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POLITICAL ELITE RHETORIC ON POPULAR UPRISINGS:

Responding to the Lebanese 2019 'October Revolution'

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ABSTRACT

Anna Kristiina El-Khoury: Political Elite Rhetoric on Popular Uprisings: Responding to the Lebanese 2019 'October Revolution'
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In October 2019, the Lebanese political leaders were faced with widespread popular protests contesting their political power and holding them accountable for deficiencies, such as corruption, economic deterioration, and government mismanagement. The purpose of this research is to examine how the contested political elite addressed the anti-elite uprising and the subsequent discourse on responsibility and accountability in their political communications to the public. This was done through the Rhetorical Analysis (RA) of two years of both written and oral communications of Gebran Bassil, Hassan Nasrallah, Michel Aoun, Nabih Berri, Saad Hariri, Samir Geagea, and Walid Joumblatt, representing the main sectarian, partisan and factional affiliations, and key political offices at the start of the protests.

The research found varied rhetorical strategies employed by the different political leaders, representing differing degrees of alignment to the protests and their demands, as well as criticism of objectionable aspects. The elite rhetoric was particularly related to the legacies and histories of the elites and their platforms, criticism of the main slogan of the protest, dynamics of political rivalries, warnings and narratives on political conspiracies and threats, the characterisation of protest participants and waves, as well as whether or not the protests represent a breaking point of ordinary politics. The findings highlighted the continued significance of civil war and conflict rhetoric in the Lebanese political discourse, particularly as a basis for the rhetoric of fear and the defence of elite political power. The research, thus, contributes to the literature of Lebanese political elites by providing a systematic in-depth analysis of elite rhetoric across the scale on a single issue, as well as to peace and conflict studies in addressing civil war memory in political elite discourse in a post-conflict society, and the utilisation of these memories for persuasive purposes.

Keywords: rhetoric, political elites, popular uprisings, Lebanese leadership

TIIVISTELMÄ

Anna Kristiina El-Khoury
Poliittisen eliitin retoriikka kansannousuista: Libanonin johtajien vastaus lokakuun 2019 mielenosoituksiin
Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research, Yhteiskuntatieteiden tiedekunta
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Libanonin eliittien poliittista valtaa kyseenalaistettiin 17. lokakuuta 2019 alkaneissa maanlaajuisissa mielenosoituksissa, joissa johtajia pidettiin vastuussa esimerkiksi korruptiosta, heikosta taloudellisesta tilanteesta ja valtion huonosta hallinnasta. Tässä tutkielmassa kartoitettiin, kuinka nämä kiistanalaiset poliittiset johtajat vastasivat heidän julkisissa viestinnöissään mielenosoituksiin ja niistä kehittyneisiin keskustelunaiheisiin muun muassa liittyen vastuuseen ja vastuullisuuteen. Tutkitut johtajat olivat Gebran Bassil, Hassan Nasrallah, Michel Aoun, Nabih Berri, Saad Hariri, Samir Geagea, ja Walid Joumblatt, jotka sekä edustavat johtajuuden keskeisimpiä uskonnollisia ryhmiä, puolueita ja liittoutumia että hallitsivat valtion tärkeimpiä asemia mielenosoitusten alkaessa. Heidän kahden seuraavan vuoden suullisia ja kirjallisia kommunikaatioita tutkittiin retorisen analyysin (RA:n) avulla, josta ilmeni, miten poliittiset eliitit käyttivät monenlaisia retorisia strategioita vastauksena mielenosoituksiin. Näihin sisältyi eri tapoja ja asteita esittää yksimielisyyttä mielenosoittajien ja heidän vaatimustensa kanssa, sekä kritiikkiä joitakin toimintatapoja kohtaan.

Johtajien keskusteluissa löytyi kuusi vastaavanlaista retorista teemaa. Ensimmäinen on perintöjen retoriikka, jossa johtajat viittasivat oman, puolueen ja edeltäjien historiaan. Toiseksi johtajat käyttivät retoriikkaa yleistämistä vastaan kritiikkinä mielenosoituksien pääiskulausetta kohtaan, joka syytti kaikkia johtajia. Kolmanneksi johtajat heijastivat heidän välisiä kiistoja poliittisen kilpailun retoriikan kautta. Neljänneksi johtajat varoittivat salaliittoretoriikan kautta poliittisista suunnitelmista ja turvallisuusuhista viittaamalla myös kansallissotaan. Viides johtajien retoriikka oli varoivaisuus moittimisessa, jonka kautta he välttivät mielenosoitusten yleistä kritisointia. Ja lopuksi käännekohtaretoriikan kautta johtajat esittivät mielipiteitään protestiliikkeen vaikutuksesta politiikan toimintaan. Tutkielman tulokset erityisesti korostivat sisällissota- ja konfliktiretoriikan jatkuvaa merkitystä Libanonin poliittisessa keskustelussa, joita käytettiin esimerkiksi pelon retoriikan ja vallan puolustamisen yhteydessä. Siten tutkielma osallistuu Libanonin poliittisen eliitin kirjallisuuteen ja laajentaa sitä tarjoamalla järjestelmällisen analyysin Libanonin merkittävimpien ja moninaisien johtajien retoriikasta samassa asiayhteydessä. Tutkielma laajentaa myös rauhan- ja konfliktitieteen kirjallisuutta käsitellessään sisällissodan muistoa johtajien retoriikassa ja näiden hyödyntämistä kansan suostuttelussa.

Avainsanat: Retoriikka, poliittiset johtajat, kansannousu, johtajuus Libanonissa

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Introduction

'All of them means all of them', this was the widely used slogan of the Lebanese October 17, 2019, popular uprising, contesting the sectarian political elites and establishment. The protests held a strong symbolic meaning relating to national unity, rejecting sectarian and partisan loyalties, and resisting the political elites by name. Despite the popular upheaval, with the following 2022 general elections, most of the same political elites and their political parties were re-elected to power. Somehow, these elites were able to navigate the October 2019 discourses and ensure their political survival and the continuation of their sectarian, partisan and personal support. Protests with such wide participation and representation place the elites' legitimacy as leaders into question since they and their power are directly resisted. Therefore, the uprising represented a "crisis of political legitimacy and trust" (Abiyaghi and Yammine, 2020, p. 9) between the population and the political elites. The mere presence of social movements that transcend sectarian divisions is seen as threatening since they question the 'moral order' of the sectarian political system, and thus, are expected to face opposition by the ruling elite (Geha, 2019a; Nagle, 2018). Since the contestation takes place at the symbolic, rhetorical level, the political elites must respond to these contestations in their political communications by addressing the protests and engaging in the protest discourse. Although the political elites' responses to the protests cannot be limited to communication, with political actions being an additional aspect, this research aims to focus on rhetoric since it is a significant aspect of political strategies regarding their political survival and the effect on protest mobilisation.

The October 2019 movement exceeds previous protests in Lebanon in its impact and attention in the public arena, thus, making it a significant case to study. A few recent studies have focused on Lebanese protest discourse, with significant insight into elite rhetorical strategies, however, the focus has largely been on the protest movement, its rhetoric, and its navigation of the elite rhetoric. This research will extend the existing knowledge of Lebanese political elite rhetoric through the in-depth analysis of elite-level communications regarding the October 2019 uprising, relying on elite theory, and theories on accountability, political communication, and rhetoric. This research aims to examine the rhetoric of the Lebanese political elites through the focus on their oral and written communications, revealing how the elites relate to the protest movement and its salient issues, such as corruption, the sectarian regime and elite accountability. This will be studied through the research question: *How did Lebanese political elites respond to the October 2019 anti-elite popular protests in their*

political rhetoric? This research question will help understand in what ways sectarian leaders consolidated their power within a legitimacy crisis brought by a popular anti-sectarian uprising through their rhetoric. This will be done through the qualitative Rhetorical Analysis (RA) of political communications of seven political elites, namely Michel Aoun, Gebran Bassil, Nabih Berri, Hassan Nasrallah, Samir Geagea, Saad Hariri, and Walid Joumblatt, over two years, starting from the first day of protests. These leaders are among Lebanon's prominent political figures and represent a range of sectarian, partisan and factional affiliations. The results of the research reveal the rhetorical strategies used by the political leaders, which included the extension of empathy to the protesters and the alignment of the political elites with the demands and positive aspects of the protests, while criticising undesirable aspects, although with differing degrees per political elite, with the general avoidance of criticising all the participants indiscriminately. The leaders utilised the protest discourse for the development and defence of their characters as leaders in the face of political contestations.

The main rhetoric used by the political elites is characterised according to six themes, first, the 'rhetoric of legacies' where the elites draw on their personal, familial, and party achievements as an appeal for their character, second, the 'rhetoric of non-generalisation' by which the slogan "all of them means all of them" is criticised for its aggregation of elites, third, the 'rhetoric of political rivalries' in which inter-elite power struggles are manifested, fourth, the 'conspiracy rhetoric' by which the protests are implicated in an international scheme and connected with the wider 'security rhetoric' and civil war fears and memories, fifth, the 'discretion to denounce' in which elites avoid criticising the entire movement by differentiating between participants and between protest waves, and, finally, the 'turning point rhetoric' through which elites present contrasting arguments on whether the protest movement represents a breaking point of ordinary politics. The 'discretion to denounce' is a rhetorical strategy that has not been highlighted in previous research of Lebanese elite discourse. This research contributes to the literature on Lebanese elites by providing a comprehensive analysis of their protest political rhetoric, with significant implications for peace and conflict studies. The findings demonstrate the state of the Lebanese political discourse and post-war society, which is still connected with the civil war past, allowing for the political elite utilisation of civil war memories, security threats, and partisan and inter-elite rivalries in their rhetoric as counter-argument for the power contestation of the protesters, and tools for persuasion.

It must be noted that the protest wave beginning on October 17, 2019, will be referred to in this research as a protest or popular movement, or an uprising, to denote the events as a public challenge against the political powers. However, this thesis will not refer to the protests as a revolution, which was a common title for the protest movement in Lebanese public discourse, except when it was explicitly stated as such by political elites in their rhetoric. A common criterion for the definition of a revolution is the change in political leadership, thus, it must be a successful uprising where the movement manages to substitute a new ruler, or form of government, or generally seize power in the state (Kimmel, 1990). Although the 2019 protests were able to exert power on the government to resign, there was no change in the power structure, and the same selection of elites remained in power and later re-elected, except for Hariri who did not run in the elections. Therefore, the term 'revolution' is inaccurate in describing the October 2019 uprising.

The thesis will begin by considering the Lebanese context, specifically the history of its political leadership, and the recent wave of anti-sectarian protests. Following, a literature review will reflect on the vast literature on Lebanese politics and its leadership, the existing research on the specific political elites studied, as well as the recent literature on Lebanese contentious politics and anti-elite protest movements. After contextualising the thesis within the literature, the research's theoretical framework will be outlined, beginning with the application of elite theory in research and the context of the Lebanese leadership, followed by the conceptualisation of the understanding of elite accountability, particularly in the context of anti-elite popular protests, and, finally, delineating existing theory of elite political communication and their use of rhetoric. The research will proceed to outline the research design employed in this thesis, including the research methodology, justification for the chosen cases, description of the research material and how they were collected, followed by the conceptualisation of RA and the employed data analysis method, and a consideration of research ethics. The findings of the research will then be discussed in the analysis section, with each political leader's rhetoric analysed and interpreted separately, followed by an analysis of similar themes identified in the elite rhetoric. Finally, the thesis will discuss the complete findings of the research with concluding remarks.

Background of Lebanese Elite Leadership and History

To contextualise the political structure, norms and practices in the current Lebanese political system, and the politics around the October 2019 protests, this section will provide a background to the Lebanese political leadership, by presenting the roots of the current political leadership in Lebanon, by an outline of significant events that has shaped the current Lebanese political elite landscape, beginning from the Ottoman rule. The section will be followed by a presentation of anti-sectarian protests in Lebanon, including protests preceding the October 2019 movement. First, for the better understanding of Lebanese history and current affairs, political sectarianism will be defined, in the Lebanese context.

Defining Political Sectarianism

Sectarianism is a contested term in Middle East literature, defined in conflicting ways, or left undefined (Haddad, 2017; Valbjørn, 2021). In his study of literature on sectarianism, Haddad (2017) outlines the differing ways the term is used, such as relating to identity and belonging to a sectarian community; hostility between ethnic, religious, or political groups; sect-based discrimination; and, mostly in the context of Lebanon, as a confessional power-sharing political system (Haddad, 2017). For this research, the focus will be on political aspects of sectarianism, defined by Saouli (2019) as "the mobilization of sectarian communities – their emotions, memories, beliefs, aspirations, and fears – for political goals" (p. 69), linked to the broader concept of identity politics (Valbjørn, 2021). Therefore, this is characterised as 'instrumental sectarianism', where sectarian affiliations are "politicized identities associated with the mobilization of groups and competition for power and economic goods" (Valbjørn, 2020, p. 14). In his study of the emergence of the culture of sectarianism in Lebanon, Makdisi (2000) defines sectarianism as a practice, and a discourse, where religion is used as a determinant of political identity. In other words, sectarianism is "politics organised according to sectarian lines" (Makdisi, 2008, p. 559) and a process where "religious identity is politized, even secularized, as part of an obvious struggle for power" (p. 559), particularly, when sectarianism relates to questions of national identity and political representation (Saouli, 2019). The emergence of these practices and discourses of sectarianism are attributed to the 19th century Ottoman Lebanon (Makdisi, 2000).

History of Political Leadership in Lebanon

The Emergence of Political Sectarianism: Ottoman Rule and the French Mandate

The beginning of Lebanon as a polity started with the 16th century Ottoman Empire's rule over a significant area of the current Lebanese state, as the Emirate of Mount Lebanon, which was a religiously mixed area, with substantial Druze, Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Shia communities (Makdisi, 2000; Traboulsi, 2012). Mount Lebanon was controlled through the relatively autonomous *iqta'* system, where the people were governed in a feudal social system by notable families, who were overseen by the emir of Mount Lebanon, who was accountable to Ottoman authorities (Saouli, 2019; Traboulsi, 2012). Social order was divided hierarchically, with elite communities at the top, made up of notable families, and the commoners at the bottom which included peasants, farmers, and merchants, among others (Makdisi, 2000; Traboulsi, 2012). This feudal order operated through patrimonial clientelism, which is a form of patron-client exchange, where patrons provides protection in return for the client's support and loyalty (Hamzeh, 2001).

In the 19th century, the 1831-1840 Egyptian occupation, the *Tanzimat* Ottoman reforms, and the intervention of European powers are considered seminal events in the transformation to a new sectarian political order (Makdisi, 2000). The Egyptian occupation is attributed to the later Druze-Maronite antagonism, as well as socio-economic and political shifts of groups and communities, which affected the balance of power of the previous social order (Khalaf, 2002; Makdisi, 2000). The *Tanzimat* reforms enacted at the return of the Ottoman rule led to the involvement of non-elites and the Maronite Church in the realm of politics, with growing tensions resulting in civil strife and peasant revolts, which transformed into sectarian manifestations (Khalaf, 2002; Makdisi, 2000; Saouli, 2019). During this period, clientelism gained a sectarian identity, where patron-client networks were expanded from merely personal loyalties to include sectarian loyalties (Hamzeh, 2001). The political elites, to survive in the changing political scenes and realising the salience of sectarian identities, aligned themselves with European powers (Makdisi, 2000; Salibi, 1977). Thus, the elites began speaking on behalf of their entire sectarian communities and portraying themselves as the only legitimate voices for their community (Makdisi, 2000).

As a result of the increased tensions, in 1942 Ottoman and European powers partitioned Mount Lebanon into two districts –one for the Druze community, and another for the Maronites– which in 1845 established the *qa'imaqam* system, translating the hierarchical social order through sectarian identities, thus, further intensifying religious cleavages,

producing new sectarian language and ideas, such as ‘Druze rule’, and ‘minority communities’ (Khalaf, 2002; Makdisi, 2000; Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab & Mikaelian, 2015). To adjust to the increased sectarian violence, European and Ottoman powers agreed on the creation of the Règlement Organique of the *Mutasarrifiya* (governate) in 1961, which included an autonomous Mount Lebanon government, assigned on a confessional basis representing the six major sects: the Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Druze, Shias, and Sunnis (Haddad, 2009; Hamzeh, 2001; Makdisi, 2000; Traboulsi, 2012). The feudal families were incorporated into the new administration but had to employ sectarian identities to gain access to competitive administrative offices, which provided patronage opportunities used to consolidate clientelist networks (Akarli, 1993; Kingston, 2013). Therefore, the *Mutasarrifiya* established a political system with clientelism and confessional power-sharing as its features, which was extended to the whole territory of Greater Lebanon, declared on September 1, 1920, under a French mandate, made up of Mount Lebanon with the addition of territories with predominantly Muslim populations, such as the Beqaa Valley (Hamzeh, 2001; Harris, 2012; Kingston, 2013; Saouli, 2019; Traboulsi, 2012).

In 1926, Lebanon’s first constitution was declared, which adopted both democratic and sectarian qualities (Kingston, 2013). Democratic qualities included the guarantee of personal liberties, in addition to expanding the electorate, while sectarian qualities consisted of a 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims in political and administrative offices, as well as guaranteeing autonomy and independence of sectarian communities concerning education and personal status law (Kingston, 2013; Traboulsi, 2012). The French mandate period is attributed to consolidating sectarianism through colonial strategies, institutionalising the autonomy of religious communities, empowering local elite families, as well as supporting the rise of the mostly Maronite bourgeoisie (Kingston, 2013). Local elite families were empowered through electoral laws that privileged their candidates, and that restricted voting for each in their village of origin, both measures entrenching local clientelism, and inserting factionalised political elite into the Lebanese state (Kingston, 2013). Additionally, the increased wealth of the bourgeoisie was paired with an increase in political power, thus, emerging as a new class of political elites (Kingston, 2013). Therefore, the end of Ottoman rule and the French mandate periods are attributed to the rise of *zu’ama* clientelism (Hamzeh, 2001). *Zu’ama* are leaders and power brokers, who do not necessarily hold political office but have the power to manipulate elections, and political officials for their, thus, *zu’ama*

clientelism is similar to patrimonial clientelism with its familial ties and adopted confessionalism, however, providing more bureaucratic patronage, making holding office and access to state resources crucial for maintaining power (Hamzeh, 2001; Kingston, 2013).

Lebanese Independence and Its Results

With the end of the French mandate and the Lebanese independence on November 22, 1943, the Republic of Lebanon was established with a confessional political system (Harris, 2012; Traboulsi, 2012). Confessionalism is a type of consociationalism –defined by Lijphart (1969) as a democratic political system, based on power-sharing between groups represented by elites– where the divisive cleavage is sectarian, and includes political guarantees and protections to these sectarian groups, such as propositional sectarian representation, consensual decision-making causing mutual vetoes, and segmented autonomy (Lijphart, 1969; Haddad, 2009). Two documents framed the new independent Lebanese state; the 1942 Lebanese Constitution, which gave far-reaching powers to the President, including naming ministers, appointing the Prime Minister, and dismissing any or all of the ministers, and the 1943 National Pact, an informal verbal agreement, made between the President and the Prime Minister, that supplemented the constitution on key issues (Nagle, 2016; Traboulsi, 2012). The National Pact defined the Lebanese identity in an attempt to reconcile contrasting historical elite-level connections to external allies, by ensuring the Lebanese link to both the Arab identity, and to the West, while ensuring a Lebanon independent from both (Haddad, 2009; Traboulsi, 2012). Additionally, the National Pact confirmed the 6:5 ratio established in the constitution, as well as allocated the presidential position to a Maronite, the parliamentary speaker position to a Shia, and the prime minister position to a Sunni, with minor posts to the remaining sectarian groups (Haddad, 2009; Saouli, 2019; Traboulsi, 2012). The resulting institutionalised sectarianism in the political and public sphere strengthened sectarian affiliations and divisions, and the state worked in protecting the economic interests and consolidating the power of sectarian leaders from various elite families, enforcing patron-client relationships, which ensuing corruption (Malley, 2018). Sectarian division, discourse, and mobilisation became the norm, entering all areas of political and public life, such as the media, and security (Salloukh et. al, 2015; Saouli, 2019).

Despite the relative stability of the confessional system in the post-independence period, it was “not strong enough to withstand shifting yet interrelated internal and external dynamics” (Nagle, 2016, p. 1148). Internal dynamics included the growing grievances among Muslim communities due to the Maronite primacy in politics, especially with the increased

proportion of Muslims, creating divergent interests in either revising or maintaining the existing balance of power, which then ushered in the creation of political parties, which belonged to either 'status quo' or 'reformist' factions (Abul-Husn, 1998; Makdisi & Sadaka, 2005; Nagle, 2016; Saouli, 2019). The 'status quo' coalition was made up of Christian, mainly Maronite, nationalist traditional parties, and armed groups, defending the sectarian protections and privileges of the existing system, while the 'reformist' faction was made up of mainly leftist parties and armed groups made up of Palestinians –refugees displaced in the Palestinian Catastrophe–, Shias and Druze, favouring revising the sectarian system (Abul-Husn, 1998; Hamzeh, 2001; Makdisi & Sadaka, 2005). The Palestinian military presence created political dispute in Lebanon, with the leftist ideological parties, Arab Nationalist groups, and many Muslim communities supporting this presence, and most Christian groups opposing it (Saouli, 2019). The Shia community was particularly politicised in the mid-1970s with 'The Movement of the Deprived', or Amal Movement, calling for sectarian equality, and de-marginalisation for the Shia communities in response to the Maronite-Sunni political domination (Saouli, 2019). The rise of these divergent ideologies and movements aided in the formation of party-directed clientelism during this period, where parties became a "means through which bargaining over resource allocation can occur" (Hamzeh, 2001, p. 173), and a "basis for the formation of a new kind of identity" (p. 173).

