



# The Art of Reconciliation

Understanding art from the October revolution through  
multimodal discourse analysis as a part of a reconciliation  
process in Lebanon

Characters: 69 870

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# Abstract

The art of the October revolution 2019 in Lebanon expresses narrative processes that this thesis argues can be understood as a part of the Lebanese reconciliation process relating to the civil war of 1975-1990. Following an understanding of reconciliation as a process focused on transforming relationships on mainly a societal level, and emphasizing the connection between art and shaping narratives, these findings illuminate ongoing reconciliatory change in Lebanon. Through multimodal discourse analysis rooted in a constructivist ontology, conceptual representations and narrative processes are interpreted in art pieces from three Instagram accounts dedicated to the revolution. This thesis argues that the narrative processes of breaking free, becoming Lebanese, unification, healing, and standing up to the elite, can be understood as both expressing a transformation of relationships between former adversaries in Lebanon's 18 sects, as well as constituting a change in social beliefs of identity, past, and future. This points to the October revolution and its art as breaking path dependence on reconciliation in Lebanon, making new steps forward possible.

Key words: *reconciliation, multimodal discourse analysis, Lebanon, the October Revolution, art and peacebuilding, societal beliefs*

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# 1 Introduction



(@art\_of\_thawra 62)

*A chain of persons holding hands, with the identity marker being that they all have the shape of Lebanon - colored as the Lebanese flag - for heads.*

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, a revolution started in Lebanon. As it took over the streets, so did art, covering buildings, walls, and dominating social media. Looking at representations and processes in the revolutionary art, national identity narratives and calls for unity over sectarian divisions are prominent. Whereas art with an identity claim is conventional in post-conflict societies, what stands out in the Lebanese case is the theme of unity rather than division. It is intriguing whether these representations point to the revolution, and its art, as playing part of a process of reconciliation.

What began as a direct response to a new tax quickly gained momentum as a movement against a corrupt elite, the handling of the economy, and the sectarian system which divides the Lebanese into confessional groups. This revolution sets a thought-provoking scene for studies of reconciliation, as political instability in weak post-conflictual societies has been known to lead to revived conflict or

hostility towards the other (Walter 2010:7-8). In Lebanon, however, this revolution is said to be the first instance of protest where only the national flag was used, in which unity outside sects was sought after, and where even the most exclusive sectarian narratives and their leaders were challenged from within - as the people turned on the elite in power.

## 1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to explore processes of change related to reconciliation in Lebanon by looking at art from the October revolution 2019. The hypothesis is that this revolutionary art can be understood as expressing, solidifying, and co-creating a unifying narrative, communicating an identity to replace exclusive narratives built around sectarian divides. Therefore, it can be understood as playing a part of a reconciliation process to transform relationships, despite not explicitly dealing with the civil war itself.

The art in question represents a particular case of art in post-identity-conflict contexts, as it is not primarily about the conflict nor a continuation of divisive narratives, but instead deals with the present and processes of group transformation. Contrary to the well-known murals of Northern Ireland, where art is used to strengthen one's identity narrative, the art of the October revolution can be understood as used for unification. As art can play different roles in a post-conflictual context, it is intriguing to look at art as an organic part of a reconciliation process. Art is growing as a policy in peacebuilding, but this case positions itself in that it is neither prescribed for reconciliation nor dealing primarily with the past. Although this is not a comparative study, the conclusions reached could potentially be used to understand the contribution and possibilities of art in post-conflict zones more broadly. The research question is formulated as;

**How can art during the first month of the October revolution in Lebanon be understood as part of a reconciliation process?**

## 2 Background

In an interpretative study, context is essential to understand the case. This section will outline the main aspects of the civil war causing the need for reconciliation, the political context of Lebanon, as well as the October revolution.

### 2.1 The Lebanese civil war and sectarian system

Dating back to before Lebanon gained independence in 1943, the political system has been built on confessionalism. Formally it is based on a census in 1932 measuring the diversity of the people, from which quotas were derived to divide all legislative, judicial, and civil service positions between Lebanon's 18 sects. These confessional minorities have since tended to concentrate geographically and reinforce socioeconomic divisions (Zahar 2005:2-3).

For the top positions, this means the President has always been a Maronite Christian, the President of the National Assembly, a Shi'a Muslim, and the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim. This power-sharing agreement based on sects is not constructed to update when demographics change, and according to Faten Ghosn & Amal Khoury, the system created was fragile to corruption, nepotism, and did not tend to the public interest. They further state this as a fundamental reason for the outbreak of the civil war, along with economic inequalities, and regional conflicts spilling into Lebanon (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:382-383).

The civil war began in 1975, ended formally in 1990, and caused over 144 000 killed and 750 000 displaced (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:382-383) in a country that had a population of 2,5 million at the start of the war (World Bank Group 2020). A minimum of 17 000 went missing, 13 000 were kidnapped, and the number of injured measures at 184 000 (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:382-383). It was fought by

numerous political and sectarian militias and the government, but also involved Palestinian groups and the Israeli and Syrian states. Israel withdrew in 2000, while Syrian forces remained in Lebanon until 2005. Hezbollah, now a Shi'a political party, continues to have its armed forces (UCDP 2020).

At the end of the war, The Document of National Reconciliation – the Ta'if Accord – marginally altered the sectarian power-sharing to reflect better current demographics, as well as further institutionalized it. On the other hand, it also called for a gradual end to confessionalism, although no such steps have since been taken (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:384). On the contrary, an article by Hoda Baytiyeh serves as an example of how instabilities since have been used to strengthen sectarian leadership, or are perceived as missed opportunities to do so. Baytiyeh, in this instance, argues tensions in-between Christian sects have weakened the position of the Christian community as a whole (2018:219-220).

Bassel F. Salloukh et al. argue these sectarian and confessional divisions to be the primary shapers of identity in postwar Lebanon. They are reproduced and constructed not only through the political system, but also through personal status law, which differs depending on one's sectarian affiliation. According to Salloukh et al., the absence of a civil personal status law is a further example of the institutionalization of religious authority, as one cannot completely opt for a secular identity neither legally nor politically. However, in the 2000s, a reformist movement gained ground. It is now acceptable to leave boxes blanc in forms and applications, something Salloukh et al. claim to be a first step towards embracing national identities and building a civil state (Salloukh et al. 2015:34-37).

