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BOOK REVIEW

The publication "The Lebanon Uprisings of 2019," edited by Rima Majed and Jeffrey Karam and published in 2023, compiles insights from scholars, journalists, and political activists. It explores the events of the October Revolution of 2019, also known as *Thawra*. This uprising took the form of social demonstrations spread across various parts of Lebanon, seeking to challenge the existing political and economic structures, especially amid one of the country's most severe economic crises.

This book adopts an interdisciplinary perspective in its examination of *Thawra*. On one hand, it closely engages with social and economic sciences as it explores the internal dynamics of Lebanon. On the other hand, it aligns with international relations, with several contributors placing Lebanon's revolutionary process within the context of regional revolts that originated from the Arab Spring in 2010-2011. This highlights that the resistance against the Lebanese regime, while unique in its aspects, is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is influenced by the broader wave of protests unfolding in neighboring countries.

In its introductory section, the book examines the protests through a theoretical lens that perceives the revolution as an ongoing process. In contrast to conventional viewpoints in social sciences and international relations, which typically define "revolution" based on its immediate outcomes involving swift changes in political and social structures, the approach taken in this book considers the uprisings in Lebanon since 2011, along with other Arab revolts, as an ongoing process characterized by revolutionary situations. The notion of *Revolutionary Situation* originates from Charles Tilly's "From Mobilization to Revolution" (1978) where he

delineates a distinction between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes. The former involves the political crisis context triggered by the influence of a specific opposition movement, posing a challenge to state power. On the other hand, the latter encompasses the successful transfer of power to revolutionary actors (Tilly, 1978, p.190-193).

Tilly's theory provides an intriguing framework for analyzing the Lebanese context, particularly in light of the protests that have unfolded in the country since 2011. During this period, an opposition movement emerged, mobilizing new waves of protests in 2013, 2015, and culminating in its peak in 2019. Despite the fact that none of these episodes of popular mobilization resulted in a complete transfer of power, the editors of "Lebanon Uprisings of 2019" interpret these occurrences as revolutionary situations due to their impact on Lebanese politics and society. Notably, the work acknowledges that these revolutionary situations are not isolated incidents; instead, their interconnected agendas reveal a deliberate rejection of Lebanon's existing political system and economic model. This repetition of agendas signifies an ongoing revolutionary process within the country.

After the introductory theoretical discussion, the book shifts its focus to a second theme, exploring the recent historical context that has shaped the development of opposition movements and the mobilization of social protests since the Arab Sping. Given that the Lebanese revolutionary pro- cess is essentially an anti-system struggle, the chapters dedicated to this topic are crucial. They provide a historical narrative, examining both political and economic aspects, to delineate the features of the system that protesters aspire to dismantle.

Within the political domain, the authors explore the configuration of sectarianism, constitutionally acknowledged as confessionalism[2]. Since the country's independence, this model has resulted in the establishment of a sectarian elite that consolidates control over state resources and distributes them within their network of clients. As a result, a segment of the population is deprived of basic rights. On the economic aspect, the authors highlight the adoption of neoliberalism from the 1990s onward. This economic framework, stressing decreased state regulation and limited social intervention, has sparked a succession of protests since its initiation (Baumann, 2016). Notably, amid the escalating crisis in 2019, dissatisfaction with neoliberalism surged to unprecedented levels, serving as a catalyst for the eruption of *Thawra*.

Continuing on this contextual theme, the book provides a noteworthy contribution to the study of revolutions by introducing the concept of "neoliberal sectarianism," as elucidated by Rima Majed in her examination of the political-economic landscape in both Lebanon and Iraq. Majed emphasizes that neoliberal sectarianism is not merely a combination of the sectarian political system and the neoliberal capitalist model; rather, it emerges as a phenomenon constructed at the intersection of these two forces. The author contends that, in the absence of state provisions for social welfare and redistribution, coupled with the deregulation of labor relations under neoliberalism, sectarian elites position themselves as the exclusive alternative for certain sectors of society seeking security and

2. In Lebanon, sectarianism has been a historically shaped framework dating back to the Ottoman era. During this period, religious communities, predominantly Christian and Muslim, started being treated as distinct and opposing sociopolitical entities. Following the attainment of Independence from France in 1943 and the establishment of the National Pact, sectarianism became entrenched in the political landscape through the implementation of the consociational model, known as confessionalism. This system involved the distribution of power among politicians from 18 officially recognized religious communities (Makdisi 2000; Cammett, 2014).

subsistence. Consequently, she argues that the revolutionary process in these countries underscores how protesters express opposition not only to the sectarian political system but also to the liberal economic model, regardless of the terminology used to describe it (Majed, 2023, p.78).