The Lebanese Civil War and the Taif Agreement

The social, economic, and political tensions erupted between the 'status quo' and 'reformist' factions in 1975, beginning a 15-year civil war, characterised by various phases, including battles, massacres, forced expulsions, which were often identity-based, escalated inter-faction fighting, and various Israeli and Syrian involvement and operations in Lebanon (Harris, 2012; Makdisi & Sadaka, 2005; Paul, et. al., 2013; Traboulsi, 2012). The civil war brought a rise of militias, thus, a new type of patron-client relations, namely repressive, militia clientelism, characterised by coercive power, foreign funding, and political control over specific territories (Hamzeh, 2001; Kingston, 2013). The leaders of these new militias included both sons of established zu'ama, as well as new political figures, however, with clear sectarian lines, functioning through the exploitation of resources for the benefit of a small circle of devoted militia members (Hamzeh, 2001; Kingston, 2013).

In 1988, President Amin Gemayel, fearing a political vacuum of the inability of the parliament to elect a successor, appointed a military cabinet, headed by Maronite army commander-in-chief Michel Aoun as prime minister, essentially functioning as president

(Makdisi & Sadaka, 2005; Paul, et. al., 2013; Traboulsi, 2012). In 1989, the Lebanese Parliament met in Saudi Arabia and signed the National Reconciliation Accord, better known as the Taif Accord, which Aoun refused to acknowledge, unlike most of the other political elites (Hamzeh, 2001). Additionally, Aoun refused to leave the Baabda Presidential Palace, culminating in 1990 with the Syrian raid of the palace and his exile to France (Makdisi & Sadaka, 2005; Namani, 2015; Paul, et. al., 2013; Traboulsi, 2012).

The 1989 Taif Agreement is seen as the 'peace agreement' that ended the civil war in Lebanon, contained the new balance of power, and restored stability and the Lebanese state, however, it also restored consociationalism (Nagle, 2016). Although the Taif Accord stipulated the process of abolishing political sectarianism, this process has not been put into motion until this day, therefore practically speaking, the Taif Accord merely replicated the sectarian power-sharing system, with some modifications (Rosiny, 2015; Traboulsi, 2012). The main philosophy advanced by the Taif Accord is the idea of "no victor, no vanquished", which made clear that no one community can claim victory, or defeat, in the civil war, and proceeding, no community can dominate the other, due to the balance offered by the system (Nagle, 2016). Therefore, the stability of the settlement relied on maintaining the careful balance of power-sharing in the government, as well as preserving the legal and equal rights of every sectarian community (Haddad, 2009). Subsequent political changes following the Taif Accord included the reduction of the president's political powers in favour of the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament, therefore, replacing the previous Maronite-Sunni political agreement, with a three-way Maronite-Sunni-Shia understanding (Haddad, 2009). Additionally, the sectarian representation was reduced for the Christians to an even split with the Muslims, compared to the previous 6:5 ratio (Malley, 2018; Nagle, 2016; Rosiny, 2015).

Post-Civil War Lebanon and the End of the Syrian Occupation

The civil war is characterised as ending in 1990, followed by the implementation of the Taif Agreement, allowing for the subsequent Syrian military stationing in Lebanon, "as part of a transitory period until peaceful cooperation between elites became evident" (Nagle, 2016, p. 1148). In Lebanon's experience of power-sharing, foreign protection has proved to be significant for the guarantee of some degree of stability, first with the Ottoman Empire, then with the French mandate, and, after the civil war, with the Syrian authoritarian regime, until 2005 (el-Husseini, 2012; Zahar, 2005). The Syrian control in Lebanon meant that they arbitrated nearly every political decision in Lebanon, which included interference in the work of the Lebanese government (Haddad, 2009). The Syrian occupation was characterised by the

consolidation of pro-Syrian political elites and sectarian patronage networks, allowing corruption, favouritism, and unaccountability, consolidating sectarianism and marginalising and alienating opposition groups, that sought to change the political system (el-Husseini, 2012; Haddad, 2009; Saouli, 2019). Because most prominent Christian leaders at the end of the civil war rejected the new political rearrangement, and Syrian control, Christian political participation and influence in the political system were weakened, to the advantage of Muslim political elites (Saouli, 2019). The Syrian occupation particularly privileged, and endorsed the pro-Syrian Hezbollah armed group, which was successful in mobilising the Shia community to its support (Saouli, 2019).

The Syrian occupation came to an end when the assassination of the former prime minister Rafik Hariri commenced the Cedar Revolution, a popular uprising demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon (Deeb, 2013; Malley, 2018). The events that unfolded during this process left the Lebanese political leadership with a new political cleavage: the March 8 and March 14 coalitions (Harris, 2012; Nagle, 2016). The March 14 alliance is named after anti-Syrian demonstrations on March 14, 2005, which drew approximately 1.5 million people to the streets, with the alliance made up of various Sunni, Christian and Druze anti-Syrian occupation parties (Deeb, 2013; Harris, 2012). The March 8 alliance is made up of pro-Syrian groups in Lebanon, led by Hezbollah and Amal, with the name denoting the March 8, 2005 counter-demonstration to the anti-Syrian protests (Harris, 2012). In subsequent years, Hezbollah expanded its political power and network, and, with the heightened Saudi-Iranian rivalry, by 2006 the Lebanese political sphere experienced an enhanced sectarian divide, adding a new Sunni-Shia political cleavage (Saouli, 2019). The March 8 and March 14 blocs, thus, can be separated accordingly, with the former dominated by Shia elites and the latter by Sunni elites (Nagle, 2016).

Due to the necessity of foreign protection for the operation and stability of the Lebanese power-sharing political system, the post-Syrian Lebanese system is characterised by dysfunction and poor governance, which produce political deadlocks in passing key policies, forming governments, and electing presidents, leading to a 2005-2008 political crisis and a 2014-2016 presidential void (Geukijan, 2014; Nagle, 2016). The political crisis ending in May 2008 was resolved with the Doha Agreement in Qatar, which achieved the election of a compromise presidential candidate, as well as the establishment of a ‘national unity government’, in which opposition groups are arranged veto power in the cabinet through the means of one-third representation (Geukijan, 2014). Although this was granted to ease the

fears of sectarian elites that a government dominated by an opposing sectarian group would be exploitative, it added to the fragility of the Lebanese sectarian political system (Geukijan, 2014). Fears of exploitation are inherent in such a political system where corruption is extensive, ranging from bribes to illegal practices, and reaching practically every Lebanese state institution (Barroso Cortés & Kéchichian, 2020; Leenders, 2012). These, and other social, political, and economic factors, have led to several anti-sectarian, anti-regime, and anti-elite protests in Lebanon in recent years, accumulating in the October 2019 protests.

Anti-Sectarian Protests: '*You Stink*' and October 2019 protests

A precursor to the October 2019 protests was the 2015 movement named the 'trash protests', which erupted in reaction to a garbage crisis (Kiwan, 2017; Nagle, 2018). The activist movement, called 'You Stink', protested the failed waste mismanagement in Beirut and the surrounding areas, in addition to other political issues that are seen as root causes for the mismanagement, such as political corruption and sectarianism (Kiwan, 2017; Kraidy, 2016). A significant slogan in the movement was the 'all of them means all of them', which expressed that all of the elites in the political class are responsible and are included in the contestation, with no one being exempt, regardless of party or sect (Kraidy, 2016). The protesters' demands went beyond the garbage crisis at hand, framing the garbage crisis within the larger political context and presenting the elite as ineffective and untrustworthy (Kraidy, 2016). Although an estimate of up to 120 000 people participated in the protests in downtown Beirut, the protests were seen as being organised and attended mainly by Beirut's middle-class activists, rather than the general public (Kraidy, 2016; Nagle, 2018).

On October 17, 2019, as a result of economic decline, a popular protest movement erupted, triggered by the government proposal to tax Voice Over Internet Protocols, which include typically free voice and video calls through WhatsApp and other commonly used apps in Lebanon (Abiyaghi and Yammine, 2020; Fakhoury, 2019; Rakickaja, 2020; Youssef, 2020). The protest demands increased as the uprising continued, starting from opposing corruption and the economic crisis, leading to demands to bring down the regime, with variations of demands on bringing down other institutions, such as the power of the banks (The National, 2020). The most significant slogan of the protest movement was "all of them means all of them", carried from the 'You Stink' protests, and referring to the contestation of the entire sectarian leadership (Halabi, 2019). The participation in the protests was wide, although the precise numbers differ with estimations ranging from hundreds of thousands of protesters up to two million protesters, however, it was widely recognised that the movement

was joined by participants from different sects and areas, symbolised by the fact that no party flag or any other flag than the Lebanese flag was present among the masses, thus a strong narrative grew relating to national unity and positive inter-community relations (Hodges, 2019; Ipek, 2020; Rakickaja, 2020).

As a result of the protests, the government abandoned the new tax proposals, and on October 21 the government agreed on an economic reforms package and a 2020 draft state budget (Al Sharq Strategic Research, 2020; Haines-Young & Rose, 2019; The National, 2020). Nevertheless, Hariri resigned from prime ministership on October 29, with Hassan Diab nominated as the new prime minister, 51 days later, and forming a government a month later, on January 21 (Al Sharq Strategic Research, 2020). The early protest period was marked by vandalism of some political party offices; Hezbollah and Amal clashes with protesters, and destruction of protest tents and roadblocks; the closing of banks, which upon opening on November 1 implemented cash withdrawal limits; the use of rubber bullets by military forces towards the protesters; and diverse demonstration methods by protesters, for example blocking roads, particularly to the parliament to prevent the summoning of a legislative session (Al Sharq Strategic Research, 2020). After the climax of the protests in October and November 2019, the momentum of the protests decreased during the winter weather following December 2019, the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic to Lebanon on March 2020, and the subsequent lockdown measures (Barroso Cortés & Kéchichian, 2020). The subsequent protests remained small-scale compared to the turnout of the October 2019 protests, even in the face of ensuing events, such as the August 4, 2020, Beirut Port Explosion and the increased cost of living and loss of currency value (Macaron, 2020). Nevertheless, a legacy of the protest movement includes the public discourse shaming the "once untouchable ruling oligarchy" (Macaron, 2020, para. 2). Therefore, despite the fading of the October 2019 uprising and the return of the political elites to ordinary political practices, its discourse remained in the public and political sphere, exemplified by the political leaders' continued reference to the protests, years later as will be demonstrated in this research (Macaron, 2020).

Literature Review

This literature review aims to contextualise this literature within the current literature on Lebanese politics concerning leadership, rhetoric, and protest movements. It will begin by reviewing Lebanese political leadership and rhetoric literature, followed by a more specific evaluation of research on elite-civil society relations, subsequently focusing on political elite responses to previous political protests, and concluding with present research on the October protests with regards to political elite strategies.

Literature on Lebanese Leadership and Elites

Literature concerning Lebanese politics illustrates a significant elite-level focus, dealing with the actions and configurations of its leadership. Historically-focused studies on the creation of modern Lebanon include elite-level considerations, focusing on biographical-level analysis and inter-elite interactions, for example, Cobban (1985) and Gordon (1983) biographically study Chamoun's 1950s presidency, while Cobban additionally studies Khoury's 1940s presidency, and Gordon studying Kamal Joumblatt's leadership. Additionally, several studies have specifically elite-level focus. For example, Dekmejian (1975) comparatively studies political leadership in Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon regarding the patterns of political leadership and the background and characteristics of the political elites, such as the elite configurations, and characteristics. These earlier studies considering Lebanese leadership exhibit focus on inter-elite political interactions while providing little insight into elite-population. Additionally, the outcomes of these studies are significantly out-of-date, due to the major political and structural changes that have taken place since. This, for example, reflects in the definition of elites, which in Dekmejian's study is limited to the cabinet and presidency, reasoning that significant elites from other spheres of society have, nevertheless, served in the cabinet at some point. This classification would be too limited to study Lebanon's current political leadership since, for instance, Nasrallah has never assumed any political office, despite being the leader of Hezbollah, and manages to exercise a high degree of political power. More recent elite literature demonstrates a more comprehensive definition, with el-Husseini (2004) studying Lebanon's post-war elite configurations employing Perthes's (2004) conceptualisation of Politically Relevant Elites (PRE), which is notable in that it does not limit elites to any formal national level position, by focusing on the decision-making power, rather than offices. This thesis, similarly, does not limit the definition of a Lebanese political elite to formal office-holders, with the main criteria being a wide support base. The chosen political elites are unarguably seven of the most politically influential

figures in Lebanese politics, with the source of political power varying among the elites, between formal office holders and political party leadership, along with established familial legacies.

Another research by el-Husseini (2012) maps out the sub-discourses of the national debate on identity and state formation identifying 'Phoenicianist', 'Arabist', and 'Syrianist'. However, the research remains at a general level, due to not naming the political elites studied, and focusing on policy, rather than the discursive functions, such as persuasion (el-Husseini, 2012). In contrast, literature focusing on specific political elites and their communities provide more in-depth considerations of Lebanese leaders, however, with disproportionate considerations of different political leaders and parties. Among the political leaders, Shia leaders have received the most substantial attention, with extensive research on their leadership and communities (Deeb, 1988, 2013; Norton, 1987; Siklawi, 2012). Literature on the Shia and Hezbollah leadership has thoroughly examined Nasrallah's leadership since the study of its leaders' "worldview, surroundings, and its conduct" (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014, p. 8) is viewed as crucial to understanding Shia leadership. Hezbollah's organisational strategies are viewed in Mishal, and Goldberg's (2014) research as embodied in Nasrallah's actions and speeches. Similarly, Alagha's (2006) research examines Nasrallah's rhetoric to understand Hezbollah's ideological shift, and Matar (2008), focused on the rhetoric of Nasrallah's televised speeches, examines two of the leaders' political communication strategies, namely his 'mediated charism' and his "religious-political discourse" (p. 123), to better understand how Hezbollah publicly frames its understandings of political events. The literature on Nasrallah, thus, illustrates the significance of examining the political leaders' speech and rhetoric to better understand the functions of the political party. Matar particularly provides a significant precedent to the aim of this research, however with the difference of the crisis considered, with Matar considering rhetoric around the 2006 war, in contrast to this thesis's communications relating to popular protests.

Perhaps due to Hezbollah's unique character in Lebanese and regional politics, and the strong organisational structure of the party, Nasrallah has received significant academic attention, while other Lebanese political leaders have received significantly less interest. For example, although Amal has been studied to some extent in the context of studying the Shia community, Berri has not been studied as much. More comparable to the extensive study of Nasrallah is Helou's (2020) study of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), which subsequently considers Aoun from a charismatic leader perspective, and thus, considers his

oratorical style during the critical political period between 1988-1990, offering insight on Aoun's rhetorical style and strategies in times of crisis, and mobilisation of political social movement through persuasive rhetoric. In other studies, Aoun's civil war actions have been studied (Gambill, 2001; Al-Rubaie & Ibrahim, 2021). In a more recent study, Lefort (2015) studies the public representation and narration of Aoun's image, with a strong connection to the civil war memory connected to Aoun. This civil war memory and leader image are significant for this research from the perspective of the leader's engagement in them through their rhetoric. Additionally, C. Bassil's (2021a) doctoral dissertation studies the sectarian populist rhetoric of Aoun and Bassil through a sociolinguistic discourse analysis of tweets between 2012-2020, and some press briefings. Despite the specific focus on populist rhetoric, the work provides a model for the study of elite rhetoric through Tweets and employs a wide-scope analysis. Similarly, Joumblatt's political communication has received attention in Rowayheb's (2011) study on his political survival, with a focus on providing an analysis with a wide time-frame rhetoric perspective. These academic works, therefore, represent more comprehensive analyses of political elite rhetoric, on which this thesis will expand.

In contrast, research on elite rhetoric for Geagea is more limited in scope, as Mardirian's (2019) analysis of Geagea's public apology for his actions in the civil war consisting of one speech, and Hage's (1992) focuses on the LF's civil war religious nationalist discourse, with no consideration of Geagea. Regarding Saad Hariri, research on him lacks altogether, however, there are some economic policy-focused studies on his father, Rafik Hariri (Nizameddin, 2006; Petetz, 2006). All in all, the literature on specific political leaders provides some significant research on a few elites' rhetoric, however, the availability is inconsistent across the different political leaders. Therefore, this thesis builds on existing literature by providing a consistent examination of the political elites chosen for this study, thus, for some, such as Berri and Hariri, providing new insight into their political rhetoric. None of the considered analyses on elite political rhetoric considers the specific context of anti-elite popular protests.

Literature on Elite Interaction with Civil Society and Contentious Politics

A closer review needs to be given to the literature particularly considering elite strategies concerning to popular protests, and the functions of the public political arena as a whole. Civil society is particularly seen as an arena of contestation against the sectarian political system, and elites, which has motivated several studies on political elite strategies towards civil society organisations. For example, Clark and Salloukh (2013) find relations between

the political elites and the civil society as reinforcing sectarian identities and noted strategies of elite smearing of NGOs, and Nagle (2016) noted strategies to minimise the influence of non-sectarian civil society, generally relate to the defamation of the protesters and their actions. The findings are not immediately applicable to the context of a popular protest due to their specific focus on established organisations, and political activists, rather than the general public, however, some of the literature provide insight into discourse strategies employed by political elites from the civil society point of view, thus illustrating what they perceive as threats, mainly counter-framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Rønn, 2020). Rønn (2020) notes, by citing Clark and Salloukh, how political elites create counter-frames by utilising their media, legal and economic power, and making claims, such as presenting the protestors as "unserious or even as threats to the political stability in Lebanon" (Rønn, 2020; p. 89), additionally, they "express sympathy with some of the demands posed by non-sectarian actors and thereby make it difficult for them to maintain an us-versus-them narrative" (p. 89), and by supporting their demands, calling on their supporters to join and establishing parallel protests have the effect of 'sectarianising' the protest. These identified strategies are applicable as general elite strategies against protesters. Rønn's observations particularly reference Geha's (2019a) findings, which are contextualised in pre-2019 protest waves, however, still with an activist-centred perspective. Geha explores "how Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing regime reacted to two waves of anti-sectarian movements that emerged in 2011 and again in 2015" (p. 9), offering a theorisation of the relation between power-sharing regimes and protests. Using Lebanon as an instructive case, the Geha examines the use of co-optation, counter-narratives, and repression by the regime against contentious politics, which prove to be significant observations of political elite rhetoric in protests, which are valuable for this research.

Research by Abu-Rish (2015), studying the 2015 'You Stink' protests, highlights similar strategies as noted by Rønn (2020) and Geha (2019a; 2019b), although with differing terms and characterisations. Abu-Rish particularly notes the elite portrayal of themselves as seeking solutions and conceding to the public. Inconsistencies between Geha's and Abu-Rish's findings include the former's claim that many leaders called on their supporters to join the protests, while Abu-Rish states that they forbade their supporters from participating. This disparity illustrates the significance of avoiding aggregating the Lebanese political elites since they may employ varying strategies. Although some specific leader strategies are presented as examples, the general analysis tends to consider the regime as unitary. This

thesis attempts to increase the depth of the analysis of the regime strategies by focusing on the political elites as separate entities. A more systematic analysis of the rhetoric of individual leaders allows for more particular conclusions on the strategies used by the various political leaders. The leaders are, then, not assumed to represent a unified front against protests –although this may be the case in some instances– and accounts for dissimilarities in elite strategies and allows for a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the rhetoric used by the contested sectarian elites.

The applicability of the findings on the previous protest waves, however, cannot entirely predict the elite rhetoric in the 2019 protests, due to the widespread popular nature of the movement, which may require varied approaches by the elites. Current literature on the 2019 protests is varied, however, no research yet has specifically studied political elite rhetoric during and after the October protests, except for of Barroso Cortés and Kéchichian (2020) and Fakhoury (2019) who do so briefly. Barroso Cortés and Kéchichian, in their research on the practice of corruption in Lebanon, deal with elite strategies during, and after the October 2019 uprising, which includes delegitimisation, distraction of public opinion, 'mimicry' by showing empathy and understanding, which relates to Geha's (2019a) characterisation of co-optation, and the 'narrative of fear'. Their findings, thus, demonstrate similarities with previous literature, however lacking a systematic and balanced study of the various leader discourses (Barroso Cortés & Kéchichian, 2020). The examples are merely illustrative and do not attempt to analyse the range of political leaders, which is exemplified by the fact that there is no reference to Geagea, and focuses on Bassil and Berri, although not claiming any limitation of their scope. Although the research highlights significant political elite strategies in response to popular protests in 2019, the research demonstrates a need for a systematic and balanced dealing with Lebanese political elites and their response strategies. In turn, Fakhoury only provides a brief consideration of political elite strategies since an in-depth examination of this matter is not the aim of the report. Publishing in November 2019, only a month after the commencement of the protests, the observations made represent merely the immediate responses of the political elites to the protests, which already included the rhetoric of the accusation of foreign interference, which are claims that diminish protest legitimacy, and observing strategies of inciting fear of escalation of sectarian conflict, and that the established political parties already represent most Lebanese people.