Public and private are highly intertwined in Lebanon, a critical factor in understanding why economic conditions led to a revolution calling for an end to sectarianism. Salloukh et al. point to state funding being subcontracted to private companies, often owned by the sectarian elite, and the high number of organizations and civil society funded by the state that also have strong connections to sectarian elite networks. Some schools and hospitals are among the institutions run by sectarian organizations, with Salloukh et al. emphasizing how this can enable

sectarian narratives (Salloukh et al. 2015:46-49). The first held election after the beginning of the revolution 2019, for the Beirut Bar Association, was therefore viewed as a big success, when an independent candidate was voted head of the organization (Daily Star 2019).

## 2.2 The October Revolution 2019

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, unprecedented demonstrations erupted nationwide, motivated by a deep economic crisis. The demonstrations have since been mostly peaceful but met with some excessive use of force from the Lebanese Army. After thirteen days of protests, the government of Saad Hariri resigned. Even so, the revolution is ongoing, due to its more general demands of changing the political system, saving the economy and electing new people on non-sectarian grounds (Amnesty International 2020, Sullivan 2019, Yazbeck 2019).

At the start of the revolution, Lebanon had the third-highest public debt in the world, an unemployment rate at 20%, and very high levels of corruption. A state of economic emergency was declared by the government in September 2019, after which the currency began to crumble, with serious effect on imports of, for example, gas, wheat, and medicine, which generated public outcries and strikes (Sullivan 2019, Lemon 2019). A few days before the start of the revolution, the worst wildfires in years raged outside of Beirut, illuminating neglect in the maintenance of the planes supposed to fight the fire. The fires were further subject to sectarian political responses, which infuriated the public (Sullivan 2019).

The spark that ignited the protests was a government-announced tax on Internet voice-call services, with the public arguing this showed a fundamental lack of understanding of the people's struggles. Roadblocks were called upon as a protest, thus starting what would develop to a revolution (Sullivan 2019). Local media reported over a quarter of the population taking part on the fourth day of the revolution, estimating 1.2 million protesters nationwide (Lemon 2019).

Besides calls for economic reform and meeting of basic needs, all gatherings of protesters also rejected sectarian identities and demanded the resignation of the government and all elected on these grounds (Sullivan 2019). Cybelle Yazbeck describes the revolution as a “new non-sectarian unified move” (2019), and point to how this is perceived as critical due to many previously having lost hope in unifying the country (Yazbeck 2019). The failing economic system is deemed tied to sectarianism, and no longer working in favor of the majority (Newsweek 2019, Majzoub 2020). Within a couple of days, though, a few smaller groups started to counter-protest in support of their sectarian leader, with some even attacking those calling for non-sectarianism (Bergman 2019), leading to concerns whether the revolution could cause a return to violence (Qiblawi et al. 2019).

Yazbeck points to the width in participation, from people chanting on the street and blocking roads, to educating people on corruption, to protesting through making art on social media. As the Lebanese diaspora is estimated to be over two and a half times larger than the population in the country, they are argued to have played a vital part in developing the revolution online (Yazbeck 2019, Ahmad 2019, Pukas 2018).

Despite deep regional sectarian lines, traditional Sunni areas have been reported to chant about wanting revolt for the south – where Shi'a dominated cities were protesting for non-sectarianism while facing threats from the Amal movement and Hezbollah, Shi'a political parties. Protesters have pointed out this to be a defining difference in this protest to previous ones in Lebanon, that people are expressing solidarity instead of taking orders from sectarian leaders (Sullivan 2019). According to Lina Khatib, this is the first time a change in the political system has been called for, with people rejecting sectarianism as a basis for electiveness. While previous protests have planted seeds of non-sectarian organization, this one was founded on that grassroots movement across the entire country, even in parts where public criticism of one's sectarian leader previously has been considered impossible. While Khatib wrote her piece as early as on October 20<sup>th</sup>, she deemed this a social revolution already, no matter the political outcome (Khatib 2019).

## 3 Theory

In this section, previous research on reconciliation in Lebanon will be outlined to position the contribution of this thesis to the field. The theoretic understanding of the what, how, when, and who, in reconciliation, will then be clarified, along with its implications in this research. Here, extra attention is paid to the discussion of identities and narratives. Last but not least, the connection between this understanding of reconciliation and the field of art and peacebuilding is explored.

### 3.1 Previous research - reconciliation in Lebanon

Scholars have argued the so-called stable peace in Lebanon to have come at the expense of national reconciliation, where sectarian identity remains more vital than the Lebanese identity (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:380). Reconciliation has been treated as an end goal, where only villages with specific experience of communal violence were selected for mediation. With reparation and rebuilding of infrastructure conditioned on signing a document of reconciliation, Dima De Clerck argues the new social bonds to be artificial (2014:50-54). She agrees with Ghosn & Khoury on the root causes not being confronted or rehabilitated in the post-conflict process. There has, however, been a relative success in maintaining the absence of direct violence between groups (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:386-390, De Clerck 2014:56).

Much critique has been directed at the no winners, no losers-agenda favored by politicians, starting with the Ta'if-agreement and the blanket amnesty law of 1990. Viewed by the people as accommodation for warlords, it has been perceived as consolidating elite positions, rather than enabling reconciliation through truth and justice for citizens (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:388-390). This political culture of

amnesia has led to NGO's attempting to fill the gap in how to address a war with contested truths, with Oren Barak referencing this as a task of remembrance which challenges a civil society mostly based on kinship (Barak 2007:52-54).

With reconciliation becoming politicized and history a product of compromise, also civil society promotes different understandings of the war, its memory, and how to reconcile best (Abou Assi 2012:401, 407). The education system plays a part in this, as schools function as principal confessional institutions rather than integrating different sects (Barak 2007:63), and above that only teaches history up until 1943, leaving information of the war left to relatives due to the lack of consensus on the war period. Non-sectarian civil society has achieved some progress across religious lines and narratives. However, with limited resources, they have not been capable of outcompeting narrower sectarian remembrances (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:391-396, Salloukh 2019:342).

Much research has gone into how the memory of the war is commemorated, contested, and used selectively to uphold or challenge the official confessional balance of power and the political system itself (Salloukh 2019:341, Abou Assi 2012, Barak 2007). Many have supported the call for truth- and factfinding missions as a historical base on which to build Lebanese society and democracy (Barak 2007:58, Abou Assi 2012:401, Fahed 2018:44-48). Other research has focused on the implementation of national and international efforts at reconciliation and evaluation of official strategies (Berti 2014, De Clerck 2014), concluding the state approach of thin reconciliation in favor of accommodation has been a failed one. The civil society approach is deemed more successful but still considered as challenged and contrasted due to a lack of consensus on the past or the future. According to a 2009 minor survey, 85% viewed themselves as not reconciled (Ghosn & Khoury 2011:386-387). Without progress on truth and justice, many have been skeptical of the possibility of moving forward.

