights Watch (2015), Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session, Retrieved at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LBN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_LBN_19385_E.pdf
[41] Human Rights Watch (2015), Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session.
[42] Human Rights Watch (2015), Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session.

their representation in the Parliament constitutes less than 5% - often backed by the support of a powerful political party, or on a nomination list as part of a gender-friendly image a political party wishes to convey.[43]

Dr. Guita Hourani, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Notre Dame University-Louaize insists that the presence of women on the ground falls directly in-line with a feminist revolutionary ideology. She connects women's presence in this revolution, with their presence across decades in revolutions throughout history, but fears their fate will be yet again marginalized in the rhetoric surrounding the post-revolutionary era – such as in the case of the French Revolution for instance.[44] She highlights that it is often an overwhelming reality that the rhetoric for "equality" and "justice", are demanded independent of a gendered component.[45] Building on this point, when issues of equality and social justive are addressed, they often refer to economic standing between citizens rather than the political participation of all factions of society in the decision-making process. Hourani insists: "[…] by remaining perseverant and vocal in support of their political and socio-economic demands, women have become some of the Revolution's most iconic images. Not only have they defied gender stereotypes, they have also included patriarchy, injustice and militarization to the feminist agenda".[46]

On why women are inherently marginalized in a post-revolutionary era, and why this may very well be the case in Lebanon, Hourani insists that the issues are not only present in the patriatchal political structure in place, but rather that women need be more organized as a group and learn to "support other women".[47] She states:
"[…] there are many reasons why women are sidelined in post-revolutionary eras. I will mention two. One of these reasons, which is very rarely talked about, is financial ability/wealth that can facilitate women's access to politics and help them make an impact. The other reason is that women in our part of the world have yet to support other women in politics, in fact, women, as well as men, disempower women who are interested in politics, this happens through defaming, not voting for them, and accusing them of being aggressive and manly".[48]

Conclusion: Intersectional and Systemic Challenges amid Protest
The reality of the matter is that the women's rights discourse in Lebanon has largely been treated much like every other pressing and fundamental human rights issue the country faces: piecemeal reforms managed to provide temporarily solutions and instant gratification without making any meaningful and sustainable changes or improvements. Decades of these unaddressed grievances have given women additional reason to organize themselves in protests and revolutions.

Women have inspired the Lebanonese 2019-2020 revolution, led several sub-movements, and provided a space within this revolution for forwarding the women's agenda, gendered perspectives, as well as comprehensive policy approaches. As the spirit of this revolution centers on bringing about the reform necessary for the abolishment of sectarianism, bad governance, and corruption, the specific and disproportionate injustices women experience in the country intersect with these inherent injustices fundamentally. The challenges brought on by Lebanon's dwindling economic system are particularly amplified for women from poor socio-economic conditions, women in underdeveloped regions, migrant domestic workers, refugees, sexual and gender minorities, among other marginalized groups. Blatantly, according to Human Rights Watch, women are discriminated against in the country's laws, economic and labor practices, as well as in cultural, social and political norms.[49]

In sharp contrast to the realities on the ground, the extensively active participation and leadership of women in protests and revolutions across its history, Lebanon has been consistently ranked as one of the lowest in the region in terms of

[43] Human Rights Watch (2015), Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session.
[44] Personal Communication (2020).
[45] Personal Communication (2020).
[46] Personal Communication (2020).
[47] Personal Communication (2020).
[48] Personal Communication (2020).
[49] Human Rights Watch (2015), Lebanon: Laws Discriminate Against Women: Pass Optional Civil Code; Reform Religious Laws, Courts, Retrieved at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/19/lebanon-laws-discriminate-against-women

Parliamentary representation of women.[50] Women's advocacy and civil society groups have lobbied to advance a draft electoral law, known as "the female quota," that would ensure a 30 percent quota for women for years now.[51] In 2017, in a move widely condemned by activists and civil society groups both locally and internationally, the government failed to pass the draft law or even make any promising progress in incorporating the proposal in Parliament.[52]

While the aforementioned depiction does not entirely capture the full picture when it comes to the state of gender discrimination in Lebanon, nor does it assist in identifying the extent to which women are at a disadvantage in the post-revolutionary period; it does serve as a clear emphasis of its systemic nature. Systemic forms of injustice build upon each other. Corruption, sectarianism, clientelism, racism, and patriarchal social norms all reinforce one another, producing an environment that is destructive to a women's presence and active participation in society. Emphasizing the urgency of dismantling these barriers is pivotal in a period of ongoing revolution, reform and convergence.

At the foundation of Lebanon's ongoing revolution is an otherwise overlooked collective struggle against the injustice women face daily in the areas of political participation, legal frameworks, social norms as well as personal status. Demonstrators have transcended sectarian, regional, generational, and traditional political loyalties to condemn a broken political and economic system, and this inevitably needs to constitute a major shift in the role of women in the public sphere. As women have been instrumental to the revolution's success, the revolution itself cannot succeed is key players in the revolution are not involved in the convergence period, in policy development, in power and at the decision-making table.

It is simply insufficient to solely give recognition to the fact that the revolution "would not be possible" without the leadership, courage, or engagement of women. It is important to recongnize that the revolution is unsuccessful and essentially incomplete if it does not champion women's rights and justice. Ultimately, inclusive and intersectional platforms are the sole means through which Lebanese women can play a leading role in shaping a key shift in the country's political, economic, social and cultural landscapes.

[50] Human Rights Watch (2015), Lebanon: Laws Discriminate Against Women.
[51] Human Rights Watch (2015), Lebanon: Laws Discriminate Against Women.
[52] Human Rights Watch (2015), Lebanon: Laws Discriminate Against Women.