A significant aspect of Lebanese elite rhetoric, which has not been highlighted in the literature Lebanese protest literature, is their connection to civil war memory. Larkin (2012),

in studying Lebanon's civil war legacy, particularly from the population's point of view, notes how memory is weaponised and politicised in political rhetoric by the elites. The civil war rhetoric can be used, both to justify criticism towards the state and leadership by 'opposition' elites, such as Joumblatt and Geagea, while simultaneously defending the status quo and warning of foreign interference, such as by the March 8 coalition (Larkin, 2012). The author notes that this discourse is closely linked with the "rhetoric of patriotism and national unity" (Larkin, 2012, p. 77), as well as "reveal deepening political divisions and agendas, and serve as weapons to attack and de-legitimate political opponents" (p. 77). Through the study of political elite rhetoric responding to protests contesting their leadership, this thesis expands on the use of the civil war legacy in political elite communications, examining how the war memory may be utilised by the political elites. Therefore, this research will provide a peace studies perspective to the literature of Lebanese political elite rhetoric in popular protests by the recognition of the post-civil war societal and discourse contexts in rhetoric.

All in all, the literature demonstrates the extensive research done on leadership in Lebanon, with a particular focus on biographies, elite configurations, and inter-elite interactions, while more recent literature has considered elite interactions with civil society and social movements, there is a lack of systematic analysis of the political communications of these elites individually. Additionally, some specific political elites are understudied, namely Bassil, Berri, Geagea and Hariri, in comparison to more widely studied elites, namely Aoun, Nasrallah and Joumblatt. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the literature by providing a systematic analysis of the political communications of several political elites in anti-regime protest contexts, building on the insights provided by existing literature. Literature on Lebanese leadership can benefit from a focused study of rhetoric in a specific context of protests challenging these elites.

Theoretical Framework

Building on the previous literature on Lebanese political leadership, political elites and elite interaction with civil society and contentious politics, this section will outline the key theoretical foundations of this thesis, starting with the conceptualisation of political leaders and political elite theory, and followed by the consideration of accountability in elite-public relations, including anti-elite popular protests. Finally, theories regarding political communication and rhetoric will be outlined as the main subjects of inquiry in this thesis.

Political Leaders and Elite Theory

It is a fundamental observation that in complex societies power is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, namely, with the elite, defined by Best and Higley (2018) in their handbook on political elites as "individuals and small, relatively cohesive, and stable groups with disproportionate power to affect national and supranational political outcomes on a continuing basis" (p. 12). Similarly, Perthes (2004) defines politically relevant elites as individuals that "wield political influence and power" (p. 5) manifested in their ability to "make strategic decisions or participate in decisionmaking on a national level" (p. 5), additionally, they influence the definition of "political norms and values" (p. 5) and "political discourse on strategic issues" (p. 5). This research will rely on these definitions to distinguish political elites as individuals holding a high level of political and social power and influence, with considerable support bases, which in the context of Lebanese leadership encompasses holders of positions of power, including presidents, prime ministers, speakers of the parliament, and certain members of the parliament, and beyond government officials, including leaders of major political parties, blocs and movements. The political elites of the Lebanese leadership consist of varying backgrounds, including rising into prominence following the civil war events and other movements, often relying on sectarian or familial ties.

Elite theory offers a framework for the study of political leaders, holding three principal tenets (Pakulski, 2018). First, in modern states, power is concentrated at the top of the organisational hierarchies with political elites, second, this power is mainly top-down, from the elites towards the non-elite populations, and third, the actions of these elites have significant political and social consequences, with effects on political practices, policies, and the regime itself (Pakulski, 2018). Therefore, elite theory addresses three main topics: "the inevitability of elites, the effect of elites on political regimes, and the interdependence

between elites and mass publics in politics" (Higley, 2001, p. 193), with this research relating to the latter topic, in the form of elite rhetoric with the public as its audience. Literature on elite theory has two stances that are significant for this research. First, current elite theory literature holds that elite recruitment of supporters is relatively open, and that "elite mobilization of popular support is thought to rely heavily on persuasion rather than coercion" (Pakulski, 2018, p. 18; Higley, 2018). The utilisation of persuasive techniques by political elites demonstrates the significance of studying the political elite rhetoric, which is particularly significant in the Lebanese system, where political elites rely on intensely contested elections as a foundation of their legitimacy, thus, rendering their communication with the public crucial. The Lebanese system is often characterised in the hybrid regime literature as a competitive authoritarian regime, which describes the elite functions as containing abuse of state resources, the lack of checks and balances, and government accountability, including widespread corruption, and harassment of opposing elites, although through subtle means since rules cannot be completely and openly violated (Carothers, 2002; Ekman, 2009; Levitsky & Way, 2002). The opposition still has the means of presenting a serious challenge to the incumbents, with the challenge creating instability in the political system (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Thus, the Lebanese political system demonstrates elite competition in terms of maintaining public support, which was then seriously questioned within the context of the 2019 widespread popular protests.

Second, rather than "assuming substantial consciousness, cohesion, and conspiracy among elites" (Pakulski, 2019, p. 180), elite theory highlights the fragility, complexity, and variability of elite networks. Higley (2018) reports, based on findings of elite theory literature, that elites are not "consciously conspiratorial" (p. 26) with a common plan, but rather, their actions are determined by the structures of the system and present advantages. Therefore, in this research elites are not seen as a unitary actor, such as 'the regime', nor as unified since Lebanese elites are internally fragmented. Elite literature provides theory on disunified political elites, which is relevant to the Lebanese case. Higley & Burton (1989) note that disunified national elite produce unstable regimes, which then vary between authoritarian and democratic forms of rule. These elites are insecure and fearful of any advantage gained by opponents, and thus, "take extreme measures to protect themselves and their interests" (Higley & Burton, 1989, p. 19), in fear of the implementation of punishments against them in the future, particularly if such punishments have occurred in the past. Elite political power and power relations, additionally, vary according to changing functional

importance of different positions and the occurrence of crises (Hagley, 2018). This research focuses on such an instance with the study of a crisis of contestation by the public.

On the individual level, the governance of political elites relies on their leadership qualities and specific personal attributes of the leader (Higley, 2018). Elite theory literature provides varying qualities essential for political elites, such as Bourdieu (1984) shows that authority figures "must have cultural capital and social distinction" (Higley, 2018, p. 27). These elite qualities are significant since their absence "leads to a degeneration of elites accompanied by ever-more frequent and profound socio-political crises" (Higley, 2018, p. 27; Higley & Pakulski, 2012). The significance of elite qualities to governance justifies the need to study political elites on an individual level, particularly the most prominent of these leaders. Elite theory, additionally, focuses on the "shortcomings that produce political decay and lead to replacements by new elites" (Best & Higley, 2018, p. 16), creating political crises that manifest in various political and economic issues. Elites have power over the "basic stability or instability of political regimes, the forms and workings of political institutions, and the main policies of governments" (Higley, 2018, p. 25). Different crises and circumstances create different elite structures, similarly, Lebanese history, particularly the civil war and the subsequent events, have determined the elite configuration, which continues to affect current Lebanese politics and economy (Higley, 2018). The consideration of mass populations in elite theory holds that the elite ability to exercise power relies on "the constituencies and social forces" (Higley, 2018, p. 27) of the people, and therefore, require their support to maintain their positions. Due to this significance of public support, Higley (2018) notes that "elites format constituencies and social forces by shaping political organisations and by encouraging or discouraging political identities and degrees of activism" (p. 27), thus, shaping "mass political alignments and loyalties" (p. 27). This illustrates the function of elites and their rhetoric on political identities and mobilisation, which are then threatened by popular protests.

Accountability and Anti-Elite Popular Protests

The arenas of contestation for hybrid regimes were categorised by Levitsky and Way (2002) as the electoral, legislature, judiciary, and media arenas, however, Ekman (2009) categorises the fourth arena as the public, as public discontent is crucial for regime sustainability (Furman, 2007). The public in competitive authoritarian regimes is dissatisfied with the politics of their state and has little confidence in state institutions, particularly since these institutions have poor performance records (Carothers, 2002). Politics is especially viewed as

an elite-dominated arena and lacks government accountability (Carothers, 2002; Ekman, 2009). An accountable government is one where elites "believe that they are responsible to the people they govern and put the people's interests above their own" (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 322). Additionally, elites hold formal accountability from the procedural accountability of elections (Fukuyama, 2011). However, not all political elites in Lebanon are elected office-holders, and the ones that are, represent the interests of their areas, sectarian communities, and political parties. The power-sharing nature of the Lebanese government diminishes the clarity of responsibility of specific failures of the government to the liable elite, therefore, weakening the accountability of the ruling elites, as well as complicating the ability of citizens to blame culpable elites. This clarity is particularly lacking due to the lack of policy-specific positions of Lebanese political elites and political parties (Hauser, 2014). The 2019 protests in Lebanon are described as driven by this lack of government accountability, in addition to other economic and public sector concerns (Ekman, 2009; Nagle, 2020; Salloukh, 2019). Mass protests are, consequently, strong statements by citizens, expressing the lack of elite accountability and responsibility towards the population. Due to the relative openness of a competitive authoritarian political system to political opposition, the elites are often required to face the public's discontent (Carothers, 2002). Although the elites may claim, on the one hand, to tackle the issues brought up, such as corruption, on the other hand, they sustain the present political leadership configuration and favour limited political opposition (Carothers, 2002).

Political contention, a "collective political struggle" (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001, p. 5), entails the interaction between citizens of a government and the elites with the authority over that government, which "entail a complex interplay of political claims and counterclaims, involve difficult choices ranging from compliance to resistance, and betray a variety of attitudes including cooperation, resignation, condescension, and resentment" (Hanagan, Moch, & Brake, 1998, p. ix). In contentious politics, the people challenge the elites at a specific political opportunity, and, when this challenge is maintained and organised, it is termed a social movement (Tarrow, 2011). This contentious challenge takes the form of mainly public "disruptive direct action against elites, authorities, other group, or cultural codes" (Tarrow, 2011, p. 9), with common claims against the challenged. These claims relate in some aspect to either the interests of the challenging citizens or the challenged authority (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Social movements additionally involve public performances, such as protests and public displays of unity and numbers,

among others, with signs and slogans, as well as rely on "organisations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 11). The 2019 protests fit this characterisation of social movements since they witnessed common anti-sectarian claims directed at the political elites, with a public performance of recurring mass protests with the impressive turnout, common slogans, and the Lebanese flag as a unifying sign, and, finally, with networks that link the 2019 protest and earlier anti-sectarian protest waves. The slogans, signs, and demands presented in the protests demonstrate a protest narrative, which affects Lebanese political discourse. The concept of language, discourse, and rhetoric in politics, particularly in the context of contentious politics, will be considered next.

Political Communication and Rhetoric

Language is at the centre of politics, politicians use it to persuade the public and other political elites, in addition to their political activity largely relating to language, from political debates to written documents (Graber, 1981). The importance placed on political discourse stems from the knowledge that "any political action is prepared, accompanied, controlled and influenced by language" (Schaffner, 1996, p. 201) and that "politics exercises its power of making decisions and influencing citizens through language" (Rubinelli, 2018, p. 17). It is argued by Charteris-Black (2005) that "the most important type of behaviour by which leaders mobilise their followers is their linguistic performances" (p. 1) and is often used to legitimise their leadership. Additionally, the role of persuasive political communication towards followers is significant in the context of government accountability (Charteris-Black, 2005). Thus, the elite's political communication in the context of popular protests, where the power of these elites is being challenged, their legitimacy questioned and the issue of accountability raised, is crucial for their political careers and the management of the crisis, primarily through persuasive techniques aimed at the challengers, which may include members of their usual support base.

What makes language political is "the substance of the information it conveys, the setting in which this information is disseminated, and the functions that the political language performs" (Graber, 1981, p. 196). Therefore, the features of political communication are that they are of concern to the public and that the authors of the discourse possess political influence (Graber, 1981). Particularly the top political elites possess the "power to affect the public issues they are discussing" (Graber, 1981, p. 197) as well as the ability to "strongly [influence] how these issues will be perceived" (p. 197) by the public based on the way these elites decide to present the issue, which is intensified by mass media. Political

communication influences the thoughts and actions of other political elites and the public, thus, shaping public opinion, which then legitimises, or delegitimises, specific courses of action in the public sphere (Graber, 1981). Referencing classical rhetoric literature, Charteris-Black (2005) highlights the three main contexts of speech-making: *genus deliberativum*, *genus iudicium*, and *genus demonstativum*. The first refers to the speeches relating to controversial issues in the public sphere, requiring persuasive tactics, explicitly encompassing persuasive political communication relevant to the context of Lebanese politics, the second to speeches regarding judicial decisions, while the third relates to speeches for display, such as commemorations, which may also touch upon current controversial political topics in Lebanon, such as in the case of commemorations for martyrs (Charteris-Black, 2005).

The key to political communication is persuasion, defined as the "reciprocal efforts of people to influence one another" (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981, p. 30). In persuasion, the speaker aims purposefully to impact the audiences' "beliefs, attitudes and behaviour" (Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 9; Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986). Persuasion is the basis of rhetorical speech, therefore, a politician's rhetoric is only seen as successful, if it manages to persuade its intended audience (Charteris-Black, 2005). Political rhetoric is the "engagement of motives, principles, thoughts, arguments, and sentiments in communications" (Graber, 1981, p. 225), to "form attitudes, and assist judgements regarding the broad range of civic affairs" (p. 225) for the elite purposes. Political rhetoric is a "method of inquiry and communication" (Graber, 1981, p. 227), which could, thus, be used for varying motives and ends. Political language, using persuasion, may have several functions, Graber (1981) distinguished five functions. First, information dissemination, relating to a political crisis, may carry connotations and inferences relating to the issue, or convey a symbolic meaning (Graber, 1981). Second is agenda-setting, which brings topics to public attention to become targets of public action (Graber, 1981). Third, interpretation and linkage, which are functions where political elites explain the political scene according to their view of significance, causes, and judgements on particular events, and how they relate to other events (Graber, 1981). The effects of the speech may be coercive, legitimising or delegitimising, and representing or misrepresenting information (Chilton & Schäffner, 1997; Chilton, 2004). Fourth, projection to the future and past, which include informal projections which consider the past in an attempt to create patterns and evidence for tested concepts, and the future in an attempt to offer a vision of the future, while formal projections relate to platforms on political parties' and elites' pledges for future courses of action (Graber, 1981). Fifth, action stimulation, which is a function where

politicians can either call for a specific action, or set the stage for it through impressions, such as fear, nationalism, or a sense of community (Graber, 1981). The political communication of political elites responding to contentious politics may employ several of these functions.

This elite political communication is characterised as top-down political communication strategies, which can be proactive or reactive concerning public opinion (Kriesi, 2004; Morris 1999). In contrast, bottom-up strategies encompass political communications of popular movements, such as those in the October 2019 protests. 'Protest politics', a strategy among the top-down political communications, indirectly offers elites political opportunities to respond, either negatively, such as by repression, or positively, such as by co-optation of the causes (Kriesi, 2004; Tarrow, 1994). Additionally, media-centred strategies are significant to consider since the media possesses several functions in the communication of information and events, such as controlling functions, structuring and orientation functions, as well as control and evaluation functions (Kriesi, 2004). In the case of press conferences aimed at managing criticism and political crises, the journalists may take the role of the accusing public, advancing the public's claims of accountability (Angouri & Wodak, 2014; Hansson, 2015; Ekström & Eriksson, 2018). Politicians may, thus, respond by employing blame avoidance strategies, justifications, denial, apology, and resignation announcements, among others, with aggressive discourse being commonplace (Ekström & Eriksson, 2018). Political elites, as the targets of bottom-up and media-centred strategies, must react with counterstrategies aimed to "drive actors and issues out of the public sphere" (Kriesi, 2004, p. 198). Using Sarnicelli's (1989) concept of 'techniques of symbolic politics', Kriesi (2004) distinguishes two strategies: issue-centred and actor-centred strategies. The former issue-centred strategies consist of "displacing problems, shifting debates to secondary arenas, and transforming substantive conflicts into moral ones" (Kriesi, 2004, p. 198), thus, displacing the issue or discrediting it. In general, this strategy relies on avoiding the critical issue at hand, and instead, focusing on 'campaign issues' (Kriesi, 2004). The latter actor-centred strategies include, among others personalising strategies and negative publicity (Kriesi, 2004). Personalising strategies refer to the distractions from issues at hand by focusing, rather, on the actors, or vice versa, avoiding personal questions by focusing on another issue or another actor (Kriesi, 2004).

A more recent mode of elite communication, which needs particular focus, is social media, which is defined as electronic sites with features allowing communication and networking, with the opportunity to share information, and ideas, as well as various types of

content, including written text and audio-visual material (Fuchs & Trottier, 2015; Zeitzoff, 2017). Political leaders have adopted the use of social media, with 75% of world leaders owning Twitter or Facebook accounts (Zeitzoff, 2017). This is the case with Lebanese political leaders, with all except Nasrallah, having social media presence on at least one platform, some having several. The literature identifies two hypotheses regarding politician-to-citizen social media political communication; the innovation hypothesis and the normalisation hypothesis (Larsson, 2013; Gruber, 2018). The former stipulates that social media offers new and better possibilities for politicians to share information and keep contact with citizens, thus, increasing dialogue, while the latter stipulates that social media merely offers an extension of offline political communication, thus, not taking advantage of informative and interactive functions of social media (Larsson, 2013; Gruber, 2018). Current literature presents the normalisation hypothesis as more commonplace among politicians (Larsson, 2013; Gruber, 2018).

Despite the extensive conceptualisation of elite political communications and rhetoric available in the literature, there was a lack of material concerning rhetoric in specific societal contexts. This is significant since the theory does not offer insight into possible elite rhetorical strategies particularly in post-conflict societies, recognising the presence, or form of civil war memories and legacies in political rhetoric. Therefore, this research expands on the theory of political elites and their political communications by examining the concepts within the Lebanese post-civil war context, thus providing a peace and conflict studies lens to the study of elite rhetoric. All in all, with the concepts of political leaders and elite theory, accountability and anti-elite popular protests, and elite political communication and rhetoric outlined, this thesis will follow by presenting the research design to realise how these concepts will be applied, beginning with the justification and outlining of the case and elite selection.

Research Design

The following research design section will detail the methodology employed in this thesis, outlining the material studied, the method for data collection, and the analysis method, using RA, as well as considering relevant research ethics questions. However, first beginning with justifying and presenting the case selection of the research in terms of the choice of the contexts of the Lebanese leadership, as well as the event of the 2019 October protests, in addition to the specific choice of the individual leaders, whose political rhetoric will be the focus of this research.

Case and Elite Selection: Lebanon and the Seven Political Elites

The Lebanese leadership is a significant case to study, first, since it offers the possibility of a thorough examination of elites with a variety of backgrounds, qualities as well as sectarian and political affiliations, within a case study of a single political system (Halperin & Heath, 2017). Therefore, the context of Lebanon presents plenty of variation among the elites to meaningfully study the different political communication strategies employed by sectarian elites. The thorough examination provided by the case of Lebanese leadership is significant due to increased knowledge of elite political communication strategies in addressing contentious politics, specifically in the context of a fractionalised sectarian power-sharing system (Haddad, 2009; Lijphart, 1969). The findings of the Lebanese case would not be generalisable to other cases, due to the particularities of each society, however, it may give an overview of possible elite rhetoric in similar societal contexts. Lebanon is used in the literature as an example of sectarian power-sharing governance; thus, the focus on elite strategies contributes to the examination of the performance of political elites in such a political system, or generally in a fractionalised political landscape. Therefore, Lebanon serves as a revelatory case for the rhetorical strategies used by sectarian elites for political survival in the face of protests contesting the leaders' rule and legitimacy and holding them accountable (Halperin & Heath, 2017). Second, in addition to the contribution the case provides for research on elites and their political communication strategies in contentious politics, the case study of Lebanon allows for a thorough examination of a single case, which develops existing literature on Lebanese leadership with a more systematic approach on elite rhetoric (Halperin & Heath, 2017). This research offers a contextualised analysis of the elite strategies of Lebanese sectarian leaders, which will help further understand their tactics to consolidate their power, even against anti-regime popular protests targeting them. Therefore,

the focus on Lebanon as a case study will contribute to research on Lebanese leadership strategies with attention to communication.