Both Barak and Benedetta Berti argue the non-sectarian movement has gained ground, starting with the murder of former prime minister Hariri 2005. While appropriating national symbols and changing discourse of war memory through

major demonstrations, this nationalistic move is argued to have been paralleled by sectarian approaches on how to move forward (Barak 2007:66-69, Berti 2014:122). Ziad Fahed argued in 2018 that a challenge facing Lebanese reconciliation was citizens daring to declare a secular allegiance over their confessional one (2018:49). This thesis argues this movement to have gained a different momentum with the October revolution and therefore making new forms of reconciliation possible, despite not dealing explicitly with the civil war. On the contrary of what De Clerck predicted, a collapsing state has not enabled a resumption into intercommunal violence (2014:56) but instead seems to have united people against the political elite. This makes this revolution and its art an intriguing case for understanding reconciliation, as it has possibly altered relationships between former enemies.

In the context of reconciliation and art in Lebanon, Salloukh has researched smaller galleries displaying artworks relating to the war as a therapeutic space for forgiveness and remembrance, to counter the hegemonic war memory promoted by political elites. He explains the lack of space within society at large for these kinds of developments, with divisive narratives growing at the expense of community reconciliation (Salloukh 2019:356-357). This thesis further explores the effect of creativity in the Lebanese case in a new social context and focuses on the transformative aspect of art in discourse when spaces do open up in society at large. Contributing to an understanding of reconciliation in Lebanon in light of new developments, this thesis might challenge the position of scholars who have argued truth, justice, and forgiveness the only path forward.

## 3.2 Reconciliation

In academia, as in everyday life, the concept of reconciliation carries different meanings depending on the context. In the field of peacebuilding, reconciliation has emerged with a constructivist ambition to transform relationships between former adversaries. It has been argued to be an important part of both conflict resolution, prevention and transformation (Assefa 2015:237), but the central part of the

literature on reconciliation focus on the post-conflict reality and moving from negative peace to positive peace (Tang 2011:714).

Reconciliation studies have benefitted from interdisciplinary research, evolving as a field in the intersection between multiple professional communities. For those interested in thick reconciliation, psychology and theology have influenced practice and theory, while those adhering to a thin definition have teamed up with law and conflict resolution. In the debate of whether reconciliation is a process or an end goal, advocates for the thick definition tend to be process-oriented and looking to change hearts and minds. In contrast, those advocating a thin definition have been known to focus on the end goal of sufficient transformation for co-existence in daily life (Lederach 1998:24, Bar-Tal 2000, Auerbach 2009:292, Rettberg & Ugarriza 2016:520-521, Småberg 2017:305-307). This plurality in the field has led to different approaches and focus areas in both theory and empirics.

Shiping Tang uses narratives and identity as one way to distinguish between shallow and deep reconciliation; in the former, the adversaries have few, if any, collective narratives, while they in the latter share significant narratives and “strong but limited common identities” (Tang 2011:713). Like many others, he argues the approach to alter relationships is dependent on the post-conflict context, and that there might be a more pressing need for thick reconciliation after an intrastate conflict, than after an interstate one (Tang 2011:714, Kriesberg 2007:16). This can be argued to correlate with the level of psychological involvement in an intractable conflict (Auerbach 2005:43-44), and the claim that it is not enough to resolve underlying issues to the conflict in intrastate conflict, but also needed to transform relationships between those involved (Assefa 2015:238). Building on this, reconciliation will, in the context of this thesis, be understood in its thick sense, and with a process-oriented outlook.

Turning then to the ‘how’ of reconciliation, a steppingstone in the field of process-oriented reconciliation has been the four elements of reconciliation, as presented by John Paul Lederach; truth, justice, mercy, and peace (Lederach 1998). While truth and justice seem to be agreed upon as fundamental features, although debated on

how to be achieved, the last two have been subject to more discussion. Louis Kriesberg, for example, has opted for respect and security (2007:4-6) and Nadim M. Rouhana for historical responsibility and restructuring of social and political relationships (2004:176).

Another divide in the field has been the role of forgiveness. The theological connotation to reconciliation has been critiqued for its Christian partiality to forgiveness, among others by Rouhana, who argues a therapeutic model is wrongfully forced upon contexts with decades of power relations and group identities. He instead proposes major political and social restructuring to be necessary in order to correct the institutionalization of past wrongs. As Rouhana argues forgiveness to be but a substitute for the healing structural change can bring (2004:174, 180), this can be seen to play a part in the move to differentiate between interpersonal and intergroup reconciliation (Tang 2011:714). Yehudith Auerbach, on the other hand, argues forgiveness to be a necessary condition for genuine reconciliation, as it covers the spiritual and moral transformation needed (2005:53-54). Maria Småberg, in turn, points to the immense responsibility placed on individual victims, and advocates – similarly to Rouhana – that forgiveness could be part of a reconciliation process but is not a prerequisite to it (Småberg 2017:308). Understanding reconciliation on a societal level, rather than individually, this thesis will adhere to this line of thought.

Continuing on the group psychological side of reconciliation, altering societal beliefs has been furthered as a key concept. Lederach conceptualized reconciliation “as a process of encounter and as a social space” (Lederach 1998:29), where the sharing of perceptions is vital to jointly create new, shared ones (1998:26-27, 30). The extent to which former adversaries share a social system and a common identity has been argued to have a strongly positive effect on their degree of reconciliation (Kriesberg 2007:15-16). Collectively shared representations refer to a group’s sense of social reality, making discourse and reproduction of narratives crucial to either uphold or change conflictive identities, as well as a force to vitalize action (Auerbach 2005:45, Bar-Tal 2014:3-7). Building on this, Daniel Bar-Tal argues changes in societal beliefs come about through replacing societal goals, viewing

one's adversary as a balanced heterogeneous group, viewing one's ingroup more objectively, constructing new beliefs of the relationship between groups and lastly changing the belief on what peace entails (2000:356-359).