A third crucial theme in the work focuses on the existence of counter-revolutionary forces within *Thawra*. Several authors examine various strategies employed by a sectarian elite to thwart the revolutionary momentum and uphold the existing political and economic order. Noteworthy among these strategies is repression, manifested through either violence or legalistic discourse. Additionally, the political elite has undertaken initiatives to "sectarianize" (Hashemi and Poster, 2016) revolutionary forces, aiming to instigate sectarian opposition among protesters. This is often achieved through the extension of social benefits in exchange for political support and the encouragement of opposition against rival leaders. Lastly, one must consider the actions of opposing regional and global powers that support their allies in Lebanese politics, thereby serving as guardians of the *status quo* and acting as counter-revolutionary forces in the country.

In the Lebanese context, it is essential to scrutinize the organization and activities of counter-revolutionary forces, as highlighted by Jeffrey Karam, who argues that counter-revolution constitutes an inherent component of Lebanon's revolutionary process (KARAM, 2023, p.90). The author suggests that the mere presence or success of these forces' actions should not be automatically construed as a failure of the revolution. Instead, the observed reality reflects a dialectical relationship between these opposing forces. Consequently, embracing this dialectical perspective towards the Lebanese revolution provides valuable insights for analyzing social protests within the broader regional context, particularly given the parallel nature of such phenomena across numerous arab countries since the Arab Spring.

The fourth pivotal theme addressed in the book explores the various strategies employed during the 2019 social protests. One of these tactics involves the appropriation of specific urban locations by *Thawra* protesters, such as squares, buildings, and monuments with national symbolic significance. Through this method, protesters not only enhanced the visibility of their opposition movement but also practically established the concept of a revolutionary community. The coexistence and interaction in these public spaces served as a platform where "imaginaries of union are rehearsed and experienced" (Harb, 2023, p. 109). Additionally, protesters adopted the revolutionary strategy of blocking streets in various parts of the country. According to Nizar Hassan, this proved to be "the most prominent and undoubtedly the most impactful of the revolutionary tactics as it paralyzed the country" (Hassan, 2023, p.174).

Another significant strategy employed by demonstrators, and one that persists, involves the utilization of alternative media and digital platforms to convey revolutionary ideas. Claudia Kozman, for instance, illustrated how unconventional media acted as alternative information sources, generating content that scrutinizes the power structures within the country. Furthermore, various digital platforms and social networks

played a crucial role in coordinating new protests and broadening civic engagement among the Lebanese population, both in virtual spaces and in the physical realm (Kozman, 2023, p.120-130).

As a fifth focal theme, the work is insightful for featuring a set of chapters that analyze the contributions of social actors and political activists, including women, unionized workers, environmental advocates, and individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, international actors, such as refugees residing in Lebanon and members of the Lebanese diaspora, are acknowledged for their involvement in the protests to varying degrees. Overall, it is crucial to commend the chapters for placing emphasis on illustrating that within the context of *Thawra*, there exists a convergence between the distinct struggles of these movements and the overarching resistance against the sectarian-neoliberal model.

The convergence of struggles among various social actors aligns with Charles Tilly's proposition, as referenced by the editors at the beginning of the work, that revolutionary situations entail an opposition coalition challenging state power (Karam and Majed, 4). Despite their historical pursuit of collective rights tied to specific agendas (such as women, workers, and individuals with disabilities) since the country's independence, several authors in this work emphasize a distinctive feature of *Thawra*: the expansion of alliances among these diverse groups into an unprecedented anti-system coalition. However, the work also demonstrates that these coalitions were temporary within the context of *Thawra*, as counter-revolutionary forces succeeded in sectarianizing and undermining the movement.

As a comprehensive examination, "The Lebanon Uprisings of 2019" stands as a work of significant analytical excellence, offering an in-depth exploration of one of the most crucial events in the country's recent history. This distinction arises from both its theoretical framework, which scrutinizes *Thawra* within the procedural model of revolutions, and its thematic exploration across chapters addressing the historical, political, and economic context of the movement. The work further delves into the dynamic interplay between revolution and counter-revolution, the principal tactics employed during the protests, and the role played by diverse social actors in shaping a revolutionary process in Lebanon. Significantly, the excellence of the work stems not only from the scholarly chapters but also from the narratives shared by the voices of the revolution. These accounts are presented by political activists who intricately describe their experiences on the ground.

Therefore, this book emerges as a vital reference for gaining insights into the revolutionary process unfolding in Lebanon. Additionally, The Lebanon Uprisings of 2019, with its theoretical perspective and extensive analysis, contributes substantively to the wider academic discussions surrounding the "revolutions" across the Middle East and North Africa following the Arab Spring.

In conclusion, the pronounced focus on the procedural dimension of the Lebanese revolution in this work lays the groundwork for further exploration of this topic in the post-*Thawra* era, particularly as the revolutionary process endures in the country. Despite refraining from initiating

new high-impact social protests similar to those in 2019, the opposition movement has sustained its activity, chiefly through a fundamental aspect of its repertoire not extensively addressed in the book, namely, its political organization aimed at gaining governmental representation. This involves the establishment of parties, electoral lists, and coalitions for participation in parliamentary elections. A recent result of this organizational endeavor manifested in the success of securing 13 parliamentary seats in the May 2022 elections, representing the largest number achieved since the inception of the revolutionary process.

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