The October 2019 protests are a significant case to examine more thoroughly for several reasons, although it was a wave of protests among many, as research has also noted the similarities between the 2015 and 2019 protests. The October 2019 protests were described as representing "a new and complex case of non-sectarian mobilization" (Rønn, 2020, p. 95), and political from the beginning by clearly linking the sectarian political system with corruption (Abiyaghi and Yammine, 2020). Additionally, the October 2019 protests were characterised as containing exceptional mass participation, wide geographical scope, a diverse set of strategies, different segments in society, as well as the ability to overcome contentions of previous movements, thus making the protests a significant, and differing, case to study from the previous waves (Rønn, 2020; Youssef, 2020). The exceeding mass participation, and their varied demography, placed the political elites under more significant pressure, questioning their legitimacy and governance, and accusing them of mismanagement and corruption. The protests' significance can be further illustrated by their worldwide attention, their extensive demands, and some of their outcomes, such as the resignation of the Prime Minister within 13 days of the beginning of the protests (Collard, 2019b).

The level of analysis in this research is at the individual level, specifically sectarian political elites. The leaders chosen are Gebran Bassil, Hassan Nasrallah, Michel Aoun, Nabih Berri, Saad Hariri, Samir Geagea and Walid Joumblatt, who are among the leading political figures in Lebanon. Some of the selected leaders were or are, additionally, office holders, namely Aoun was the President, while Hariri was the Prime Minister at the start of the protests, Berri continues to be the Speaker of the Parliament and also a member of the 2018-2022 Lebanese parliament, as were Hariri and Bassil. Apart from Aoun, all of the selected elites are party leaders of their respective parties, which were the most prominent political parties in the government in October 2019; Hariri of the Future Movement (FM), Berri of the Amal Movement (or just Amal), Nasrallah of Hezbollah, Geagea of the Lebanese Forces (LF), Joumblatt of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and Bassil of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), which Aoun founded. Hence, the selected political elites are at the top of the Lebanese sectarian political class, and are directly targeted in anti-elite challenges, being mentioned by name, thus, making them appropriate and ideal individuals to analyse for this research. The selected leaders represent a comprehensive variety of elites across the different political cleavages and rivalries in Lebanon. Being from several political parties, the chosen

political leaders belong to different coalitions and sectarian groups. Aoun, Bassil and Geagea are of the Maronite sect, Hariri of the Sunni sect, Berri and Nasrallah of the Shia sect, and Joumblatt of the Druze sect. Regarding alliances, Aoun, Bassil, Berri and Nasrallah make up the March 8 coalition, and Geagea and Hariri make up the fractured March 14 coalition, of which Joumblatt was a former member. Therefore, the chosen elites typify sectarian elites from different sects and political affiliations. It is significant to note that there are additional sectarian leaders that could have been chosen along with the seven selected for this research. Najib Mikati of the Azm Movement, Suleiman Frangieh of the Marada Movement, as well as Samy Gemayel of the Phalange Party, could have served as possible figures of interest for the research. However, to limit the scope of the research, the selection of political leaders had to be limited. Mikati, Frangieh and Gemayel have significantly smaller support bases, and fewer parliamentary seats for their political parties, than the selected seven leaders. In this research, the focus is more on political elites that have wide political and societal support, and thus, would be more greatly threatened by contentious anti-regime politics. Furthermore, the addition of these three leaders, or any other possible alternatives, would not have added considerable diversity to the elites regarding political affiliations and sectarian groups. Therefore, to maintain adequate variety and balance, and a practical scope, the chosen seven elites are sufficient.

Methodology: The Study of Political Text

In studying the rhetoric of Lebanese political elites following the October 2019 Uprising, this research aims to answer the research question "*How did Lebanese political elites respond to the October 2019 anti-elite popular protests in their political rhetoric?*", by examining the political communications of seven political elites regarding the protests through a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach is ideal for the research aim of this thesis since it allows for the in-depth study of a relatively small number of political elites with the purpose of understanding, describing, and interpreting a specific social phenomenon (Lichtman, 2014). Qualitative research allows for the examination of the political leader's communicative behaviour by studying their social interaction with the public and is best suited for the analysis of the type of data used in this research, namely written, and spoken text (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Additionally, it allows for a detailed analysis of a specific issue, in this case, the rhetoric of the Lebanese national-level elite (Hennink et al., 2011). The case study of this research focuses on the political communications of Lebanon's prominent political elites following the 'October Revolution', which started on October 17,

2019. The single case of the Lebanese protest context allows for the opportunity to study the case holistically, by focusing on several political elite communication within the same political system, in the same period, however, with differing individuals.

The data material of the research consists of political communication on the subject of the October 2019 protests. The modes of public communication vary both among the leaders, including spoken and written text, which are both monologic and dialogic discourse. Written texts include social media posts, while monologic discourse includes public speeches, and dialogic discourse includes press conferences, as well as radio, and television show interviews. Although different modes of media demand different communication strategies, such as in television interviews facial expressions become relevant, however, linguistic performance is common to all, whether written or spoken (Charteris-Black, 2005). It is significant to note that even the term 'text' consists of various modes of communication, therefore, it goes beyond the written text, and may include visual and oral material as well (Halperin & Heath, 2017; Lemke, 2012). Therefore, the study of political discourse allows for the examination of varying publicly disseminated material, including speeches, interviews, as well as social media written posts and images, which are all material analysed in this research since they are all modes utilised by political elites to communicate with the public and their supporters.

Data Collection

With a clear idea of the types of material analysed in this thesis, a timeframe had to be set the materials. The beginning date is determined by the start of the popular protests, which is October 17, 2019. Naturally, the discourse of the leaders in the several following months relate heavily to the protests, and are, therefore, significant. Due to the qualities of Lebanese politics, and how the passing of time is meaningful in the strategies used by the leaders to narrate past events, the range must extend more than a few months. Therefore, the end date for the material was set for October 31, 2021, approximately a two-year period, which gives enough time to analyse differences in rhetorical strategies between the initial and later phases of the protest discourse, and also encompasses significant events, such as the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, the anniversary of the protests in 2020 and 2021, and initial preparations for the May 2022 elections. A longer timeframe would have been impractical, due to the timing of this research, and most likely would have contained a repetition of strategies already captured in the later phases of the selected two-year period.

In practical terms, the material was collected using various approaches. For the video material, Google and YouTube search bars were utilised, testing different search words both in English and Arabic, as well as utilising the custom time range feature when possible. Additionally, useful YouTube channels and websites that included useful videos were then used to access additional relevant video sources. Thus, collection aimed at forming a comprehensive list of all the speeches, interviews, and press conferences of the selected leaders from October 17, 2019 to October 31, 2021. For each leader, the materials found online were as follows:

- 10 videos for Berri.
- 32 videos for Hariri.
- 35 videos for Aoun.
- 45 videos for Bassil.
- 47 videos for Joumblatt.
- 69 videos for Nasrallah.
- 85 videos for Geagea.

The audio-visual material includes political speeches, press conferences and interviews. These speeches and interviews are both in-person, where the political leader was in front of a live audience or interviewer, or online, where the speeches were delivered through live-stream or pre-recorded, and with the interviews conducted through a video or phone call. Live-streamed and pre-recorded speeches became more popular among some of the political leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic. A possible limitation of the audio-visual material is that the Lebanese public most likely followed these communications through the television and radio, of which not all of the material was necessarily uploaded on the internet for access following their broadcast. However, this might not be a significant issue since, first, the material found is sizeable, thus, indicating that the un-uploaded material may be minor in comparison to those available, and second, some of the social media material compensate for the audio-visual material since several the political elites shared reiterations, summaries, and clips of their addresses on their social media accounts. The official public social media accounts for each leader are as follows:

- Aoun has four social media accounts, a presidential account and a ‘public figure’ account, on Facebook and Twitter each.
- Bassil has accounts on Facebook and Twitter.
- Berri has a Facebook account.

- Geagea has accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Hariri has accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Joumblatt has a Twitter account.
- Nasrallah does not have any social media accounts.

The relevant posts were collected either by the sites' built-in functions to select a time range for a specific account, namely on Twitter, or by manually scrolling to October 17, 2019, on sites where this was not an option, or where all the materials would not show using these functions, namely on Facebook and Instagram. There is a limitation regarding social media material in that most social media accounts are not managed by the political leaders themselves, rather, the posting is most likely done by a social media team. However, social media posts will still be considered in this research for several reasons. Firstly, some of the leaders seem to produce some or all of their posts. For example, all of Joumblatt's tweets, as well as Bassil's tweets marked with his initials 'GB', seem to be shared by the leaders themselves. Secondly, although the social media team may be in charge of managing the account, the accounts are still in the leaders' names, and present as the leaders, and, thus, must deliver the leader's rhetoric accurately. Thirdly, most of the materials shared on the social media accounts are extracts from the leader's speech elsewhere, which could not be found elsewhere. Fourth, it is mostly clear in communications whether the content refers to the leader in the first person or third person.

Following the collection of these materials, the data was extracted, for both the written and spoken texts, by filtering significant material, that is, text that related to the protests, either directly or indirectly, by mentioning the protests, protesters, or responding to protest claims and demands. References included, for example, "protest", "revolution", "uprising" and "October 17", or about the people, such as "the street", "the will of the people" and "revolutionaries". References to the claims of the protests include responses to the protest narratives, such as direct corruption claims, and demands for resignation. Within the 2 year studied, other protest movements occurred, which will not be considered in this thesis. Reference to protests following the initial October 2019 movement was considered if there was an insinuation of relation to the uprising, or that they are the same. References to protests were not considered when they related to different movements during the same time, such as pro-Hariri and pro-Aoun demonstrations, or protests relating to the Beirut Port explosion, its investigation, and other protests relating to precise political events. All of the analysed spoken and written texts were in Arabic, except for some interviews with Bassil and

Joumblatt. Therefore, the quotations of the elite rhetoric are translations from the original Arabic to English, with an attempt to retain the original meaning and connotations, which are separately noted if the full meaning was not conveyed in the translation.

Rhetorical Analysis

The analysis method most suitable for the research aims of this study and the type of material collected, is the Rhetorical Analysis (RA), an analysis concerned with "finding and interpreting persuasive strategies in language" (Posch, 2018, p. 247; Leach, 2000). Politicians resort to rhetorical strategies, which include, among others, reasoning, appealing to emotions, building the speaker's character and reputation, persuasion, reinforcement of values and opinions, as well as verbal and written hostilities (Amossy, 2018). Discourse rhetoric is significant to study to reveal how politicians "give legitimacy and meaning to social practices and institutions" (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 335), such as the political power of individuals and groups, through persuasive techniques in their political communications (van Leeuwen, 2018). This research is interested in examining how the selected elites respond to, refer to and discuss the 2019 protests, as well as utilise them in their political communication. The literature on political elite discourse has previously employed RA for the study of political elite communications, for example, Aune and Medhurst (2008) studied the public speeches of US presidents through RA to better understand American political leadership; and McAnulla and Crines (2017) examined the rhetoric of politician Alex Salmond regarding nationhood during the 2014 independence referendum (McAnulla & Crines, 2017). The literature illustrates the use of RA as a tool to examine the rhetorical functions used by elites in their political communication.

RA is particularly ideal in the analysis of observed discourse, which is not influenced by the researcher, as is the material of this research, as opposed to that produced in research interviews or surveys since the natural occurrence of the political speech allows for the meaningful assessment of the persuasive efforts of the speaker to an intended audience (Leach, 2000). RA is preferred to other discourse analysis methods because it "evades the lingering structuralism of other approaches" (Martin, 2015, p. 25), by focusing on the ideas advanced, and how they are used for "particular contexts, audiences and purposes" (p. 25). Thus, it can reveal the rhetorical strategy employed by the speaker, that is, the "purposeful assemblage of arguments for a particular occasion and setting in light of its anticipated effects and by means of available techniques" (Martin, 2015, p. 29). Therefore, rhetorical strategy is aimed at shaping the way the audience perceives a certain situation (Martin, 2015).

Data Analysis Method

The literature on RA does not offer a unified method of analysing political rhetorical communication, therefore, this research will adopt a method of RA using the various guides for RA and Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA), as well as taking note from other similar studies. The following outline will be used as a guide for the analysis by the researcher, thus, the analysis section will present the findings of these steps, rather than explaining them as a checklist. First, it is valuable for the analysis to begin with a focus on the *political elites' backgrounds* and party platforms, to understand their political, social, and sectarian attitudes and affiliations, and to offer a better analysis of their political rhetoric, reflected in a short description of each elite before presenting the analysis of their rhetoric (Aune & Medhurst, 2008; Henderlider, 1946). Second, the speech and argument are shaped according to the occasion, known as 'decorum', thus, the *rhetorical context* of the speech is significant to consider, in terms of time, place, purpose, and broader circumstances of the rhetorical speech (Martin, 2015). Bitzer (1968) calls this the 'rhetorical situation', which helps identify the concrete details of the speech, such as where is the situation taking place, when is it occurring, and what for (Leach, 2000). Bitzer characterises three key aspects relating to the rhetorical context of the speech: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence is the urgency of some situation that needs to be changed and is specifically labelled as rhetorical when "it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 7), prompting rhetorical responses to it by those in influential positions, such as political elites. In the 2019 protests context, the politicians have higher exigence to respond at the beginning of the protest movement. The audiences are those whose decisions and actions are the focus of the speaker's persuasive rhetoric, not merely all who may hear or read the rhetoric, but they must be "capable of being influences" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8) and "being mediators of change" (p. 8), thus, the speaker's desired effects occur once they are persuaded by the rhetoric to believe and act accordingly. Constraints relate to limitations the speaker faces in confronting the rhetorical exigence (Bitzer, 1968). Leach (2000) adds to this categorisation the identification of the type of persuasive discourse, which helps understand the types of arguments used.

The third is the focus on the *rhetorical argument*, relating to the language of the speech to advance particular ideas persuasively (Martin, 2015). The parts of rhetorical speech are (1) the formation of a persuasive argument, namely ethos, pathos, and logos, (2) the organisation of the discourse as it pertains to the persuasion, (3) style, such as the use of

metaphor, analogy, and other types of figures of speech, (4) memory, particularly calling upon cultural memory, and (5) the dissemination of the speech (Leach, 2000). The key to persuasive language is the speaker's appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos in their presentation of arguments (Charteris-Black, 2014). Ethos relates to the character of the speaker, which conveys their 'ethical credibility' to establish trust and demonstrate shared values with the audience and concern over their interests (Charteris-Black, 2014). Logos relates to the appeal to reason to present arguments and to refute opposing arguments (Charteris-Black, 2014). Pathos relates to appeals to emotion, such as evoking anger or sympathy (Charteris-Black, 2014). These arguments can be presented through varying styles, thus relating to the word choices, such as the use of figurative language, as well as varying ways of delivery, which in spoken speech relates to the performance of the speech, such as the tone of voice (Charteris-Black, 2014). A final step, highlighted by Martin (2015), is the *rhetorical effects* of the speech, which relate to the outcomes of the speech. Martin notes that measuring the success of rhetorical speech is difficult, but that they can often be inferred. The analysis of the societal effects of each political elite's political rhetoric is beyond the scope of this research, however, the rhetorical argumentation can still be judged on the discursive effects of the rhetorical strategies used. Therefore, rather than merely drawing attention to the rhetorical strategies employed by the political elites, this analysis will consider "to what effects?" to better understand the rhetorical consequences of the political communication of the elites. Such an analysis is unable to infer the intentions of the political leaders, however, the "argumentative appeals, arrangement, style and delivery" (Martin, 2015, p. 35) reveal the possible persuasive outcomes of the speech, regardless of whether the audiences were convinced.

Among the weaknesses of RA, as noted by Leach (2000), is that the application of the rhetorical tools may differ between texts, which may be a benefit in that it allows for flexibility, while a negative in that there is the danger of inconsistency, heavily subject to the researcher's abilities. For this research, flexibility is a benefit since the method may be applied to the various political leaders, considering their differing rhetorical styles. The open-ended character of RA allows the focus on the rhetorical aspects specifically relevant to each political elite's communications style, even varying between different addresses. The developed outline above assists with attempting to maintain a similar systematic nature of analysing the rhetoric. Further considerations on the research process will be discussed regarding the research ethics, in the following section.

Research Ethics

It is a significant ethical concern for the researcher to conduct the study reliably and cautiously (Bos, 2020). This concern is particularly relevant regarding this research due to my close links to the case study, namely the Lebanese context. I am of Maronite Lebanese origins, with enduring close links with Lebanon and the (Maronite) Catholic Church, as a member of both. Regarding political views, I am non-partisan. However, due to my previous research and personal social milieu, I have been more familiarised with the FPM and the LF, the political parties of three of the leaders studied in this thesis. Therefore, to ensure a fairer consideration of all political leaders, I undertook during my research to carefully understand the paradigms of the considered political elites, and their political parties, on a more general level, beyond the limited scope of this research. This required further studying of Druze, Shia and Sunni religious history, references, and traditions, to the extent that aids me in better understanding the leaders' references and terminology. Therefore, the strategy to overcome the ethical concern of the lesser familiarity with the Druze, Sunni and Shia communities relies on the consultation on references that I did not understand, which turned out to be few. Transparency in the analysis section is significant to overcome this ethical concern (Bos, 2020). The analysis will aim for transparency, first, in the assessment of the data leading to certain deductions, and second, in the candour in references which may include uncertain or numerous interpretations. This also helps ensure the replicability and reliability of the research (Bos, 2020).

Regarding ethical issues specific to the method of analysis chosen in this research, there are a few aspects to consider. In the case of human participants, attention should be paid to consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and minimising the risk of harm, however, the political leaders in this research are characterised as subjects, rather than participants, since their consent is not necessary since they are public figures that have voluntarily spoken and written in the public sphere, which includes social media (Gorup, 2020; Iphofen, 2020). An ethical consideration, however, could be made about one of the sources relating to an interview with Joumblatt, which was a discussion between him and his party supporters in the diaspora in the US, which Al Jadeed News posted as 'leaked' (Al Jadeed News, 2019d). After considering whether or not this source should be included in this research, the source was included in the research, because it is not clear whether the interview was truly leaked or not, since there was no further explanation of this, and additionally, the contents were still public political communication, since it was first directed to a wide audience, as it was clear in the

audio that he was addressing a large diaspora group, and it was more widely disseminated by Al Jadeed News, allowing the source to enter into the wider public arena. The issue of consent is more complicated in this case, however, it aligns with similar communications of Joumblatt online, where his visits to several Druze communities are informally recorded with an attendant's smartphone. The material reveals Joumblatt's political communications' particularity, in which his communications that gets disseminated in the public are often extracted from his visits and discussions with a smaller portion of his community. All in all, there seem to be no ethical concerns regarding the data collection.

Regarding the analysis of the elite rhetoric, I have the responsibility to report their discourse with accuracy and authenticity. Particularly since the leaders studied are publicly controversial figures, it is common to make assumptions and rash judgements about their discourse. Therefore, careful attention was taken to translate the texts truthfully, making note of the interpretation of the statements in Arabic, if there may be a difference. Accuracy was ensured by offering direct translated quotations, when appropriate, and taking the context into account in the interpretation of the discourse. Overall, avoiding the misrepresentation of the elites was an ethical matter at the forefront of the following analysis of this research.

Analysis

The following section will begin by presenting the analysis of the elite rhetoric, first separately for each political leader, by presenting a short introduction on the leader and their political platform, followed by the analysis of their protest rhetoric. Second, after the general analysis of each political leader, the final section will analyse seven rhetorical strategies particularly utilised by the political elites in their protest communications.

Michel Aoun

From Army General to President of the Republic

Michel Aoun was the president of Lebanon, from 2016 until October 2022, serving as president during the protest movement and the subsequent three years. Aoun was the General of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) between 1984-1989, starting his political presence in 1988, when he was assigned as the interim Prime Minister, making him the de facto president, and, upon appointing his military cabinet, Aoun led a parallel government to the El-Hoss cabinet, creating a dual-government situation (Helou, 2020). As an outcome of the "war of Liberation" against the Syrian occupation in Lebanon, Aoun was targeted by the Syrian government and exiled in 1990 to France until his return after the end of the Syrian occupation in 2005, with mixed reactions from the political elites (Nisa, 2015). In 2005, Aoun founded the FPM, which participated in the elections of June 2005 in predominantly Christian constituencies and utilised sectarian mobilisation and discourse, despite presenting itself as a secular political party (Helou, 2020). Despite Aoun's stance against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, the FPM left the March 14 coalition, and instead, joined Hezbollah and Amal in the pro-Syrian March 8 coalition (Nisan, 2015). In 2006, Aoun and Nasrallah made a "Memorandum of Understanding", more commonly known as the Mar Mikhael Agreement, referencing the church in Beirut where they met, calling for "national dialogue, for placing national interests above all others, and for promoting consensual democracy" (Nisan, 2015, p. 192). On October 31, 2016, the Lebanese parliament elected Aoun to the presidency, ending an almost 30-month presidential vacuum (Helou, 2020). Aoun's slogan for his presidency was "strong reign", thus, his presidency is known in the Lebanese political discourse as "the reign", in Arabic *al 'ahd*, the word also translates as 'era', 'covenant', 'pledge' and 'testament'.