Having arrived at the theoretic standpoint of reconciliation as a social space of encounter, where the process of altering relationships through changing societal beliefs is at the core, the question of when comes into play. For the sake of the research question in this thesis, the focus will be on reconciliation post-conflict.

It has been proposed that there is path dependence in how a reconciliation process proceeds; Tang argues certain events and periods to define the path of reconciliation – for instance, the measures taken directly after negative peace is achieved. Through institutionalized memory, these consolidate the post-conflict goals and can explain the outcome of the reconciliation process. Following this line of thought implies the need for a turning point, often a crisis, according to Tang, to break the path and create new possibilities (Tang 2011:741-743). Likewise, Kriesberg touches upon contemporary social, political, and economic conditions as contextual factors playing into the developments of a reconciliation process (2011:13). Rouhana, in turn, addresses the willingness to reconcile in an asymmetric process as an imperative factor to consider, illuminating that a new generation with less psychological scars can increase the willingness to potentially lose power in a reconciliation process (Rouhana 2004:182-183). However, new paths to reconciliation between two groups might come at the expense of another (Kriesberg 2011:2-3).

As narratives related to an intractable conflict become even more consolidated, and the questioning of a narrative can be perceived as weakening (Bar-Tal 2014:16), this long-term thinking might be necessary for a thick reconciliation process. It might also be needed to recognize the different levels of kinds of reconciliation within a large-scale group, as it might vary between hatred to full unity (Kriesberg 2011:2-3). Auerbach has presented a narrative-based pyramid of reconciliation which focuses on steps needed in reconciliation, incorporating both the thin and thick definition as well as reconciliation as a process and as a goal (Auerbach

2009:303-304). Even though this model could be seen to be fitting, this thesis agrees with Rouhana and Småberg that forgiveness need not be as central as Auerbach argues it to be. The psychological process at a group level is of more relevance for this case, and as mentioned, the level of forgiveness can vary in a group. However, the perspective of reconciliation as narrative change throughout a process of encounter echoes similar to Lederach's conceptualization and Bar-Tal's focus on societal beliefs, a perspective this thesis adheres to.

In the question of who, the levels of grassroots, middle-range, and top leadership, as defined by Lederach, are often used to debate what is most effective in peacebuilding. If one holds a trickle-down belief, the symbolic actions of public figures and top leadership is argued to affect the attitude of the greater masses (Lederach 1998:44), and the act of seeking apology has, for example, become a discursive tool for representatives of states or groups (Rouhana 2004:173). Lederach argues, however, that reconciliation needs to occur on other levels as well in order for progress made at the top level in a peace process to not be under constant danger of collapse (1998:34), and looking to the role of transforming relationships, this then has to occur on a societal level rather than only between leaders (Rouhana 2004:175). Even with the top-level setting the agenda, institutions function to enable or complicate reconciliation processes (Kriesberg 2007:16), and the conditions of which the general public lives influence processes of peace and reconciliation. Following this, this thesis agrees with Lederach in looking at relationship building at middle-range and grassroots levels, as these tend to be the long-term key to societal change (Lederach 1998:43, 52, 100).

### 3.3 Art and peacebuilding

In transforming relationships and narratives, art has been argued to have reconciling power. Mostly drawing on its psychological influence, scholars have promoted art as a tool in constructing identities and fostering relationships. Katherine Wood, for instance, points to the simultaneous use of physical, emotional, and existential

aspects in art as a key to advance understanding as well as enhance narratives (Wood 2015:1-3). The reconciling aspect of art is also furthered by Vandy Kanyako, who argues art to be a tool in exploring and constructing identity and social movements between communities (Kanyako 2015:106-107). It has, therefore, been argued it can create possibilities to rethink and contest prevailing othering and particular identities in a post-conflict society (Stephenson Jr. & Zanotti 2017:351). Wood further points to a tendency of art in conflictual societies to amplify through social media and be used to define identity (2015:1-2), and therefore have quite the potential influence for relationships between adversaries.

In policy development for peacebuilding, the use of art has been promoted with reference to a study showing nonverbal communication to account for 65-93% of communicated meaning (Shank 2005:538). This power has also been used to wage conflict non-violently, using, for example, murals to promote one's narrative endlessly to passersby (Shank & Schirch 2008:222), illuminating the fact that identity art can be used for other purposes than reconciliation in a post-conflict context. A known example of art used in a post-conflict setting is in Northern Ireland, where art mobilized particular identity narratives rather than unified them (Stephenson Jr. & Zanotti 2017:350).

One could argue a strategic use of art to be an excellent instrument for one's cause, with Michael Shank promoting a balance of emotional and cognitive artistic pathways to capture hearts and minds. For instance, he points to Lisa Schirch's four themes in strategic peacebuilding, where art is deemed useful both to challenge powerful social orders and to build capacity among one's own (Shank 2005:534, 539-542).

Many have argued in favor of prescribing art as a therapeutic tool for participants to work through traumatic events and develop a peaceful consciousness. Art for reconciliation could be argued to be a growing policy choice, with major organizations funding programs in conflict zones and a creative process being seen as central in peacebuilding (Gal-Ed 2009:118, Shank & Schirch 2008:218-219, 224, Wood 2015:1-2, Bang 2016:361-362). Max Stephenson Jr. & Laura Zanotti

concluded that aesthetics could serve to challenge social structures and beliefs. While being unpredictable as a strategy, effective use of art can lead to changes in individuals and groups (2017:350). However, while less research has been devoted to the use of art in a more organic, or self-growing, process of reconciliation, it can be inferred that the psychological and strategic aspects of art would function in similar ways; having potentially healing qualities as well as transforming world views and identities. These are crucial to the connection to reconciliation, where the transformation of relationships is key to progress. Understanding art as potentially healing and transforming relationships and narratives illuminates its potential within reconciliation. It strengthens the role of art as not only discursive statements but constitutive in creating change.

## 4 Method

Aiming to understand how art can be understood as part of a reconciling process, I have opted for qualitative interpretative methods rooted in a constructivist ontology and discourse-oriented epistemology. Through tools of multimodal discourse analysis, this thesis has analyzed representations and processes in a case study of revolutionary art. As both reconciliation and art necessitates inferring, I argue this qualitative methodology enables reliability in the analysis and discussion.