Aoun's Response: Protecting an Image

Aoun's first address to the nation following the start of the October 17 protest took place on October 24, a week following its eruption. The delay displayed to the audience low urgency to address the protesters, although, in the following months, Aoun made several public appearances discussing the protests and their demands and responding to some of its claims. Aoun's initial addresses on the protest movement made a positive judgement on the protesters, for example, he stated how the protesters represented the entire Lebanese population, who are "creative, strong and successful", and he gave the protesters credit for helping advance the "first reformist paper" in "record speed" (Aoun, 2019a). In pointing out the exceptionality of the Lebanese population, which is a common nationalist sentiment, he mimicked the national, rather than sectarian and political, stance of the protests, and the largely positive ambience of the beginning stages of the protest. In later addresses, Aoun particularly highlighted the youth among the protesters, stating that they are Lebanon's "pulsing heart", and that they are Lebanon's future (Aoun, 2019b; Elnashra - Speech, 2020e). Using this metaphor equating the young protesters to the heart of Lebanon and other amiable references, Aoun judged the protesters in a positive light and a legitimising manner. Aoun demonstrated empathy with the protesters by stating that their "shouts should have been shouts of joy and accomplishment of your aspirations and dreams, not shouts of pain" (Aoun, 2019a). This recognition of their pains and the barriers they represented Aoun as an empathetic and understanding leader. In addition to appealing to emotions, Aoun aligned with the protests by pointing out that Lebanese people "are crushed by sectarianism, and corruption has rotten us to the bone", thus portraying a similar interpretation of the social issues by focusing on the same concepts of sectarianism and corruption. (Aoun, 2019a).

Interpreting the protests as anti-corruption and anti-sectarian, Aoun portrayed his agreement with these justified stances by reminding the audience that he "swore an oath to preserve Lebanon and I committed to fighting corruption fiercely", stating that "I have many stances, the same were repeated in the protests, of course not with the same expression, but with the same meaning" (Aoun, 2019a; Al Jadeed News, 2019b). Therefore, Aoun's rhetoric argued the convergence between the protester's and Aoun's values, demonstrated by his previous and ongoing commitment to the same causes. In the response to the challenge of the elites' lack of achievement, Aoun stated that "despite all the hardships, we were able to achieve advancement in many sectors, although not on an adequate scale", such as bringing "Lebanon to the shore of safety and stability" (Aoun, 2019a). With this response Aoun

presented his achievements in the security arena, turning the audience's attention away from the issue areas of corruption and sectarianism and focusing on areas where he was able to claim success. He described that before his elections "there was animosity and a great political division in the country", and with his presidency, he "unified the Lebanese", and "there started to be cooperation", with the protest movement as an indication "that there has started to be national unity" (Al Jadeed News, 2019b). This argument applied the movement's unified character as a demonstration of his achievements, drawing on national unity. Overall, regarding accountability, Aoun recognised that he is the "president and responsible", however, he explained that "I do not have the power", "I am handcuffed by the contradictions in the power, contradiction in society" and that "the struggle of powers internally and externally of some, is what stopped me, it was the barrier, it is not little" (Aoun, October 24, 2019; Al Jadeed News, 2019b; Elnashra - Speech, 2020e). Aoun blamed his inability to advance reforms on the shortcomings of the system, thus, supporting the protest sentiments against the political system. Despite not having the power to initiate change, Aoun stated how he had warned the political leaders earlier, that the people have lost trust in the government, portraying himself as aware of the issues, but incapable to act (Al Jadeed News, 2019b). Regarding this address, Aoun mentioned that "I suppose that this was shared but of course people are not listening to me 100%. Very few are the ones that follow my news", therefore, presenting the people as not recognising his good efforts (Al Jadeed News, 2019b). This rhetoric offers an argument in response to the protester's holding Aoun accountable, whereby he avoids blame by portraying the limitations of his powers, and that the good that he has done was not recognised.

Two weeks following the October 17 protests, Aoun's supporters organised a pro-Aoun demonstration at Baabda, with the slogan "we are with you", reminiscent of the pro-Aoun protests towards the end of the civil war. In Aoun's address to his supporters, he noted that the pro-Aoun demonstration should not be seen as "square against square or protest against protest", and rather than competing, the two protests should be seen as complementary (AL Jadeed News, 2019a). Therefore, Aoun rhetoric opposed the image of being in hostility with the movement, rather it portrayed his relationship with the movement as cooperative, stating that "I was looking for them. I am telling you if they are reading carefully, they find that I was looking for them" (Al Jadeed News, 2019b). In his first address on October 24, he invited anyone representing the protesters to dialogue with him, however, later he criticised the protesters for their lack of cooperation, stating that he was "not

receiving answers from them", and that the opportunity for change was lost, and the movement was merely an "emotive popular protest" (Al Jadeed News, 2019b; Elnashra - Speech, 2020e). This blaming for their shortcomings discredits the protesters regarding their seriousness and ability to lead change. This illustrates a development in Aoun's reference to the protesters, with heightened tensions. In an interview, Aoun challenged the protesters in that "if they do not have any *awedem* in this state, let them emigrate, they will not reach power" ('Al Jadeed News', 2019b). *Awedem*, plural for *adame*, roughly means good and decent people, a common reference in FPM rhetoric. The statement of Aoun was received by the protesters as offensive and was interpreted as telling the protesters to leave Lebanon if they do not like anyone currently in the government (Molana-Allen, 2019). Although this interpretation is inaccurate, since the context indicates, and the president's information office additionally clarified, that Aoun was challenging the protesters about not finding a good person to represent them, nevertheless, the rhetoric is particularly shocking to a Lebanese audience since youth emigration is a sensitive and prevailing issue in Lebanese society, thus, on Aoun's part, illustrating a frustrated rhetoric regarding the protests' lack of leadership (Lebanese Presidency, 2019a, 2019b).

Gebran Bassil

The Rise of the New FPM Leader

Gebran Bassil, the leader of the FPM since 2015 and the son-in-law of Aoun, began his career in national politics at his appointment as the Minister of Telecommunication in 2008, despite his two-time loss in the 2005 and 2009 parliamentary elections (Helou, 2020). Following, he served consecutively as Minister of Energy and Water, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, which he was serving at the onset of the 2019 protests, and he has been a member of parliament since the elections of 2018 (Helou, 2020). Both in national-level politics and politics within the FPM, Bassil is described as outspoken, confrontational and an active politician, however, an issue facing Bassil's leadership is described as his inability to match the charisma of Aoun's leadership (Helou, 2020). In the 2019 protests, Bassil was particularly singled out as a target for the protests, such as through a vulgar chant referencing his mother (Collar, 2019). Bassil's particular unpopularity is attributed to, for example, his failure to deliver results as Minister of Energy and Water, despite his ambitious promises of providing 24/7 electricity (Collard, 2019a; Estrin & Al-Arian, 2019).

Bassil's Response: A Political Target

Bassil's first address following the start of the protests took place on the second day of the protests, thus, he responded at the height of exigence, which is a highly volatile rhetorical context and offers the political opportunity for the speaker to frame their relation to the protests (Kriesi, 2004; Tarrow, 1994). Bassil's initial addresses described the protests in an optimistic tone, for example, presenting them as an "opportunity to save Lebanon and its economy, from corruption and the wrong financial and monetary policies", since they serve as pressure on the leaders to advance reforms (Newsgate, 2019a). Additionally, Bassil demonstrated empathy towards the protesters, for example, he states that "I followed you moment by moment and I heard your voice" and that "not only I sympathise with them, I could not bare the situation" (Al Jazeera English, 2019, 1:46; Elnashra - Speeches, 2019). Bassil's rhetoric portrayed shared values and concern for Lebanon, thus connecting himself with the protest movement through an emotional appeal and display of support towards the protests and the protesters. He described the protesters as being rightful on multiple occasions, mentioning that he and his party supports them, encouraging their positive action on the street (CNBC International TV, 2020). Therefore, Bassil's initial rhetoric legitimised the protesters and their demands, and he expressed that the FPM and its parliamentary bloc's opinions on how to proceed are anyway what the protesters "spontaneously want", meaning that they share the same stance without the protesters realising it (Newsgate, 2019a). Starting approximately half a year after the protests, Bassil began offering criticism towards the protests regarding their lack of achievements. For example, he criticised their failure in "fighting against corruption", rhetorically asking: "where are they now, quietly watching the whole battle going on against corruption?", blaming them for not taking the opportunity to partner with the FPM to achieve reformist and anti-corruption goals, and even accusing them of becoming additional obstacles in the fight against corruption (Bassil, 2020b; Bassil, 2020c; Elnashra - Speeches, 2020i). Bassil demonstrated the protesters as ineffective in this matter, while the FPM has been attempting to pass reforms, thus, the current lack of reforms would rather be blamed on the futile movement.

Particularly in interviews, Bassil has had to respond to questions concerning the protest movement's disproportionate targeting of him in their slogans and chants. He delegitimised the critical opinion of him by arguing that "the people on the streets also do not represent all of the Lebanese" and that "there are many supporters of the FPM on the streets" signalling that "what is happening is not directed" at him and his party (Āl-rfā῾y, 2020;

Newsgate, 2019a). Therefore, he portrayed the protest sentiments as not unitary, since his supporters are among them, and not representing the public opinion. Another form of response was Bassil's portrayal as a leader that isn't intimidated by accusation, believing that "truth will prevail in the end" (Al Jazeera English, 2019, 3:30), as well as being prepared to sacrifice himself and his image for the benefit of the nation, for example, if the government promised "all the things that the people went down [to the streets] for", such as anti-corruption laws, the FPM "would give up on everything we sacrificed for throughout the years, for the country to be saved", even if this required "self-abolition" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019g). This rhetoric presented Bassil's character as not interested in the power aspect of politics, either for himself or his party, as long as their goals are achieved, thus, discussing his accountability to portray a positive character of his leadership. This is best exemplified by his response to the vulgar chant cursing him, through an insulting reference to his mother, which he used as an opportunity to narrate that his mother "taught him to love Lebanon, and that my personal dignity is not more important than the dignity of my nation", that "you know what you have raised, o my mother", and that time guaranteed to "show the truth, because the truth alone triumphs" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019d). This rhetorical tool is particularly notable since Bassil can present his character by appearing to let them into the fundamental values he was taught as a child, thus demonstrating his decency by how he was brought up, therefore, serving as a rhetorical tool to display a high character.

In his speech on the second day of the protests, Bassil presented the future as consisting of two options, "the big collapse or the daring rescue" (Newsgate, 2019a). He summarised these two options as "the ones that want to light the fires, and burn the green and the dry", in other words, destroy everything, and on the other hand, the "ones that want to put off the fires, no, even prevent its setting off, by pruning the dry and keeping the green", in other words, keeping the good while removing the bad (Newsgate, 2019a). This rhetorical use of analogy portrays a dichotomy of two parties, and two choices for courses of action for Lebanon, namely the destructive option of their opponents in contrast to their constructive approach. In this manner, Bassil's rhetoric often relies on notions of "success" versus "failure", where he and his party aim at success, while other political leaders are complacent about continuous failure (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019h). This separation of Bassil, the FPM and their supporters from other political elites, demonstrated by the creation of this dichotomy, was a recurring stylistic tool employed by Bassil in his rhetoric.

Additionally, Bassil utilised the protests in his rhetoric about the FPM. First, he often equated the protesters and the FPM supporters in an advantageous comparison portraying his supporters in the same positive connotation attached to the protests, such as calling them both "the reservoir of reform", (Elnashra - Speech, 2019d). For example, Bassil stated that they were "sad that we are not with them on the streets because our responsibility today is to be here in the parliament and the constitutional institutions", indicating that the FPM as a party prefers to be among the people (Bassil, 2020a). In Bassil's political communication, he often described the FPM and its supporters in an exalting manner with terms that are familiar from the protest rhetoric. For example, the FPM's achievements included offering a "new type of struggle against corruption", and a "challenge on decency, which the FPM raises in front of all people", and not staying "quiet about the corruption", instead, "we we named them and created hundreds of problems with them in front of you" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019d). In several speeches, Bassil emphasised the FPM's and Aoun's resilience, calling Aoun "the symbol of legitimacy in Lebanon" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020f). Therefore, Bassil's rhetoric demonstrates the use of positive rhetoric to describe himself, the FPM, and Aoun in response to contestation of the movement.

Nabih Berri

The Successor of Al-Sadr and the Speaker of Parliament

Nabih Berri is the current Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon and the leader of the Amal Movement. Amal, which means 'hope' in Arabic, was founded by the Shia religious scholar Imam Musa Al-Sadr, who was the first Shia leader to "address the plight of Lebanese Shiites in a political fashion" (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014, p. 102), and created the social movement "The Movement of the Disinherited" in 1974, and a year later, founded Amal (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014, p. 102; Joffe, 2009). On the one hand, they called for greater inclusion of Shia populations in politics, through reform of the Lebanese state, and on the other hand, reforming community affairs by diminishing the power of land-owning elites (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014). In 1978, Al-Sadr disappeared during a visit to Libya and was replaced by Nabih Berri as the leader of Amal in 1980 (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012; Joffe, 2009). Berri is described as lacking Al-Sadr's qualities, religious credentials, and religiosity in his political actions and agendas, and in 1982, Hezbollah emerged to create a party more closely linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014). Berri has been the Speaker of the Parliament since 1992, and he was considered the most powerful leader in the Shia community during the initial post-war years, which, however, changed in favour of Nasrallah

with the increased influence of Hezbollah (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012; Nisan, 2015). Berri's politics is described as defending the interests of the Shia bourgeoisie and utilising his political position for the advantage of personal business interests (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012).

Berri's Response: Words of Warning

Berri's first reference to the protests was through a Facebook post on October 21, where he made a defence of himself by demonstrating to the audience his character as a leader. He stated that "my crime is that I am with the unity of Lebanon and preserving it" (Berri, 2019a). Although the protests related mainly to corruption, Berri's response shifted to what he illustrated as more important issues, namely national unity, which he aimed his political action towards. The topic of perseverance simplified the politician's role into that concerning security and stability, and the topic of unity into that concerning sectarian co-existence. He continued that "I will continue to protect Lebanon until the last day of my life" (Berri, 2019a). This rhetoric gives the impression that he was key to Lebanon's protection, thus, presenting an argument on his value and character as a political leader. Additionally, Berri argued that the protest demands were in accordance with to his political demands and stances, for example, that he had called for decades for the same economic demands, followed with a figure of speech that roughly translates to: "advice used to be for a camel, but now it has become for a revolution" (Berri, 2019b). The first part is a common proverb which is used to argue for the importance of advice, that people used to give a camel in exchange for good advice, usually said to argue that the current generation does not value advice given to them for free. The second is Berri's addition, which argues that now, instead of receiving benefits from giving good advice, his decade-long call for change was met with contempt, namely a revolution which attacked him. Therefore, Berri discredited the protesters by illustrating that they have not presented anything new, and they are attacking the leader who has called for their same demands. He did note, however, that the protesters have been able to achieve change due to their public pressure (Berri, 2019b). All in all, the rhetoric appeals to Berri's character as a forerunner in these demands.

A particular aspect of the protest movement which Berri repeatedly referenced is the call for a civil state. Geha (2019a) notes that in the 2011 protests, Berri was the "first to claim that he wanted to change the sectarian system" (p. 18). Following the 2019 protests , Berri called for the move to a civil state, and he stated that if Lebanon did not become a civil state as a result of the protests, the movement did not have any value (Berri, 2019c). In this manner, Berri interpreted the measure of success for the protests as the achievement of the

civil state, which related to his usual political rhetoric concerned with reaching such an arrangement. Berri offered an optimistic view by presenting the conditions as "favourable for the establishment of a civil state" (Berri, 2019b). Additionally, Berri commented on another protest demand relating to the call for a technocratic government, which is a cabinet made up of politically unaffiliated expert ministers (Berri, 2020a). Berri opposed the proposal, suggesting an alternative of a 'techno-political government' where the experts would be selected from within political parties (Berri 2020a). First, he argued that political independence did not guarantee that the expert has no affiliations, and second, he rhetorically questioned the "portrayal of parties and partisans as if they are a 'bogeyman'" (Berri, 2020a). Therefore, these points present counter-arguments against the protest's anti-partisan rhetoric.

Hassan Nasrallah

Nasrallah and the Resistance

Hassan Nasrallah, a Shia cleric, has been the Secretary General of Hezbollah since 1992. Hezbollah, meaning 'party of God' in Arabic, is a Lebanese political party, as well as an armed group, which split from Amal in 1982, following the disappearance of al-Sadr, to develop stronger relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014). In the early 1990s, Hezbollah experienced an opening up to the world compared to earlier periods, particularly in the image of Nasrallah, although otherwise keeping their leadership deliberations and functions secretive (Mishal & Goldberg, 2014). Hezbollah's political influence strengthened in the 1990s under Syrian tutelage, with a "political stronghold in Beirut and a military stronghold in the southern borderland" (Meier, 2015). Under the leadership of Nasrallah relations between Syria and Hezbollah were expanded, and even after the withdrawal from Syria in 2005, Hezbollah remained the principal pro-Syrian power in Lebanese politics, thus expanding its presence and influence in the political and public arenas (Nisan, 2015). Under the leadership of Nasrallah, significant events include the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000 and the 2006 war with Israel, both perceived as victories for Hezbollah (Matar, 2015; Nilsson, 2020).

Nasrallah's Response: The Grand Scheme of Things

Nasrallah's political communications typically take the form of more than hour-long televised addresses, additionally, the material analysed includes more than a two-and-a-half-hour interview. Approximately half of the addresses were spent focusing on Islamic doctrine, usually relating to the specific occasion, commemoration, or season, although often these considerations are also linked to the current state of affairs. Nasrallah's first address

concerning the protests was on October 19, 2019, starting with a religious topic, followed by a commentary on the protesters, beginning with discussing responsibility. He stated that "all of us need to take responsibility and accept responsibility", including himself, although the responsibility may be proportionally different (Qaptan14m, 2019). Nasrallah diagnosed the crisis as not the product of the past years, nor the current presidency or government, but the accumulation of at least 20 or 30 years, therefore, he continued that "who flees, who gives up, who retreats –I do not want to pronounce judgements against him– the Lebanese people need to pronounce against him a judgement" because someone can't rule the state for 30 years and "in the last moment he is Sharif of Mecca and go sit on the hill, or that he is not implicated, and throw this disaster in other people's face" (Qaptan14m, 2019). The reference to the Sharif of Mecca is a sarcastic reference implying that these political leaders make themselves out to be honourable and virtuous when they are not. This is in contrast to him and his party, who he stated did not ride the wave of the protests, and instead "they acted with responsibility" and engaged in discussions for solutions (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019c). Therefore, Nasrallah's rhetoric portrayed an initial focus on other political leaders, with the consideration taking a moral tone of elite responsibility and accountability.

At the beginning of the protests, Nasrallah demonstrated positive rhetoric regarding the protest participants. For example, he mentioned that the protests were "spontaneous, sincere, and transcendent of sect, creed, area, and political orientation" and that "we all respect their choice to protest, we do not merely understand, we respect, and we appreciate your shout and, and your demonstration, and your protest, this shout that is expressive of your pain" (Qaptan14m, 2019). This rhetoric was favourable towards the protesters by holding their actions to high value. In the same address, he defended the government to a degree by arguing that the tax proposal, which he presented as unjust, was merely an idea to be discussed but was not carried out by the government, although he noted that the uprising signalled that the population cannot bear any additional taxes (Qaptan14m, 2019). Nasrallah justified the continuation of the current government, but with "a new curriculum and a new spirit" (Qaptan14m, 2019). This seems to represent Hezbollah's 'conformist resistance', which Mishal and Goldberg (2014) characterised as a discourse strategy by Hezbollah of maintaining both confrontation and cooperation with the government, since these contradictions preserve the tension between Hezbollah and the government, while not causing its collapse. Similarly, regarding the protests, Nasrallah's rhetoric included both the defence of the government and its criticism by justifying the grievances of the protesters.

First Nasrallah claimed that “no one is able to –and I am certain of what I am saying– no one stands, no party, no organisation, even no foreign embassy –because we always go to the theory of conspiracies– no foreign embassy, no one, no one stands behind these protests.” (Qaptan14m, 2019). However, in an address on the October 25, Nasrallah mention that he wanted to modify the statements he made only 6 days prior, due to further developments, stating that “today this movement, with its daily activities, with its slogans, with its stances, with what is issued by it, it is no longer a popular and spontaneous movement”, claiming that the movement is now run by “certain people, dignitaries, and organisations”, and that the protest movement had “leadership, organisation, and there is funding” (Newsgate, 2019b). Nasrallah’s rhetoric presented these claims as fact by appealing to reason to prove the accusation, such as by pointing to uniform stances and tactics of the protesters and the lack of transparency on the funding of the movement, because various elements of the protests, such as refreshments and sound systems, require funding, which he reasoned could not come out “pockets of the poor people” (Newsgate, 2019b). In a later address, he expanded on the claims of leadership, stating that he knows personally that some of the leaders are “patriotic, clean, loyal, sincere, and really their heart is on the heart of the people”, but in contrast, there are also among them known political parties, some new organisations, some organisation linked to embassies, and some corrupt figures (Newsgate, 2019b). Thus, warning, the movement from replacing “who we consider as corrupt, with who is necessarily corrupt”, thus, portraying his motive as a service towards the protesters and the general public (Newsgate, 2019b). All in all, this questioning presented critical rhetoric towards the protesters and forwarded discrediting claims.