### 4.1 Methodological choices – multimodal discourse analysis

As the research question is based on the understanding of art, the material is graphic and visual beyond ‘classic’ textual analysis. In analyzing it, this thesis uses the tools of multimodal discourse analysis (Björkvall 2018:355, 358), also described as image semiotics as discourse analysis (*bildsemiotik som diskursanalys*, Skåreus 2014:13) and similar to what Carey Jewitt & Rumiko Oyama coins social semiotic analysis of visual communication (2011:9). Despite using different names for the method, they share the foundation of a hermeneutic understanding of images as part of a discourse and the aim of looking to narrative and conceptual patterns in the visual material to make visible norms, values, and identities (Skåreus 2014:8, 15, Björkvall 2018:359, Jewitt & Oyama 2011:9-11). This method has been argued to be connected to critical discourse analysis and discourse psychology as it shares some key characteristics with said methods, such as the importance of potential significance (*betydelsepotential*, Björkvall 2018), interpretative repertoire (Bergström & Ekström 2018:267) as well as a focus on competing versions of reality (Skåreus 2014:8, Björkvall 2018:359).

The essential ontological underpinning is the assumption that discourse is constitutive and has a significant relation to its context. This thesis has progressed with the epistemological approach of art as independent statements in a social and cultural context, through which meaning is communicated and created. These statements can then be analyzed as discursive products (Skåreus 2014:21, 23, 26) as well as creating a way of viewing the world. An important note on this hermeneutic method is that these statements are not claimed to depict the 'real' version of the world but that they instead provide examples of how the world is understood in different ways and, therefore, might serve to construct different narratives (Björkvall 2018:371).

As a discursive method, it focuses on how narratives and concepts are being presented, and the process of how meaning is being created. Semiotics study how perceptions of reality are being mediated to humans and the general processes of creating the experienced world. Image semiotics, relied upon in this thesis, is a subgenre to semiotics, focused on signs and significance in images, language, and art (Skåreus 2014:23) and their function in creating reality (Jewitt & Oyama 2011:10). For the interest of this thesis, the main focuses are iconic signs – direct images - and indexical signs, which have relations to something not visualized but inferred by our experience. This type of sign makes it possible to associate beyond the direct image in an analysis, connecting it to the context and referential spaces (Skåreus 2014:23). This semiotic analysis, in relation to the emphasis on making conceptions and narratives visible, makes multimodal discourse analysis a solid choice of method to analyze perceptions, narratives, and identity in art.

#### 4.1.1 Tools of analysis

The material has been processed for conceptual representations and narrative processes. The latter illuminates a happening, a process of change, or an action and is characterized by a vector, a connecting line for relations in the piece, or easier put: a verb. The narrative processes also point to whether those in the artwork are participants or targets of a process, or interacting. The effect of these narrative processes can be amplified through thought bubbles, texts, or alike, to illuminate

mental processes. Anders Björkqvall emphasizes knowing the context in order to interpret processes relating to someone or something which is not pictured in the artwork, as circumstances place the material in time and space and provide a ‘how’ and ‘why’. The background scenery and what means are used can also tell of what story is being told. Conceptual representations instead illuminate being, meaning or belonging through attributes of meaning (*betydelsebärande attribut*, Björkqvall 2018:376), such as clothing, flags, and symbols in the bigger picture that tells of who someone is, their qualities or what they are part of (Björkqvall 2018:371-377, Jewitt & Oyama 2011:11-15). Here, as well, the interpretative repertoire is key to how one understands the material.

#### 4.1.2 Methodological considerations

There is an academic challenge in the necessary transformation between modalities when analyzing visual material, including that information that could have been deemed relevant by another scholar has been lost in this interpretation of the material. Interpretation, however, is a necessity with visual material. Detailed and transparent analysis, as well as semiotic knowledge, has therefore been argued by Eva Skåreus to be essential (2014:7, 15) in order to be clear in one’s priorities and choices when processing the material.

Some tools of multimodal discourse analysis are better suited for smaller qualitative studies, where each piece is analyzed extensively. In studies with more material, Björkqvall argues there is a risk to lower validity due to too many qualitative considerations if one not instead chooses to limit the number of analytic categories (Björkqvall 2018:394). In order to cover more material and increase reliability, this thesis has not analyzed each artwork to extent and has focused on themes relevant to the research question. For instance, some material from the revolution is solely focused on corruption. While this is highly relevant for the revolution itself, it is not as directly related to narratives of identity or reconciliation and will, therefore, not be analyzed in this line of work. By also limiting the analytic categories in reference to the artworks, I am aware that some layers of understanding might have been overseen in the material. I argue that, for the sake of this research, enough

relevant layers have been covered and in a substantial number of instances, in order to make inferences and discuss the matter in question.

The reliance on inference is considered natural in a hermeneutic study. However, it also makes reflexivity on behalf of the researcher key to a transparent and clear discussion. The theoretic anchoring is essential not to confuse subjective opinions with analysis. It is also of essence to be transparent and clear when using the analytic tools – in that way, the answer to the research question may be deemed valid despite the potential of different ways to interpret the material (Skåreus 2014:19-21). With reference to this, the analysis is separated from the discussion.

Reflexivity in interpretation is a challenge, as my personal background and positive experience of the revolution in question naturally have impacted how I view and value my material. An advantage in this process has been a larger contextual preunderstanding of symbols, people, and places portrayed in the material – such as knowing specific colors to be references to sect-affiliated political parties, which has enabled the analysis and discussion. Being on-site has provided me with knowledge of the timeline, key actors, and critical dates of the revolution before approaching it with an academic lens. This insight has, however, also made me very aware of the limits to my interpretative repertoire, as my cultural understanding and knowledge of Lebanon is limited to very basic skills in Arabic and living there as an exchange student for four months. While this experience helps me in understanding some layers of the artwork, it does not give me full contextual knowledge, and I am fully aware of the fact that there are layers, symbols, and stories that I do not detect since I am not the primary audience of these artists – the people of Lebanon is. While I have done extensive research to educate myself and have benefitted from some knowledge from my Lebanese friends, it is therefore of importance to note the findings of this thesis to be subjective to my interpretation. Consequently, they contribute to the understanding of the reconciling themes in this revolutionary art but exhaust neither the topic nor the material as other interpretations are possible.

## 4.2 Course of action

Both textual analysis and visual analysis challenge researchers as there is no fixed set of questions to ask or a model in which to insert data (Bergström & Boréus 2018:38), and there furthermore lacks consensus on concepts and categorizations (Skåreus 2014:14). This has facilitated an academic culture of encouraging combinations of methodological approaches to fit best the research in question (Bergström & Boréus 2018:38) but also necessitates justification and theoretic compatibility (Skåreus 2014:19).

The course of action is inspired by Skåreus in the basic structure but incorporates the narrative and conceptual structures of Björkqvall and Jewitt & Oyama. Starting in 5.1 with a description of the conceptual aspects of the artwork, the second section then looks at central narrative processes and how these can be interpreted. Lastly, the material is discussed in relation to the research question, incorporating context and discussions on theory (Skåreus 2014:26-27).

Skåreus also argues for a structured presentation, with a selection based on relevance for the results and the social science field in question (Skåreus 2014:15). Following this, all material is not presented. The analysis is instead structured around the key themes emerging in the material, and examples of these are provided. When single pieces are described in the analysis, specific references are provided, while general trends are not referenced piece by piece. Instead, the appendix provides a miniature overview of the material, and I am happy to reference in detail to specific pieces with translations for those interested.

### 4.3 Material, selection and sources

For the purpose of this thesis, the selection is limited to the first month of the revolution, partly due to an abundance of material, but also because I argue this first month was sufficient time for different themes to emerge within the material while having the most considerable momentum on the streets. The lion share of the material available in the sources was also posted during this first month of revolution. The first month could be argued to be the most transformative or setting patterns for transformation, with November 17<sup>th</sup> being a mark for the first organizational elections post the start of the revolution.

The selection has further been limited to artworks posted on Instagram accounts dedicated to the purpose of Lebanese revolutionary art and frequently referenced by various newspapers and organizational sources. These accounts are @art\_of\_thawra, @thawra\_artists, and @wallsofthawra. ‘Thawra’, should be clarified, is the English pronunciation of the Arabic word ثورة, meaning revolution. Although the method is multimodal and applicable to a broader range of art, I have, in reference to the limited scope of this thesis, opted to prioritize illustrative artworks over chants, music, videos, performative art, etcetera. I strongly encourage further research to cover more art.

The most significant source has been @art\_of\_thawra, which has functioned as a collector of artworks, posting submissions from various artists. The account was established on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, and in its own words, aims to “create an everlasting Museum of Revolution Art that documents Lebanese history for a better future” (Art of Thawra 2020). As of May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, it has over 19 900 followers (@art\_of\_thawra 2020). The account is curated and founded by Paola Mounla, a Lebanese Canadian creative director based in Beirut (Mounla 2019). In aiming to collect all art coming from the revolution with no profit goal (Art of Thawra 2019), this account has provided a wide range and scope of material. Importantly though, there is no information on how Mounla curates the account, the process of selection in place, or of the identities of the artists. This selection could be a source of error

if disregarding artworks with a more pessimistic perspective of the revolution without me knowing, or only featuring artists from a few sects. After researching thoroughly as well as referencing to my own experiences, I would still argue the selection to be representative of the revolutionary art being circulated. From the start of posting until November 17<sup>th</sup>, the selected period of time, ca 1 070 posts (@art\_of\_thawra 2020) were uploaded to this account (ca, due to a margin of error caused by having to count them by hand, and the possibility of posts having been deleted before the count). After going through this material, 169 posts were selected for analysis.

@thawra\_artists seem to have a similar aim to @art\_of\_thawra, describing themselves as a virtual art gallery for Lebanese artists, but without a known curator. With a following of almost 7 800, they have a lower potential outreach but posted ca 1 147 posts in the selected period (@thawra\_artists 2020). While a lot of these are also featured on @art\_of\_thawra, they have posted some other artworks as well. Due to the high number of cross-posting, 45 posts from this account have been selected.

@wallsofthawra, on the other hand, has the description of “Collecting & documenting words/graffiti/streetart of the October Revolution in all of Beirut’s hidden walls/streets/spaces” (@wallsofthawra 2020). With a following of just over 2 000, this account also has an anonymous curator. The ca 416 posts in the selected period have only a few overlaps with the other accounts, but features a high number of reoccurring phrases and words (@wallsofthawra 2020). 54 posts have been selected for analysis.

In total, ca 2633 works of art have been surveyed, and 268 have been selected to serve as the basis for analysis. For the majority of the pieces with shorter texts, I could translate the Arabic myself using the translation technology of Google Translate and my background knowledge. While this is a potential source of error, I argue the translations to be sufficient for this level of analysis, with the text serving only part of the pieces and, in my opinion, have matched the artwork. For 27 more complicated pieces, however, two Arabic speaking Lebanese friends volunteered;

Elie Bou Assaf and Joseph El-Hoyek. Independent of one another, they translated the remaining pieces, providing a reliable translation to use in the analysis.

## 4.4 Operationalizing reconciliation

The concept of reconciliation has been criticized based on conceptual stretching, which, according to Meierhenrich, occurs when it is conceptualized too broadly and stretched to cover cases where it is not applicable. Following his call to “climb down the ladder of abstraction” (Meierhenrich 2008:223), as well as adhering to the critique of the academic tendency to use the term reconciliation subjectively (Rettberg & Ugarriza 2016:518), the conceptualization used in this thesis is clarified in this section.

This conceptualization of reconciliation will not be claimed to be ‘the real’ conceptualization but argued for its suitability in this specific case (Meierhenrich 2008:214). Looking to Gerring’s criteria for conceptual goodness (Halperin & Heath 2016:131), the term has a high familiarity, resonance, and depth, both in the field and outside of academia, due to the subjectivity and conceptual stretching of the concept. However, it has low coherence and parsimony. In order to increase its theoretical utility, the concept of reconciliation has been specified.

Following the theoretic discussion in section 3.2, the conceptualizations of Rouhana, Bar-Tal, and Lederach are combined in conceptualizing reconciliation as a process of transforming relationships, through psychological, social and political changes in a social space of encounter, where one replaces societal goals, views one’s ingroup and one’s former adversary in a balanced heterogeneous way and create new beliefs on what peace, relationships, and one’s identity entail (Lederach 1998:29, Bar-Tal 2000:356-359, Rouhana 2004:176,). This conceptualization follows the process-oriented and relationship-focused perspective and is heavily influenced by psychology and the power of discourse.

The above conceptualization lists quite a few possible operational indicators on transforming relationships, with indicators such as a collective identity, unity, common goals, and new beliefs being possible to read from the material. This thesis has relied on inferences (Meierhenrich 2008:216) regarding processes of change in the analysis, to then complete the multimodal discourse analysis by connecting these to theory and context on the Lebanese case.

## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 Which conceptual representations are used, and how?



(@art\_of\_thawra 149)

*In the washing bin, there is a Lebanese flag with stains of yellow, orange, blue, and green, attracting flies. Another one has been washed with washing detergent labeled 'Revolution 2019' and is shining clean.*

In the artwork above, the conceptual use of colors and flags is key to interpreting the picture. The colors on the flag in the bin are associated with sectarian groups and political parties, and the flag is the Lebanese one. All these colors are key conceptual patterns in nearly all the artwork – there are very few pieces that do not

use the flag or its colors. Besides these, the central national symbols used are the cedar tree and the shape of Lebanon. All of these are used to communicate identity. As a clear example, there is a piece with an identity badge displaying only the Lebanese flag (@art\_of\_thawra 98).

Other identity-bearing conceptual representations are religious, with, for example, traditional religious clothing or symbols being worn by depicted persons, or buildings playing a part in the background to set the scene. The religious symbols or characters are in the material often used together with symbols of Lebanon; a common motive is the Mohammad al-Amin Mosque and Saint George's cathedral side by side - as they also are built - depicted with the Lebanese cedar (@art\_of\_thawra 30).

Masks and blindfolds are used as symbols of the past, sectarian identity, or unawareness. A clear example is a drawing of a group of people, all wearing blindfolds patterned with different flags. All people wearing party flags remain blind, while only the one with the Lebanese flag as a blindfold has started to take it off (@art\_of\_thawra 99).

The conceptual use of animals can be interpreted as wishing to communicate certain qualities or traits. In this material, the most reoccurring animals are sheep, pigs, doves, and phoenixes. The depiction of sheep is associated with being stupid or following blindly, for example when illustrated with a sectarian colored brain and its tongue out (@art\_of\_thawra 169) or the writing "for the leaders we are all sheep" (@thawra\_artists 34) and can be interpreted as someone not supporting the revolution or even supporting the sectarian identities.

The pigs are portrayed without pupils, in suits, and eating or obsessing with money (@art\_of\_thawra 2, 19, 34). They are not portrayed with agency but as recipients of action on the part of the revolution. Combined with messages of corruption and the elite versus the people, they can be interpreted as representations of a greedy elite. The suit in itself is also recurrent as a conceptual symbol for someone in the elite.

The white dove is frequently occurring in the material. In some instances, it is painted in itself as an art piece on walls, arguably as the classic symbol for peace. In other artworks, the dove is depicted with national symbols or revolutionary actions, for instance, as freeing Lebanon from sectarian colors (@thawra\_artists 21). It can be interpreted both as supporting the non-violent approach of the revolution and as a reference to the current events bringing peace.

Lastly, the use of the phoenix is recurrent, as born out of hands, raised fists, hearts, and cedars. In one piece, a phoenix is the shadow of a woman whose cedar heart is connected to a mass of people waving Lebanese flags (@art\_of\_thawra 97); possible to interpret as the phoenix representing the Lebanese people being reborn.

## 5.2 What narrative processes are portrayed, and how?

### 5.2.1 Breaking free



(@art\_of\_thawra 5)

*A woman with a cedar tree as her head and stretched out wings in red and white, with broken chains hanging from her wrists and wings. Birds are flying above.*

*The scene is potentially set close to fire, or at sunset or dawn.*

A reoccurring narrative process in the artwork can be read as breaking free. Through the examples of breaking chains, birds being released, cutting of the threads of marionettes, to ending a repeating circle, this can be understood as a critical process in the material. The Arabic word for freedom is also frequent. While the iconic depictions could be symbols of any liberation, the breaking of bars, chains, and never-ending circles can be understood through the additional use of text, other icons, and referential space, as liberating from such as tyrants, greed, sects and political parties. One piece is depicting a bird as still in its cage despite an open door, along with a phrase stating that the bird born in captivity considers freedom the crime (@thawra\_artists 33). This can be interpreted as a reference to the difficulty of breaking free in a system of institutionalized identity.

The difficulty or range of freedom is portrayed in an artwork illustrating two groups of people waving Lebanese flags, walking towards one another. Under the people in the group to the left, chains are broken, while the chains under the right group are attached to the grip of a suit-clad hand. The piece is accompanied by the writing “Under one flag” and “Our demands are your demands” (@art\_of\_thawra 130). This piece can be interpreted as a move of solidarity to those under a tighter grip of sectarianism, as well as portraying the revolution as a continuous process of freeing the Lebanese, with a heterogeneous view of the population.

## 5.2.2 Becoming Lebanese



(@art\_of\_thawra 156)

*A line of evolution, starting with a sheep, developing into a man carrying a flag with 'revolution' written on it. The sign says "the stages of the population's evolution".*

Another narrative process in play is the making of, the birth of or becoming of the Lebanese, depicted through processes of change from following one's leader blindly to being independent and united above sectarianism. This theme emerges through depictions of people taking off masks or clothing of sectarian color and wording, or emerging from sheep, illustrating the birth of Lebanon through revolution, turning the colors of political parties to the colors of the Lebanese flags, etcetera.

On the other hand, an illustration of people with Lebanese flags chasing away characters with party flags (@thawra\_artists 10), depicts a division between those who remain sectarian and those who have 'woken up'. In some artworks, there is a before and after-perspective, interpreted as the revolution shifting the mind of the Lebanese rather than them becoming Lebanese. One artwork depicts a brain, changing thoughts from nepotism, sectarian and geographical divides and blindly following the leader, to thoughts of hope and of breaking both sectarianism and fear (@art\_of\_thawra 119).

### 5.2.3 Unification



(@art\_of\_thawra 138)

*A Lebanese flag with a phoenix flying out from a cedar tree on fire. In front of it are two hands, gripping at each other's wrists, one with a Christian cross and one with a rising Muslim moon. The bottom left says, "Our strength is in our unity".*

In numerous illustrations, the act of holding hands is depicted, often in combination with conceptual religious symbols or pointing to regional differences. The theme of unity is also depicted through fists and communal strength, phrasing on being one people or all being home, depicting how repression united the people, and the portrayal of the country, the flag, or hearts formed out of faces. One piece explicitly says, "We are the kids & grandkids of the families you separated. Now we are united to lead!" (@thawra\_artists 16). Within the larger scope of material, the unification can be understood as both enabling the revolution and being a consequence of the revolution.