One of the main points of criticism towards the actions of the protests was the method of blocking roads. Although Nasrallah began with his opinion that the blocking of roads was a legitimate means of civil resistance and that it has been previously employed by Hezbollah, he criticised the protest movement’s use of the tactic due to their timing during a dire economic situation; the harming of workers who earn their wage by the day; their request of identification and the humiliation and cursing of the public, thus reminiscent of militias and the civil war; their closing of the Beirut-South Road which was interpreted as the provocation of Hezbollah due to the South being known as predominantly inhabited by Shia communities; and that it as an action of a small minority disrupting the lives of the majority of the country, for which he questioned the protest participation in a discrediting manner, stating that “say 100 000, 200 000, 300 000, hundreds of thousands”, but other millions were at home

(Newsgate, 2019b; Elnashra - Speeches, 2019c). Nasrallah's rhetoric on the blocking of roads represented an appeal to fear, by mentioning the economic crisis, militias, the civil war, provocation, and minority rule. He repeated almost a year and a half later that those who blocked roads were a minority, as well as participating in suspect activities, such as by risking domestic conflict and "shedding of blood", and by "humiliating people" (Elnashra - Speeches 2021). Therefore, this rhetoric employed discrediting of protesters and appeal to fear to persuade the end of the practice. In contrast to the critical consideration of the protest and their tactics, Nasrallah portrayed Hezbollah as an antithesis to the ensuing chaos, stating that they were "protecting the country from the void, from the void that will lead to chaos and collapse, and we are looking further than the far", and the protector of "dignity", "glory", "honour", and even existential matters of "existence" and "life" of the Lebanese state and nation (Qaptan14m, 2019; Newsgate, 2019b). With these qualities, Nasrallah responded to the contestation on the streets by drawing to Hezbollah's favourable qualities, heavily relying on their image of protecting Lebanon.

Samir Geagea

From the Battleground to Leadership

Samir Geagea is a Maronite leader, heading the LF, who, at the beginning of the civil war, was a student of medicine and affiliated with the Phalange Party, interrupting his studies to join the militia in 1975 (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). Geagea still retained the title 'doctor', or '*Al-Hakim*', as a common reference in public discourse. During the civil war, Geagea became a trusted lieutenant to Bashir Gemayel, who was later assassinated in 1982 as president-elect, and by the mid-1980s, he became the head of the LF (Kéchichian, 2014). In 1994, despite the post-war amnesty law dismissing any crimes committed during the civil war, Geagea was accused, with Syrian pressure, of a church bombing, leading to the dissolution of the LF and Geagea's arrest in the same year, becoming the only Lebanese militia leader to be put on trial for war-time crimes, spending the next 11 years in solitary confinement (Kéchichian, 2014; Nisan, 2015). During his imprisonment, the LF experienced a significant loss of influence, however, maintained its social support, and in 2000, the LF began its return to the public arena (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). During this time, his wife, Sethrida Geagea, led the LF, until his release in 2005, following the Cedar Revolution (Kéchichian, 2014). Subsequently, the LF joined the anti-Syrian March 14 alliance. Currently, the LF is the second largest Christian party in parliament, although Geagea himself does not run or hold any public office.

Geagea's Response: The Original Revolutionary

Geagea's political communication on the 2019 protest movement has been extensive. Main features can be noted in his protest rhetoric, which included narrating the protest goals and motives as if he represented them, aligning the LF with the movement, as well as formulating the protests as a threat to his political opponents. Geagea presented the LF as aligned with the protest in several forms. In his first communication relating to the protests, which was a series of social media posts, he wrote to his supporters: "I turn to my partisans and supporters of the party of the Lebanese Forces to participate in the ongoing popular movements according to the logic and atmosphere of these movements, that is, without party slogans and flags" (Geagea, 2019b). The call for LF supporters to join the protests portrayed his support and shared values with the protesters, particularly regarding his call for them to adhere to the logic of the protests, even its non-partisan nature. Geagea portrayed no concern towards his supporters' participation in the protests, thus, presenting the movement as not inherently in opposition to him and his party. Over a year following the protests, Geagea wrote "I am proud to announce that following the Lebanese people's peaceful uprising in October 2019 against their corrupt ruling class, the Lebanese Forces Party was the only political group that had never been accused" (Geagea, 2021a). Although this statement is false, since Geagea was named in the street protests, as were other leaders, this rhetoric aimed to depict the LF as approved by the protesters, or at the least, that they could not find anything against the LF, as they have for the rest of the political parties.

Geagea offered an interpretation of the solution to the crisis, beginning with "the resignation of this government and the formation of a new government far from the current political staff" (Geagea, 2019a). By presenting the resignation and the formation of a technocratic government as the solutions, Geagea's subsequent rhetoric aligned with these actions. On October 19, 2019, Geagea announced the resignation of the Strong Republic, the LF's parliamentary block, from the government, with the rationale as, first, the protest movement, noting their exceptionality and transcendence of identities, second, the gravity of the crisis, needing exceptional measures, and third, the inadequacy of the current government and their sluggishness in implementing necessary reforms (Samir Geagea - smyr ǧʿǧʿ, 2019a). These arguments presented Geagea and the LF as critical of the government and its actions, separating themselves from its workings, and their decision as motivated by submitting to the will of the Lebanese people, later writing that "'the Forces', as always, are in harmony with their people and their community, and because we are like that, we have also

come out of the government and everyone knows that we were living in a state of discontent within it" (Geagea, 2019i).

Regarding the formation of a technocratic government, Geagea's political communication focused on this demand of the protest above all of the other aspects of the movement. For example, in a series of tweets, he wrote that "I do not think that any reform paper will satisfy the demonstrators", continuing that the solution is a new technocratic government and that "I believe that the formation of a new government like the one I put forward will calm the street", and "we want a government of independent specialists who have nothing to do with the political majority" (Geagea, 2019d; 2019e; 2019f; 2019j). Geagea's rhetoric presented the proposal of a technocratic government as his suggestion, as well as a solution which would satisfy the protesters, thus, presenting himself as being knowledgeable on the protester's demands and aspirations. He portrayed the LF as willing to sacrifice their presence in the government for the sake of this solution, stating that "I even do not want us to be [in the government], although we are oppressing ourselves, because we do not have a connection, from the perspective of the collapse that happened", thus employing the rhetoric of innocence and self-sacrifice "for the common good" (Samir Geagea - smyr ǧʿǧʿ, 2019b). Therefore, the rhetoric depicted Geagea's utilisation of the protest rhetoric concerning the proposal of a technocratic government to make favourable political arguments in favour of the LF and align with the uprising.

Further communications similarly revealed Geagea's rhetorical style of speaking as if on behalf of the protesters, against political parties and leaders, as if he is not implicated. For example, Geagea tweeted that "nine days and more than half of the Lebanese people are in the streets screaming, and no one hears, and no one responds. Is there any more scandal, indifference, and disconnection with the people than this?" (Geagea, 2019d; 2019g). Geagea's rhetoric, thus, presented him as a voice for the movement's demands and amplification of their grievances and attitudes. Similarly, Geagea mentioned how the protests were against all political leaders and that "the 'Forces' were among them, but it rushed to read the facts, truths, and the popular mood, and harmonised with the choices of the people" (Geagea, 2020b). Geagea presented an overall amiable relation to the protests through his continual praise of the movement, through his defence of them, by echoing their rhetoric, which presented him as their spokesperson. Throughout the year 2020 and continuing to 2021, Geagea's rhetoric repeatedly instrumentalised the protest rhetoric and imagery. For example, on the first anniversary of the start of the October 17 protests, Geagea posted on

Twitter with the text “revolution until the goals are reached”, depicting resilience and persistence with the revolution (Geagea, 2020e). Similarly, in an address for the LF students at the Notre Dame University - Louaize, Geagea celebrated the student party’s success in the university elections by stating “the LF won, this is the true revolution that won, this is the actual civil society that won”, continuing that many merely make slogans, while the LF puts in the work, and sacrifices for it (Geagea, 2021b). In this example, Geagea encouraged them in their work by portraying the LF’s work as a revolution, liberally using the term ‘revolution’ to denote the political struggle of the LF, to inspire the audience for their future efforts.

Geagea made several accusations and counter-arguments against his political opponents regarding the protests. One of the accusations included the claim that the political leaders were purposefully wasting time, even in the face of the protests. For example, he wrote that “it is a real disaster, it is a real crime, those concerned have, so far, wasted three months researching the gender of angels” (Geagea, 2020a). The ‘researching the gender of angels’ is a figure of speech relating to an Arabic expression of ‘the Byzantine argument’, used to denote a superfluous argument, merely for the sake of arguing. Additionally, he warned the uprising of cooperating with other political actors, claiming that it would be like following “sand-like dreams, and theatrical personalities, butting in, and promising you that they will ‘remove the zeer from the well’”, which would lead to disappointment, and they would be like “the one that bought fish at the sea” (Samir Geagea - smyr ǧʿǧʿ, 2021). This short section of the speech contains several figures of speech, with ‘removing the zeer from the well’ referring to doing something seen as difficult, while ‘the one that bought fish at the sea’ refers to relying on something uncertain. Along with the reference to ‘sand-like dreams’ and ‘theatrical personalities’, Geagea’s use of these proverbs discredited political rivals as unreliable partners in politics.

Saad Hariri

Passed-On Family Politics

Saad Hariri was the Prime Minister of Lebanon between 2009-2011 and from 2016 until 2020, when he resigned due to the October 17 uprising. Saad Hariri is the son of Rafik Hariri, who was an economic and financial elite in post-war Lebanon, described as the wealthiest and most powerful man in Lebanon at the time, and a two-time prime minister between 1992-1994, and 2000-2004 (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). Due to Rafik Hariri’s business in Saudi Arabia, he established close ties with the Saudi royal family, which translated into their

support for the Hariris once they joined Lebanese politics, establishing the FM in 2003 (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012; Joffe, 2009). Rafik Hariri strengthened his political leadership through clientelist networks, building his public image in the media, and after 1998, focusing on his image as a Sunni community leader by strengthening his ties with Sunni religious figures (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). In 2005, Rafik Hariri was assassinated, after which Saad Hariri took over the family's socio-political assets, taking up the leadership of the FM and entering politics (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). The October 2019 protests broke out during his second tenure as prime minister, from which he resigned 13 days after the beginning of the protests in concession to the protests (Chulov, 2019). After his successor, Hassan Diab, resigned following the August 4 port explosion, Hariri was named prime minister again, resigning again nine months later due to failure to form a new government (Dadouch, 2021).

Hariri's Response: Defending Choices and Political Legacies

Hariri's first response took place on the second day of protests in a speech, addressing the nation, focusing on the concepts of nationalism and national unity. For example, he stated that "despite everything, we were and remain one family, its name is Lebanon" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Through the choice of the word 'family' Hariri emphasised national unity, while in his second address, he focused on dignity, for example, stating that "the aim of the political practices is to ensure people's dignity, and the dignity of the people is from the national dignity, with the feeling of self-governance and freedom and independence", continuing that "the clear demands, that they all are demanding is their demand of their dignity, and their respect, and the respect of their voice (AlArabiya ālʿrbyẗ, 2019). This repetitive reference to dignity illustrated a strategy of shifting focus on more abstract concepts, which also presented Hariri as concerned with a more fundamental issue of dignity as the basis for the immediate economic and societal concerns. Hariri's rhetoric recognised their pain, stating that "the pain of the Lebanese, it is true pain. I feel it, and acknowledge it, and I am with any peaceful movement that wants to articulate it", and their anger, recognising that "any population facing such political activity as the image you have seen in the past months and years, would have the reaction of anger, anger!" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Therefore, Hariri's rhetoric offered understanding and empathy to the protesters by recognising and mimicking their emotions. Additionally, he recognised their achievements, for example, stating that "what you did, broke all barriers, and shook all parties, movements, and leaderships, and the most important barrier that broke is the barrier of blind sectarian loyalty" (AlArabiya ālʿrbyẗ, 2019). Hariri particularly praised the threat to sectarian ideology

and the confessional system, thus, presenting himself per these ideals. He demonstrated on multiple occasions his support for the demands of the protesters, such as for the formation of a technocratic government, even if it meant a government excluding him, and for calling early parliamentary elections (Hariri, 2019a; 2019b; MTV Lebanon, 2020; LBCI Lebanon, 2020).

Hariri's rhetoric defended his credibility and achievements as a political leader, for example, he stated that "although this pain exploded yesterday on the street, I have been, more than 3 years, trying to solve its reasons, and offer real solutions to it" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Therefore, demonstrating earlier concern for the issues, however, he excused his inability to effect change in that "there was no delay nor barrier that were not placed in front of me" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Additionally, he explained to the audience the context around the 'political settlements' he had participated in, which may include the agreement among political elites to elect Aoun as president, reasoning that it was so that "the country does not go to a new civil strife", stating that after the start of the protests he "started to see things from new eyes", although he did not regret the settlements, "because I do not regret for a minute that I did my duty in protecting the country and returning regard to constitutional institutions" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Hariri, thus, justified his political decisions with an appeal to the fear of conflict. At the end of the first address, he gave himself a deadline, saying that "I, personally, have given myself a short time", specifically 72 hours, "either our partners in the settlement and the government give us a clear and decisive and final answer, that convinces me and convinces the Lebanese, and the international community, and everyone that are expressing their anger on the streets today, that there is a decision, from all, for reform, the end of wastefulness, and corruption, or else I will have something else to say" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Hariri, therefore, placed himself in line with the protesters and the international community as an entity that the government members need to convince. Additionally, this rhetoric represented Hariri as a leader that is responsive to the public, by applying to himself strict standards to comply with their demands. Later, Hariri resigned from his position as prime minister, offering his resignation to the president, additionally, he stated that he offered it to "the Lebanese people, in all areas, with responsiveness to the will of many of the Lebanese that went down to the squares to demand change" continuing that "positions come and go, but the most important is the dignity and the well-being of the country, and I say too, no one is bigger than their country", thus indicating his patriotism, and loyalty to the Lebanese people and the nation (Elnashra -

Speeches, 2019b). Responsiveness to the protests was further illustrated in his political communications, for example, in asserting that "the people went to the streets, and we heard them. I heard them, we all heard them", admitting that "they taught me many things, maybe I was overlooking", and, dismissing the claims that he had in mind to become prime minister again after his resignation, he emphasised that "I heard the voice of the people from the first minute" (MTV Lebanon, 2019). The rhetoric relating to listening, learning, and responding to the protesters was a portrayal to the audience of his character as a political leader that is heeding and responsive to his population. In another context, he stated that "democracy does not work without democratic leaders, leaders who hear the voice of the population, the voice of the people. I heard the voice of the people, the people demanded the resignation of the government, I submitted my resignation", therefore, presenting his action of resignation as a portrayal of his character as a politician; a democratic leader that is receptive to the demands of the people (LBCI Lebanon, 2020). Therefore, these communications reveal Hariri's use of the protest demands and his resignation as an example in his rhetoric to demonstrate a favourable image as a leader.

In general, Hariri's rhetoric appeared to be aligned with the rhetoric of the protesters, which is best exemplified by his statements which submitted to the protesters' contestation of all political leaders. On multiple occasions, he acknowledged that the protesters are "on the face of everyone, starting from us" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). In a later interview, Hariri stated that "we have failed", referring to him and all the other political leaders, thus appearing to hold himself accountable with the rest (MTV Lebanon, 2019). This rhetoric served Hariri's argument against other political leaders, by not allowing for any leader to appear unimplicated. In contrast, the FM did not "ride the wave of the popular anger" nor "depart ourselves from the political class in the time that there are many political faces that are making themselves out to be stars of a revolution on the screens" continuing that he accepted to carry responsibility, but that it should be shared by all, such as the president, the government, and the parliament (LBCI Lebanon, 2020). The sharing of responsibility by all was presented by Hariri as protecting him from targeting, stating that "I know there are many waiting to get their hands wet with Saad El Hariri, and to make us into a scapegoat, and there are people who started throwing their thugs on us, as they have previously done with the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). He compared the effort to blame him with what was done to his father, Rafik Hariri. This reference to his father is a stylistic choice in his rhetoric, which links his current political actions to the legacy of his late father,

which is substantial in Lebanese politics and demonstrates the continuation of the political practices from their political opposition from his father's time to his. Therefore, using the reference to his father, Hariri explains his targeting, which his rhetoric avoids by pointing out the responsibility of all.

Walid Joumblatt

The Adaptable Druze Leader

Walid Joumblatt belongs to the Joumblatt family, which is a prominent Druze family that has been "landowners and feudal lords over Druze areas in the Mountains for centuries" (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012, p. 225). The Joumblatt family gained the primary standing in the contested Druze leadership due to the rise of Kamal Joumblatt, the father of Walid Joumblatt (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). Kamal Joumblatt founded the PSP, a non-confessional left-wing party, and a war-time militia, in 1949 and he is considered "one of the most influential Lebanese politicians and intellectuals of the last century". After Kamal Joumblatt's assassination in 1977, Walid Joumblatt inherited the leadership of the PSP, however, he is described as lacking his father's "charisma and authority" (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012, p. 255). Initially, Walid Joumblatt was allied with Syria, however, due to troubles with the government at the end of the 1990s, Joumblatt joined the anti-Syrian March 14 alliance, which he withdrew from in 2009 (Goenaga & Mateos, 2012). This is characterised by Rowayheb (2011) as a strategy of political survival adopted by Joumblatt, where, for the sake of personal and party interests, he has portrayed the willingness to ally with any entity, without reservations (Rowayheb, 2011). During his political career, Joumblatt has served in ministerial positions and was a member of parliament until 2018, though, now he does not hold any political office apart from leading the PSP.

Joumblatt's Response: Growing Disapproval

Joumblatt's political communication regarding the protests began on the first day of the protests, through a Tweet. In the research period, Joumblatt was relatively active on the social media account, and the Tweets appeared as written and posted personally by him, particularly due to the unique, peculiar images accompanying the texts. The images conveyed deeper messages about the discussed topic and were repeated in several tweets discussing the same subject. The first Twitter post since the start of the protests relates to President Aoun, which Joumblatt accompanied with an image of a haphazard-looking robot, thus making comparisons with the portrayed robot and Aoun, which was reused in subsequent Tweets to denote Aoun (Joumblatt, 2019a). This first communication reflected Joumblatt's protest

political communication which often implicated his political rivals, particularly Aoun and Bassil. For example, Joumblatt named Bassil as a particularly guilty minister, who must resign, while the rest of the government should remain due to the fear of chaos and conflict (anbaaonline, 2019a).

Regarding the protests, Joumblatt's rhetoric messaged the need to accept the protest movement. For example, he stated that "whatever the remark of the civil movement towards us, we must accept them with all openness", stating that he "understands them" and warning his supporters that they "have to bear every criticism from the demonstrators" (Joumblatt, 2019b; 2019c; anbaaonline 2019a). With this rhetoric, Joumblatt portrayed himself as a political leader with a positive attitude towards the movement, by showing empathy and openness and bearing any attacks from them. In describing the protest movement, Joumblatt noted their importance in that they "united the Lebanese regions, broke the theory of the alliance of minorities, and crossed partisan and factional barriers" (Joumblatt, 2019d). What Joumblatt means with this reference to the 'alliance of minorities' is not clear; however, in this context, Joumblatt seemed to reference the paradigm of minority sectarian alliances, which he claims had been dispelled in the protest movement. Therefore, Joumblatt attributed positive anti-sectarian accomplishments to the protest movement. Joumblatt's rhetoric defended the protests from the violence they experienced, stating that "the attack on demonstrators is a red line", thus defining it as unacceptable (Joumblatt, 2019e). In a Twitter post on October 23, 2019, Joumblatt wrote: "no to the suppression of peaceful demonstrations from any side, not to the use of power by the organs in the face of freedom of opinion, no to the outdated conspiracy theories, theories of the dictatorial Arab regimes that suppressed peoples under the slogan 'no voice is above the sound of the gun'" (Joumblatt, 2019f). Joumblatt employed the rhetorical style of repetition of 'no' to emphasise his disapproval of the three concepts, thus, denouncing any violence on protesters, presented by describing demonstrations as an expression of the freedom of opinion, thus appealing to a common value, and he argued against protest suppression by discrediting the policy. Joumblatt displayed consistency in opposing violence against the protesters by resisting his own supporters' violence towards demonstrators. In a response to the sit-ins in front of his residence, Joumblatt apologised for any "enthusiasm" from the side of his supporters, in responding to these protesters, and for any "wrongdoing from our party", emphasising that he could not control his supporters, thus portraying his dissatisfaction for their response in this manner (anbaaonline, 2020b). This is best portrayed by Joumblatt's expressive on-screen

demand for his supporters to calm down, to "shut up a bit", and to go back home (anbaaonline, 2020b). Therefore, Joumblatt communicated that the protests should not be responded to with violence, even if it is directed towards him, thus, supporting their freedom to protest. Jumblatt continued that "they are destroying, we want to build" to argue that his supporters should not respond passionately, thus, the statement held the PSP to higher standards than that of the protest movement (anbaaonline, 2020b).

Despite his rhetoric in favour of the protests, Joumblatt often expressed criticism on several aspects. For example, he presented the protesters as, first, not listening to the reform proposals by the government, and second, as unable to dialogue due to a lack of leadership (anbaaonline, 2019a). Third, Joumblatt condemned the blocking of roads, due to their causing chaos and threatening societal harmony, stating that the method harmed people going to their jobs, and "creates sectarian tensions we are better-off without", thus, referencing the war-time associations related to the blocking of roads ('AL Jadeed News', 2019d; Joumblatt, 2019h). Fourth, Joumblatt criticised the protests as undeveloped in their approach, containing more talk than actual results. For example, regarding their demand for a secular state, he stated that "they did not specify the means to arrive at the separation of religion from the state, or to a secular state", and regarding their contestation of political leaders, he accused them of "burning all stages" and "toppling the political class", but noted that they "did not present a plan to replace it and take a hold of the rule from the inside" (AL Jadeed News, 2019d; Joumblatt, 2020). Therefore, Joumblatt emphasised their lack of solutions and practical means to reach their demands. Sixth, he criticised the protest for splintering, saying that "then there started to be movement one, movement two, movement three", portraying the protest movement as scattered, identified as lacking unity, and possessing an array of agendas (anbaaonline, 2020b; US Arab Radio, 2021). Seventh, he even rhetorically questioned the protests in an issue area that did not belong to the movement, namely the coronavirus, asking "where is it in the fighting against corona?", thus portraying their limited scope (anbaaonline, 2020c). These arguments represented Joumblatt's wide range of criticisms against the protest movement, mainly pointing out the inadequacy and failures of the movement.

Elite Protest Rhetoric Themes

The political communications demonstrate six rhetorical strategies in common with the seven political elites. This section will proceed by establishing these rhetorical functions, which will be labelled as the 'rhetoric of legacies', the 'rhetoric of non-generalisation', the 'rhetoric of

political rivalries', the 'conspiracy rhetoric' linked with the 'security rhetoric', the 'discretion to denounce' and, finally, the 'turning point rhetoric'.

The Rhetoric of Legacies

The protest communications of the political elites often relied on the 'rhetoric of legacies', referring to the close past and even historical reference, with the effect of arguing for their political legitimacy through the rhetorical use of ethos, namely appealing to their characters, and demonstrating shared values and interests with the audience proven by the past actions and stances of the elites themselves, their predecessors, parties, or families. For example, Aoun drew on his past to portray himself as trustworthy, stating: "I have a history, my history is my struggle. It cost me a lot, it cost me 15 years of my life, outside of my society. For whom? For freedom, sovereignty, and independence", similarly, in response expressed lack of trust by the population, Aoun answers "do I have a history or not? Let them revisit my history" ('Al Jadeed News', 2019b). Joumblatt made similar remarks, claiming that the party members that joined the movement "forgets 40, 50 years of sacrifices of the party", "forgets the thinking of Kamal Joumblatt, forgets the 1000s of martyrs" ('AL Jadeed News', 2019d). Joumblatt's rhetoric of legacies, thus, draws on the achievements of his father, as well as the concepts of 'sacrifice' and 'martyrdom' as valued ideals. In turn, Geagea noted in responding to contestation against warlords that "I have the pride that I participated with my comrades in the war. If we had not participated in the war that took place, Mr Albert, you, and I would not be sitting here, nor would there be a Lebanese Republic", continuing that "some of these chicks that have newly come up, they need to first read history to know what happened, and they need to at least thank us" (Geagea, 2019k). This rhetoric, thus, opposes the negative connotation attached to the 'warlord' status by the contestation by defending his civil war participation. Aoun, Joumblatt and Geagea indicate in their rhetoric that the contestation of their power is the ignoring of their histories and past sacrifices, which speak in their favour. Similarly, Nasrallah emphasised Hezbollah's high character of self-sacrifice for the nation by reminding that they "offered thousands of martyrs, and thousands of injured in defence of the dignity of our people, and his glory, and his honour, and his existence, and his life, and his integrity", referring to the Hezbollah martyrs of the Lebanon-Israel war in 2006 to argue for the party's carrying of responsibility over Lebanon's security (Qaptan14m, 2019). Nasrallah referenced the 2006 war and the Islamic Resistance to depict a pattern of Hezbollah's sacrifice for the nation, stating that "we protect them in the Resistance, and we pay the tax there; blood, martyrs, offspring, brethren, loved ones, men, women, and children in the

massacres, … Also in politics, in the domestic issue, we are implicated to protect the country" continuing that "we are ready to pay this tax" (Newsgate, 2019b). The comparison between the price they pay in the Resistance with the price they pay in domestic politics was an advantageous comparison to argue for their sacrifice for the nation, thus extending the rhetoric of sacrifice and martyrdom to their domestic politics, and the image of heroism.

Bassil argued continuity of heroic action for the FPM, making a historical comparison equating the period from 1990-2005, with the period from 2005-2020 (Bassil, 2020b). Bassil claimed that in the former 15 years, Aoun's supporters called for Lebanon's sovereignty, which was answered on March 14, 2005, and in the latter 15 years, FPM pioneered the fight against corruption, which was answered on October 17, 2019, and in both cases, the people proceeded to turn against them (Bassil, 2020b). The use of this comparison is in line with Bassil's continuous rhetoric that he and his supporters were "the true revolution" due to their history and current struggle against corruption and that "we are like you, we rose up against injustice" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019d; 2020c). Similarly, Geagea's rhetoric attempted to depict the LF as the original revolution, both relating to the LF's history, where Geagea claimed that they took all the same steps the 2019 protest movement has taken, as well as relating to LF's work in the government and parliament (Annahar, 2021; Geagea, 2019k; 2019l). Additionally, Geagea portrayed continuity in the LF's revolutionary stances, for example, he stated that "before there was the revolution of 17 October, … there was, since the year 1975, a revolution against invasion, and repatriation, and unauthorised weapons" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020g). Geagea proceeded to state that the LF "are the children of the revolution, and its grandchildren, we are its brothers and sisters", calling the LF martyrs "revolutionaries" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020g). Walid Joumblatt used similar terms to reference his father, stating in his commemoration that "Kamal Jumblatt is the first to call for change and fought corruption", presenting his father as a forerunner to some of the values the October 17 protests advanced, such as fighting corruption and advancing secularism, and stating that the PSP held the anti-sectarian demands of the 17 October protests, before October 17 (anbaaonline, 2019e; 'AL Jadeed News', 2020b). This rhetoric of the political leaders portrayed the utilisation of the term 'revolution' by the political elites as a mark of honour, which connected to favourable connotations, such as heroism and patriotism, by applying the terms to their legacies, and, in extension, to their current politics. The use of their personal, party, or paternal legacies in the face of popular contestation reveals the logic

of the legitimacy of their leadership, which still heavily rely on past conflicts, particularly civil war, and pre-civil war history.

In addition to using the past to argue for current positive images, the political leaders used their history and legacy to advance various arguments relating to the protests. For example, Bassil used the comparison of October 13, 1990 –the day marking the Syrian attack against Aoun and the massacre of surrendered soldiers and some civilians– and October 17, 2019, to illustrate a pattern that he and the FPM are under deliberate political attacks, with "the aim of both is to get rid of us" (Bassil, 2021c; Deeb, 2002). Similarly, Hariri responded to political opponents depicting the protest movement as a contestation against the FM by stating that "the problem is Rafik Hariri's head is wanted again, once again, and there are politicians who are still horrified of his prestige" (LBCI Lebanon, 2020). Therefore, using his father's legacy, Hariri portrayed that the contestation against the FM and the Hariri family was not new and was the result of long-running political spite. While Bassil's comparison aimed at reinforcing his argument on their past and current political targeting, Hariri's comparison aimed to delegitimise political contestation. Similarly, Walid Joumblatt delegitimised contestation against his leadership and the criticism of the gradual transfer of leadership to his son, Taymour Joumblatt, responding by stating that "we do not learn lessons by eliminating our past, allow me, the ones that said 'all of them means all of them', allow me, now Taymour wants to try his luck", and that "politics is continuity, they cannot, whoever they are, eliminate the ancient history of the Progressive Socialist Party in the struggle, from Kamal Joumblatt until now" (Alhurra - qnāẗ ālḥrẗ, 2020; AL Jadeed News, 2020b). The reference to the legacy of Kamal Joumblatt glorified the history of the PSP to justify Taymour Joumblatt's future in politics. Thus, the rhetoric of legacies portrays the elite use of language functions identified by Graber (1981) as the projection to the past to demonstrate a pattern for the present and future, in this case relating to their leadership and their party stances. Additionally, they utilised the tool identified by Kriesi (2004) as an issue-centred strategy, in which debates are shifted from primary issues to secondary ones, which in this case shifted from the protest's focus on corruption issues to more general considerations of morality in their past stances and actions.

The Rhetoric of Non-Generalisation: 'All of them means all of them'

The slogan "all of them means all of them" was particularly criticised by the political elites in the 'rhetoric of non-generalisation', where the elites, using the rhetorical argument of logos, argued against the aggregation of the political elites in the protester's contestation. For

example, Aoun expressed displeasure with the slogan since it wrongfully implied that "there are no *awedem*", or decent people, thus, the slogan is in error since it "includes the good and bad", distorting the truth (Aoun, 2020; Al Jadeed News, 2019b; Elnashra - Speech, 2020e). Similarly, Bassil noted that the slogan would cause a lack of true accountability and injustice towards innocents, stating that "if you accuse everyone, the corrupt and the decent, we will no longer be able to hold anyone accountable", continuing that "not all of us are corrupt and thugs" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019d). Bassil's rhetoric thus suggested the separation between "the decent from the corrupt" or thugs, with 'the decent' referring to him and his political party, portrayed by his statement that the slogan was "unfair to someone like me, for example" (Al Jazeera English, 2019, 2:02; Elnashra - Speeches, 2020a). Geagea, likewise, refused the equivalence between him and his political rivals in the form of the slogan, which was his only expressed criticism against the protest movement. Geagea stated that "no! Not 'all of them means all of them'", and that it is "like mixing the wheat with the chaff", insisting that "maybe the majority of them, yes", but that the LF represents the minority still holding the torch (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020g; Geagea, 2019l). Joumblatt exhibited similar sentiments, with more frustration, responding to the Sky News Arabiya anchor that "you need to differentiate a bit, because do not put me in the same basket of 'all of them means all of them', if you please, okay?" and proceeded to criticise the anchor, stating that "separate me from others" (skāy nywz ʿrbyẗ, 2020). Therefore, the political leaders' 'rhetoric of non-generalisation', through the criticism of the slogan, served as a rhetorical tool to distinguish themselves and their parties from the rest of the leaders, by disassociating themselves from the protester's characterisation of a uniform corrupt political class.

The Rhetoric of Political Rivalries

Elite communications on the protests engaged in 'rhetoric of political rivalries', which revealed the dynamics of inter-elite power competition. This rhetorical tool demonstrates the actor-centred strategy identified by Kriesi (2004), where actors shift the focus away from themselves to other issues or actors, thus, highlighting their rival elites in the rhetoric of blame and accountability, with Aoun's presidency as the main target. Joumblatt repeatedly interpreted the protest movement as action against 'the reign', which was facing its end, making way for the new Lebanon (Joumblatt, 2019a; anbaaonline, 2019b; 2019c; 2020a). Joumblatt particularly targeted Bassil as a minister that must step down, calling him Aoun's 'strong man', who is one of the main reasons for the failure of the government, and "the symbol of the tyranny of the government" (anbaaonline, 2019a; Joumblatt, 2019a).

Responding to attacks such as this, Nasrallah warned of political actors that take advantage of the movement to "clear political accounts with 'the reign'", as well as with the speaker of the parliament, and Hezbollah (mqābl῝ ālsyd ḥsn nṣr āllh, 2020). Nasrallah particularly defended Aoun's presidency, telling his political opposition that "you are wasting your time and tiring yourselves" and cautioning that "you cannot bring down 'the reign'" (Qaptan14m, 2019). Nasrallah's rhetoric demonstrated a grave attitude, with his straightforward rhetoric, strong language, simple and repetitive sentence structure, and powerful tone of voice. Similarly, Aoun noted that revolting against his presidency would mean the end, which he expressed by the rhetorical use of a phrase of condolence intended for funerals, to denote loss and extreme chaos (Al Jadeed News, 2019b).

Among the political leaders, Geagea particularly made several inferences to political rivalries, targeting Hezbollah, and the FPM, with a focus on 'the reign'. Geagea's rhetoric included accusing 'the reign' of inefficiency and causing further political decay, stating that "he is the person that most needs to do a re-examination and re-reading in everything" (Annahar Newspaper, 2019). He highlighted how the 2019 protests included "supporters of Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement on the street, and this is their great crisis", thus presenting their supporters' participation as a threat to these parties, while himself calling for his supporters to join the movement (Geagea, 2019c). The main rhetorical tool used by Geagea to present the protests as in opposition to his political rivals was the use of the distinction 'parliamentary majority'. For example, he stated that "the people are against the current ministerial, parliamentary majority", and he condemned the "current governmental majority", which he claimed has had the majority since 2009, defining them as "Hezbollah and its allies", thus, this qualification excluded the LF, presenting the dissent of the protests as against his political rivals specifically (Annahar Newspaper, 2019; Samir Geagea - smyr ğʿğʿ, 2019a; Geagea, 2020c; 2020d). This logic of 'majority' is controversial in Lebanese politics, since its practical significance is disputed, on the one hand, a representative majority provides an advantage in voting, while on the other hand, in several political situations, a majority is insufficient to effect change, since the consociational nature of the political system requires a consensus.

In the case of the two FMP leaders, their reference to political rivals was more general. Aoun accused political parties of taking advantage of the people, that they are controlled by "personal interests", and creating "noise that attempted to choke [the protest's] true voice and disturb it" (Aoun, 2019a). Aoun presented himself in opposition to other

political leaders, for example, stating that “every day, I talked about fighting corruption, and of course there are people that are annoyed of my talk, unfortunately people among the leaders”, pitting himself against the other political leaders (Aoun, 2019a). Similarly, Bassil accused certain political leaders of “preventing us from executing reforms from 2005, 2008 and 2016”, “riding the sincere popular movement”, attempting to “distort it from its rightful path to accomplish his political ends”, claiming that they “stole the sincere revolution”, and that the “militia even stole the sincerity of the people and the revolution of the thugs remained” (Elnashra, 2020h; Newsgate, 2019a). The rhetoric of political rivalries aligns with elite theory observations of insecurity and fear between disunified elites, due to the previous precedent, which in Lebanon is the legacy of the inter-elite conflicts of the civil war, and post-civil war political assassinations. With this political power shifting with crises, and with their political survival in line, anti-regime mass protests serve as context of threatening elite hold on power, thus explaining the reflection of political rivalries in the elite protest rhetoric.

Conspiracy Rhetoric

The rhetoric of political rivalries is closely connected to the subsequent theories and accounts advanced by several of the elites, identified as the ‘conspiracy rhetoric’. Conspiracy claims pertained to presenting links between the protests and protesters with domestic or international entities and plans. Aoun accused some of “harmonising with exterior powers to make Lebanon a ground to settle accounts”, which Bassil expanded on, warning that “there is a fifth column among the people” (Newsgate, 2019a; Elnashra - Speeches, 2020b). ‘Fifth column’ is a term referring to “compatriots [that] supposedly collaborate with a hostile foreign power to subvert the popular will” (Mylonas & Radnitz, 2022, p. 1), with the effect of questioning the loyalty of the accused party to the nation. Bassil warned that this fifth-column actor would “make problems, destruction, and break the country” (Newsgate, 2019a). Bassil particularly linked the civil society of the protest movement with the conspiracy of targeting him politically, accusing the activists and politicians of being behind the US sanctions towards him, stating that “now we know how to write ‘hela hela ho’ in English”, referring to the vulgar chant directed against him, thus, arguing that his political opponents were both behind the chant in the protests, and the US sanctions, these two actions having the same goal of Bassil’s “political assassination” with the US as its “international sponsor” (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020j). He particularly implicated the LF, asking them “is the destructive movement not enough?”, and stating how they “accelerated the collapse” and “made the lies of the revolution” (Bassil, 2021c). Thus, this rhetoric of the conspiracy by Bassil was a

counter-argument against his political targeting and the US sanctions against him: “It was funded and caused us political targeting and political assassination” (Bassil, 2021b). Additionally, he related the US sanctions with the protests by labelling the protests a “colour revolution”, referring to a concept for anti-governmental mass protests in post-Soviet countries, which has been expanded to describe anti-regime protests in many other countries, defined as “nonviolent protests aimed at changing existing quasi-democratic governments through elections” (Bērziņa, 2019, p. 331; Baev, 2011; Elnashra - Speeches, 2020j). Mass protests labelled as ‘colour revolutions’ have several common characteristics, however, Bassil’s rhetoric related to the foreign support of the movement, stating that “America uses [this tactic] in the whole world” in addition to “a group of countries, from the outside” (Bassil, 2021b; Beissinger, 2007; Bērziņa, 2019; Elnashra - Speeches, 2020j). Geagea responded to the claims that the movement’s goal was the political assassination of Bassil, and relating to foreign embassies, saying that such claims are a conspiracy without any basis in reality, arguing that the existing ruling powers are sufficient to ignite the protests, that these accusations are absurd and a political tactic by these political entities to shift the blame off themselves by misrepresenting the protest rhetoric (Haddad, 2019; Samir Geagea - smyr ğʿğʿ, 2019c). Overall, Bassil’s account of the political conspiracies related to the protests is both an appeal to reason and to fear to rhetorically argue for the involvement of political powers and rivals in the negative outcomes of the protests and his political targeting, thus utilising us-versus-them rhetoric. Bassil’s political targeting by a powerful establishment and network serves as an argument in favour of Bassil’s credibility, since the allegations imply widespread corrupt practices by the perpetrators, thus reflecting well on Bassil for being pursued by them.

In Berri’s rhetoric, he argues for the presence of a general conspiracy to “kidnapping [Lebanon] from the inside”, with an appeal to reason by offering several proofs for his claim, with one of them implicating the civil society as a threat against the power of the state continuing that “you know full well who is behind it and who trains it, and who funds it”, presenting the argument as common knowledge (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020f). These claims and accusations, then, implicated the protest movements as run by client civil society, and generally as a tool by political entities to undermine the Lebanese state. Additionally, linking to the rhetoric of political rivalries, he implicated some political actors with the exploitation of the protest movement, taking advantage of public movements and profiting off of “noble and righteous causes” for personal benefit, namely “cheap electoral and political goals”, and

even for the "fulfilment of suspicious agendas" (Elnashra - Speech, 2019f; NBN lebanon, 2021). Similarly, Nasrallah advanced conspiracy claims, although within Hezbollah's US-Iran conflict paradigm, stating that "there are people who rode the wave, well these are American", stating their motive as "their own conflict, the conflict of Iranian influence" (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019e). The protest movement is used by Nasrallah in his rhetoric to demonstrate that Lebanon is a US target within the larger conflict with Iran, by demonstrating a pattern. To prove Lebanon's significance to the US, he demonstrated a pattern of failure of the US agenda against Lebanon and the Resistance, stating that "Lebanon was also a part of the front and axis who defeated the American plan in more than one script: in the script of 1982, in the script of 2000, in the script of 2006, in the script of 2011" –referring to the 1982 Israeli military operation and invasion of Southern Lebanon, the withdrawal of Israel from Southern Lebanon in 2000, the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, and the 2011 incident most likely relating to the Syrian Civil War and the prevention of spill over of violence to Lebanon– continuing that due to the failure of these plans in Lebanon, the US is determined to make them "pay the price" by starting a war, "this war started a time ago, but if we want to give period specifically, just before October 2019", and the plan included "composing these organisations they call civil society organisations, and the NGOs", and assisting them with funding and mobilisation, "managed from the American embassy in Awkar" (klmẗ ālsyd ḥsn nṣr āllh, 2021). Nasrallah, thus, places the protest movement within a chain of events in the US 'war' against Lebanon and the creation of numerous crises in the country. For example, Nasrallah rebukes the cursing in the protest movement as the request of some political powers, arguing that the behaviour does not have precedent in Lebanon, stating that "this was not spontaneous, this was guided" (Newsgate, 2019b; Elnashra - Speeches, 2019c).

Likely in response to such claims of external meddling, Geagea insisted that the protests were "spontaneous, impulsive, sincere, transparent, direct", and defended it by stating that they are "Lebanese, 100% Lebanese", and that their only motivation was the living situation (Geagea, 2019h; Samir Geagea - smyr ǧʿǧʿ, 2019b; 2019c). On the other hand, Hariri's and Joumblatt's responses did not exclude the possibility of conspiracies and external meddling. Hariri's rhetoric argued that despite the possibility, "all of this does not remove that there is true pain that exploded yesterday", thus, the crisis was enough to cause such protests (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019a). Joumblatt reminded the audiences that "the struggle of nations is larger than us", and stated that he had inducted that "some want to use the Lebanese square, for other aims, we have had enough problems", and condemning "any

other movement that wants to steal the movement and insert it into the game of narrow opportunistic policies" (anbaaonline, 2019d; Joumblatt, 2019g).

The main threat brought about by the conspiracies, and other harmful aspects of the protests are presented in the rhetoric of the civil war. Already in his second address since the protests, Nasrallah warned "God forbid someone would be preparing for a civil war, as they did with several countries in the region and neighbouring countries" (Newsgate, 2019b). Similarly, Aoun reminds the youth engaged in a "discourse of hate and incitement" that their "parents knew all types of suffering in a destructive civil war, that destroyed most of their dreams and kidnapped the flower of their youth", warning of the "worrying civil war ambience" (Al Jadeed News, 2019c). In other cases, the civil war collective memory is referenced through the continued warning of chaos, thus engaging in 'security rhetoric'. For example, Berri warned of the return of chaos, how this is waking up sleeping devils in Lebanon, and how "bloodshed" was planned for Lebanon, but prevented (Berri, 2019e; NBN lebanon, 2021). He characterised the demonstrations as "a war against the deputies, ministers, restaurants, as well as public and private institutions" (Berri, 2020b). The framing of specific disruptive, and often criminal, behaviour as a war is a rhetorical tool to appeal to the fear of escalation and conflict. All of these rhetorical arguments of foreign conspiracies, client political elites and parties, preparations of chaos and conflict, and some of the references regarding political rivalries reveal the continued fear of civil war in the Lebanese political discourse, and thus in the national collective memory, ready to be utilised as an object of fear by political elites in their rhetoric. Therefore, the rhetoric may reveal inadequate reconciliation following the civil war in the social and political sphere, which then manifests in the face of threatening popular contestations of the elites' political powers. The elite rhetoric, additionally, portrays the continued distrust between the political elites, illustrated by the intense political rivalries manifested, particularly regarding suspicion of alliances between domestic actors and foreign powers, allowing crises and external meddling in Lebanese politics.

Discretion to Denounce

Despite the accusations relating to external meddling, the political leaders exhibited a rhetorical strategy best labelled as a 'discretion to denounce', revealed as the caution by the political elites in implicating all of the protesters in the negative commentary, particularly relating to violence. For example, Bassil made distinctions in his rhetoric between the participants deserving criticism, and the general public participating in the movement, for

example, in his negative evaluation clarifying that he is “not talking about the sincere movement”, or linking the injustice against him as relating only to a “minority among you” (Elnashra - Speech, 2020i; 2019d). Regarding the violence, he excused the “majority of the movement, which is sincere”, ascribing the violence to “some, very very very very few of the protesters”, and discussing the attacks towards the FPM and its supporters, Bassil warned that “the movement is for the decent people, and not for the thugs” (Āl-rfāʿy, 2020; Al Jadeed News, 2020a; Bassil, June 20, 2020). Later Bassil also claims that the “clean revolution left, and the client revolution remained” (Bassil, 2021c). Berri addressing the “serious and sincere in the movement” and expressing his support for “the real civil movement”, similarly, illustrated a distinction in his rhetoric between the different participants of the protests (Elnashra - Speech, 2020f; Berri, 2019d). And, while Nasrallah condemned cursing on the protest streets, he still distinguished that the “sweet and sincere do not have anything to do with all of this cursing and insults that have occurred” (Elnashra - Speeches, 2019c).

Similarly, Hariri voiced how the violence did not incriminate the revolution, since it did “not have any atom of the goals and values of the revolution”, condemning the clashes and vandalism in Beirut as “mercenaries and deliberate policies to strike the peacefulness of the popular movements” (Hariri, 2020a; 2020b; 2020d). In turn, Joumblatt called them to “return to the original movement, the peaceful one” (Hariri, 2020c). Berri particularly displayed a break between phases of the movement, stating that “at the beginning of the movement, I felt that I was one of them”, thus demonstrating amiable relations with the earlier protests, however, “with the days we noticed that things are changing and what is happening today has nothing to do with the revolution and the demands of the protesters” (Berri, 2020b). He demonstrated empathy, understanding and belonging towards the protesters in the beginning phases, however, the current protests were portrayed as engaging in destructive behaviour, which he delegitimised by disconnecting it from the proper demands of the protests. This rhetoric contrasted between the beginning of the protests and its manifestation in January 2020, portrayed as a decay of the movement, and thus, leading him to retract his support. With the continuation of violence, Berri’s rhetoric became more accusing and challenging towards the movement, stating that “today this movement is required to justify to us and the judiciary, does it approve of the attacks that took place?” (Berri, 2020d). Berri’s rhetoric did not directly equate the movement with violence; however, he offered a strong challenge against the credibility and legitimacy of the movement if they planned to continue with the violence and not denounce it, thus directing the criticism

towards the future of the protests. All in all, the rhetoric of the leaders portrays their general willingness to condemn violence in the movement, while being reluctant to condemn the protesters as a whole, and particularly the initial phases of the protests, thus limiting the condemnation to a subset of the participants or to later developments, which may be explained by the initial popular nature of the movement and its wide societal support, which, if condemned, would implicate a large portion of the Lebanese population. With the movement's popular nature and wide support in the public discourse, the denunciation of the movement or its participants as a whole would have appeared as a criticism of the general public, particularly against their discontent with the crisis.

Turning Point Rhetoric

Another commonality among the communications of the political leaders is what can be called the 'tuning point rhetoric', with the elites presenting varying arguments for the protests as either representing a juncture in ordinary politics or not. Geagea defended the changing of political course following the protests, by arguing for setting aside the results of the recent general elections in 2018, in favour of the wishes of the protesters, stating that "parliamentary elections occurred on October 17, on 18, 19, 20, and 25, newer than the elections that occurred in May 2018, we also want to take its results into account" (Samir Geagea - smyr ǧʿǧʿ, 2019b). Therefore, Geagea presented the protest movement as overweighing the earlier electoral process. The rhetoric of other elites, on the other hand, argued for the diminishing of the perceived influence of the protests, for example, by questioning the grounds to listen to them. Nasrallah questioned their representation of the Lebanese population, stating that "with my respect to the protesters, who says that this expresses the will of the Lebanese people? Elections also express the will of the Lebanese people" (mqāblẗ ālsyd ḥsn nṣr āllh, 2020). Additionally, he used the legitimacy of general elections to question their exclusive claim on public demands, such as the demand for early elections (Elnashra - Speeches, 2020d). Joumblatt, in his rhetoric, offered the protesters another way to 'bring down the regime', namely "in the elections, and the elections would be in a non-sectarian electoral law", thus, justifying the PSP preference "to stay in the inside" (anbaaonline, 2019b). Nasrallah's and Joumblatt's rhetoric insisted on ordinary political means, namely elections, in response to the contentious politics of the protest movement. Similarly, Berri suggested that the movement should be represented in the government, making up a sect of their own, therefore, these solutions still took place within the existing sectarian system (Berri, 2019c). All in all, this

rhetoric engaged with the question of the weight that must be given to the protests, whether popular protests overweighed ordinary politics, and whether they represented public opinion.

Conclusion

This research analysed the political communications of seven Lebanese political elites to answer the research question: *How did Lebanese political elites respond to the October 2019 anti-elite popular protests in their political rhetoric*? Overall, the political elites studied represented various rhetorical strategies in addressing the protest movement and the ensuing protest and public discourse. At the beginning of the protest movement, all of the political leaders extended their understanding and empathy towards the protesters, with many of them emphasising the movement's non-sectarian and non-partisan nature, and aligning themselves with the rhetoric of national unity and protest demands, particularly against corruption and sectarianism, thus, the research identified similar strategies as labelled by Geha (2019a) as co-optation and by Barroso Cortés & Kéchichian (2020) as 'mimicry'. Other strategies outlined in the literature were recognised as well, such as Geha's characterisation of counter-narratives, as exemplified by Rønn (2020) rhetoric relating to the unseriousness of the protesters and the threat to political stability, as well as Abu-Rish's (2015) note on the smearing of the protesters by presenting them as foreign agents. Therefore, this research is in line with previous literature, demonstrating similar rhetorical strategies employed by Lebanese political elites in the face of anti-elite protests. The findings are, similarly, in line with the literature on contentious politics, exemplifying the relations between the elites and the contesting public, ranging from cooperation to resentment, which the findings of the research demonstrate (Hanagan, Moch, & Brake 1998).

The findings of this study provide an in-depth analysis of several of the strategies employed by the political elites, thus expanding on previous research, such as identifying several key rhetorical themes employed by Aoun, Bassil, Berri, Hariri, Joumblatt and Nasrallah in their response to the 2019 protest movement. First, the political leaders relied on the 'rhetoric of legacies', namely individual, partisan, and familial histories, to respond to the popular contestations of their political power, to demonstrate patterns between the past and the present, and in applying positive connotations from the October 2019 protest discourse to their histories. The rhetoric of legacies demonstrates the persisting conflict rhetoric in the Lebanese political elite discourse, particularly utilising civil war stances and action as a persuasive tool to defend their political legitimacy. Second, the political elites utilised the 'rhetoric of non-generalisation' to criticise the slogan "all of them means all of them", which aggregated the political elites as a uniform corrupt class. The slogan's criticism provided them with the rhetorical tool to argue for their separation from the rest of the political elites

and delegitimise the protests through their slogan by presenting it as incompatible with true accountability. However, this rhetoric against generalisation stood in contrast to comments opposing political rivals from setting themselves as separate from the rest of the political elites. The 'rhetoric of political rivalries' is a third common reference in elite communications, in the form of strategically focusing on other actors to avoid personal accountability. Thus, the protest discourse was utilised by the elites for their political rivalries by persuading the audience of their opponents' blame and guilt, and presenting the protesters as targeting a particular political faction. Aoun's presidency, referred to as 'the reign', was at the forefront of the blaming of political elites, and the defence of others.

Fourth, the rhetoric of political rivalries expanded to wider 'conspiracy rhetoric', which argued for the implication of the uprising as either accidental or explicit agents, involving the civil society, and domestic political elites, parties, and organisations, in connection with foreign powers, namely identifying the US. These conspiracies were presented as politically targeting individual elites, involving Lebanon in US-Iranian tensions, and destroying Lebanon from the inside by bringing about crises, thus demonstrating a strong 'security rhetoric'. The legacy of the civil war is evident in the security rhetoric, revealing the fear of civil war and political rivals as an impending threat, and the intense 'us-versus-them' rhetoric in the Lebanese political discourse, 30-years following the formal end of the conflict. Fifth, the elite rhetoric demonstrated a 'discretion to denounce' the entire movement and its participants. The elites relied on the strategy of differentiating between protest participants and waves, to criticise certain aspects of the protests, such as security issues, blocking of roads and cursing, without implicating the general public. This rhetorical strategy has not been observed in previous literature, thus, providing new perspective into Lebanese elite responses to protest movements. Sixth, the political elites engaged in the 'turning point rhetoric', in which the elites interpreted the results of the protest movement of the subsequent political functions. The elites agreed that the protests represented a defining moment after which politicians must fight corruption more fiercely and bring accountability, however, there was disagreement on the elite power configuration. While some argued for the legitimacy of the previous general elections and for working within the current political institutions to reform it from within, other political elites argued for a new trajectory of politics following the protests, presenting the movement as a turning point, overruling the past elections.

The findings reveal the state of Lebanese political discourse, which is trapped in the rhetoric of the fear of civil war, security concerns, fear of conspiracies and intensive political rivalries. The elite responses demonstrate their perceived sources of legitimacy, on which they appeal in their persuasive language for their political survival in the face of contestation of their political power. These sources of legitimacy include their conflict legacies, ranging from the elite's past actions to the histories of their party, predecessors, and families. While all of the political elites engaged in the rhetoric of national unity in alignment with the movement's nationalist discourse, their recounting of past events hardly represents a unified historical narrative. The elites drew on widely different historical events, which were utilised for each of their respective purposes. These implications contribute to peace and conflict literature by demonstrating the utilisation of civil war memory in political rhetoric in a post-conflict society, even 30 years following the end of the civil war. Other research on Lebanese politics has highlighted the use of the Lebanese civil war memory as a tool against political rivals, as well as to defend the existing political system (Larkin, 2012). The rhetoric of legacies, political rivalries, and conspiracies, along with the security, civil war, and 'us-versus-them' rhetoric, suggests an inadequate resolution of the conflict at the level of political discourse, and, thus, the rhetorical utilisation of these memories for varying political purposes, in this case, the defence against contestation of their power and the threat of loss of support. The reliance on civil war achievements to mobilise support demonstrates the lack of alternate arguments for their authority as leaders and defence of their power. With the protest movement not convinced by any recent achievements of the political elites and accusing them of corruption, the political elites had to rely on a default source of legitimacy: civil war logic, political and partisan rivalries, and the fear of chaos.

Additionally, the findings display the dynamics of Lebanese political leadership, and elite rivalry, which demonstrates the functioning of the sectarian power-sharing political system in a post-war society. Studying the functions of a power-sharing system in practice is significant for peace and conflict studies since power-sharing systems are often offered as a solution for post-conflict governance in pluralistic and divided societies, which incorporates warring factions within a political system. The rhetoric revealed the highly competitive political competition between the political elites, who engaged in intense politics of blame, with serious accusations forwarded through conspiracy rhetoric. Their rhetoric was strongly partisan, while explicitly sectarian references were few, or altogether lacking, in their rhetoric regarding the protests. The lack of sectarian rhetoric could be explained by the anti-sectarian

nature of the protest movement, thus sectarian rhetoric would have placed the elites at odds with the protest movement, which the elites avoided, as illustrated by the rhetoric of 'discretion to denounce'.

This research contributes to peace and conflict studies by providing a communications perspective to post-war elite politics, by focusing on the use of rhetoric by political elites. Peace and conflict literature has scarcely studied elite rhetoric, particularly following the end of the conflict. This research proved an interesting link between peace and conflict studies and the study of elites and rhetoric through the finding of use of civil war memory and security threats for political survival. Thus, this research utilises and contributes to peace and conflict studies, elite studies, as well as research on rhetoric and popular protests. The analysis of the rhetoric of seven political elites contributes to the study of Lebanese leadership since their rhetoric has not been previously studied in a similar in-depth, systematic manner. Additionally, the findings may provide inferences to other cases of post-war societies, where war-time elites and their successors remain in power and illustrates a case of elite interaction with the public in the context of popular protests and power contestation.

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Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2019c, October 18). hḏh ālmrẗ ālāwlā ālty ynzl ālnās ālā ālšārʿ mn kl ālmnāṭq wālṭwāʾf wālāḥzāb fhnāk mn mnāṣry "ḥzb āllh" w"āltyār ālwṭny ālḥr" [This is the first time that people from all regions, sects and parties have taken to the streets. There are supporters of “Hezbollah” and the “Free Patriotic Movement”] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1185270304517578752

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Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2019f, October 20). wʿdm āldẖwl fy āy ḥkwmẗ ğdydẗ wtrk ḥkwmẗ bālfʿl ğdydẗ ttškl ʿndhā āʿtqd ān ālmtẓāhryn sykwnwn rāḍyn wnbdā bḥyāẗ syāsyẗ [And not to enter into any new government and let a new government actually take shape, then I think the demonstrators will be satisfied and we start a political life] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1185964002381312002

Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2019g, October 26). tsʿẗ āyām wākṯr mn nṣf ālšʿb āllbnāny fy ālšwārʿ yṣrẖ wlā mn ysmʿ wlā mn ytğāwb. hl mn fḍyḥẗ wlā [Nine days, and more than half of the Lebanese people are in the streets screaming, with no one listening or responding. Scandal or not] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1188023692841902080

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Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2019i, November 6). ālqẃat kmā dāʾmā hy bānsğām mʿ nāshā wmğtmʿhā wlānnā kḏlk ẖrğnā mn ālḥkwmẗ wālğmyʿ yʿlm ānnā knā nʿyš ḥālā mn [The forces, as always, are in harmony with their people and society, and because we also left the government, and everyone knows that we were living in a state of] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1192022295289745410

Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2019j, November 6). nryd ḥkwmẗ āẖṣāʾyyn mstqlyn lā ʿlāqẗ lhm bālākṯryẗ ālsyāsyẗ ،wāy mḥāwlẗ ltškyl ḥkwmẗ āẖṣāʾyyn tsmyhā hḏh ālākṯryẗ āmr mrfwḍ whḏā [We want a government of independent specialists who have nothing to do with the political majority, and any attempt to form a government of specialists that this majority calls is unacceptable and this is a] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1192019788568178689

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Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2020a, January 8). ānhā lkārṯẗ fʿlyẗ ،ānhā lǧrymẗ ḥqyqyẗ ،lqd āḍāʿ ālmʿnywn ḥtā ālān ḥwāly ālṯlāṯẗ āšhr whm ybḥṯwn fy ǧns ālmlāʾkẗ ،fy [It is an actual catastrophe, it is a real crime. So far, those concerned have wasted about three months searching for the sex of angels, at] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1214853627669553153

Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2020b, January 29). tmknt ālāntfāḍẗ mn tḥqyq āhdāf kṯyrẗ lm ykn hdfhā ḥṣrā āsqāṭ ālḥkwmẗ wlyst kmā ḥāwl ālbʿḍ tṣwyrhā bānhā tsthdf šḫṣ [The uprising was able to achieve many goals, and it was not exclusively aimed at overthrowing the government, and it was not, as some tried to portray it, that it targeted a person] [Tweet; thumbnail link to article]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1222507835432611843

Geagea, S. (2020c, February 18). rd rʾys ḥzb "ālqwẅāt āllbnānyẗ" smyr ǧʿǧʿ ʿlā ḫṭāb ālāmyn ālʿām l"ḥzb āllh" ālsyd ḥsn nṣrāllh ālāḫyr [The head of the "Lebanese Forces" party Samir Geagea responded to the recent speech of the Secretary-General of "Hezbollah" Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah] [video]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=213606209791467

Geagea, S. (2020d, June 30). mqāblẗ lrʾys ḥzb "ālqwāt āllbnānyẗ" smyr ǧʿǧʿ ḍmn brnāmǧ "ʿšryn30" mʿ ālāʿlāmy ālbyr kwstnyān ʿbr āl-"LBCI" [An interview with the head of the "Lebanese Forces" party Samir Geagea within the "Twenty 30" program, with the journalist Albert Costinian, via "LBCI"] [video]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=624320778178112

Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2020e, October 17). ṯwrẗ ḥtā blwġ ālāhdāf... [revolution until the goals are reached] [Tweet; image attached]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1317373949496446977

Geagea, S. [@DrSamirGeagea] (2021a, January 16). ānā fẖwr bān āʿln ānh ʿqb āntfāḍẗ ālšʿb āllbnāny fy tšryn ālāwl 2019 ālslmyẗ ʿlā ṭbqth ālḥākmẗ ālfāsdẗ ،kān ḥzb [I am proud to announce that following the peaceful uprising of the Lebanese people in Ocober 2019 against their corrupt ruling class, the party was] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1350338714438926336

Geagea, S. (2021b, November 27). lqāʾ rʾys ḥzb "ālqwāt āllbnānyẗ" smyr ǧʿǧʿ mʿ ṭlāb "ālqwāt āllbnānyẗ" LFStudents.com fy ǧāmʿẗ āllwyzẗ ،fy ḥḍwr ālnāʾb strydā ǧʿǧʿ [The meeting of the head of the "Lebanese Forces" party, Samir Geagea, with the students of the "Lebanese Forces" LFStudents.com at the University of Louaize, in the presence of MP Strida Geagea] [video]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=977345866457987

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%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%A9_%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1

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consequences. Won't be] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/saadhariri/status/1218585178072809472

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[Whatever the civil movement's remarks towards us, we must accept them with open arms. It is useful to hold central dialogues with them about] [Tweet; image attached]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/walidjoumblatt/status/1185520328874831872

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Joumblatt, W. [@walidjoumblatt]. (2019e, October 22). ān ālāṣlāḥāt ālty āʿtmdt hy mḫdrāt wāhyẗ lbʿḍ ālwqt wān byʿ ālqṭāʿ ālʿām ğrymẗ wqd rfḍnāhā bālāms .ālā mtā yā [The reforms that were adopted are a weak drug for some time, and selling the public sector is a crime, and we rejected it yesterday. How long] [Tweet; image attached]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/walidjoumblatt/status/1186584075676606464

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image attached]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/walidjoumblatt/status/1187109495840890885

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