The unity is portrayed both through a diversity of conceptual symbols on people and through the lack of symbols separating people. In many instances of art, the crowd is anonymous in only Lebanese colors, and equally often, it is diverse but accompanied by unifying narrative processes or conceptual patterns.

In one instance, the wording ‘our unity’ is being connected to a bomb with a lit stub (@wallsofthawra 42), leading to two very different possible interpretations. On the one hand, unity can be understood as a threat to those in power; when we are united, there is no stopping us. On the other hand, unity can be understood pessimistically as a nondurable concept that will blow up.

#### 5.2.4 Healing



(@thawra\_artists 42)

*A bleeding Lebanese flag in the shape of Lebanon, with a tear through the cedar. It is being sowed back together, with an anonymous crowd of people with flags in the background.*

A process related to unification is healing, which is also portrayed in the artworks, through instances of sowing the flag or wounds together, repairing or merging a broken cedar tree, and the use of phoenixes or flowers rising from ashes or bleeding hearts. One image of red flowers emerging from a bloodstain carries the phrase “the wounds of my people have blossomed” (@art\_of\_thawra 164), while another

portrays the revolution as the first group therapy session since the civil war (@wallsofthawra 35).

Two other pieces are without doubt depicting the revolution as the end of the civil war. One with a tombstone, saying “Civil War 1975-2019” (@art\_of\_thawra 172) and the other with the same years, saying “To be remembered but never repeated” (@art\_of\_thawra 120).

### 5.2.5 Standing up to the elite



(@art\_of\_thawra 8)

*A suit-wearing, money-eating, monster with multiple heads, each bearing a sectarian flag, and a red-colored, anonymous, large group of people attempting to bring it down.*

This process might be the most obvious revolutionary one and is often used interlinked with the above-mentioned processes. First, there are artworks depicting the status quo, such as a giant man in a suit eating someone labeled 'Lebanon' (@art\_of\_thawra 36). Second and more common, the will to overpower the elite is communicated through artwork where men in suits are consumed, captured, and crushed, by people or national symbols. The elite is also portrayed as greedy pigs, and are in these instances, hanged and burned. Some pieces illustrate the process of the elite as dominos, with the revolution tipping over the first brick, or the revolution as a game of PacMan, where the Lebanese people as one is winning over ghosts such as the system and the sectarian parties. The division between the people and politicians is communicated in multiple ways, but the people tend to be united and have agency. They are in one instance portrayed as a lion, biting an animal with words such as 'racism', 'sectarian power' and 'patriarchy' on it (@thawra\_artists 135).

This process connects to history, through for example an artwork where the faces of sectarian leaders are put in 'history's dustbin' and kicked over by a kick punching woman colored in the Lebanese flag (the silhouette referring to a woman who, on October 18<sup>th</sup>, kicked a minister's security guard who drew a gun (Read 2019)). This artist also wrote that the red symbolized the blood of martyrs, the white meant peace and purity, and the green cedar symbolized eternity (thawra\_artists 30). In some graffiti, the revolution is referred to as the second independence, and calls to stop 'recycling' the same leaders are frequent.

## 6 Discussion

In this section, I will first discuss the revolutionary art as statements of a reconciling discourse, before turning to the narratives portrayed in the artworks and the understanding of their role in the process of reconciliation in Lebanon.

This thesis argues the revolution can be understood as a social space of encounter, with the economic and political crisis serving as a catalyst to break what Tang (2011) refers to as path dependence, in the Lebanese reconciliation process. Understanding the previous steps, as discussed by De Clerck and Berti, as rather thin or shallow reconciliation, treated as a checklist by the government, and still functioning within sectarian narratives, this joint secular movement could be argued to be a breaking point. Engaging new generations without psychological scarring from the civil war, could, following Rouhana (2004), also open up a new social sphere. Within it, art can play a role in sharing perceptions and shaping new joint ones, to alter social beliefs and representations – deemed crucial for change by Bartal (2000) and Lederach (1998), among others. It might also be of interest to consider that this revolution is not part of a formal process for reconciliation, but that it might be considered almost a ‘side effect’ of rising for social, economic, and political change. The revolution is then argued to be in line with Rouhana’s (2004) view of major restructuring of institutionalized wrongs being necessary for reconciliation, and that it can be considered the turning point needed to grow common narratives and deepen the level of reconciliation.

Having established the October revolution as part of a reconciliation process, the central narrative processes in the art, as outlined in 5.2, can then be understood as discursive statements in the revolution as well as reconciling pieces in themselves. While contributing to the revolution by art, they depict processes, through which others are influenced in how to interpret, feel, or think of the same process. Starting

with the conceptual use of Lebanese colors and symbols, and disregard of the sectarian ones, points to a common identity marker becoming stronger and outcompeting particularistic ones. Promoting and shaping this allegiance through narrative processes such as unification and becoming Lebanese, could arguably be understood as part of a process to alter beliefs about oneself and one's former adversaries. This would then provide the common identity and significant narratives argued by Tang (2011:713) to distinguish thin from thick reconciliation.

This shift seems to have created a new divide, though, between those who choose this secular Lebanese identity and those prioritizing their sectarian one. From the art, one can both interpret solidarity with the latter group, as well as the portrayal of them as blind, sheep-like – without agency. In the former, there are traces of mercy to those under a tighter sectarian grip, which could point to a deeper level of personal reconciliation. For the latter, following Kriesberg (2007:2-3), the unification or reconciliation between people could come at the expense of another group, which in this case might be those adhering to secular narratives. In this case, the reconciliation process might exclude those who do not adhere to the revolutionary claims. As it is unclear which sects the artists 'belong' to, one cannot conclude the scope of the reconciling effect, or if it might be of varying effect within different sects. However, as people from all sects took part in the revolution under one flag, I argue the scope to be large enough to have an impact on the reconciliation in total, and due to the amount of diaspora participating on social media, might have also influenced those overseas.

The healing process in the artwork can be understood as a psychological process of change as well as having a therapeutic effect, relating to creativity as a tool for trauma. As referenced in one of the pieces, there is the perspective of the revolution being the first group therapy session since the war. In opening up a new space to discuss the political context, art can be argued in line with Kanyako (2015) and Stephenson Jr. & Zanotti (2017) to be a tool of exploring identities and contesting othering. Promoting an end to the system leading to the civil war might also be understood as wishing to hinder the continuation of harm, and replacing it with a process of healing.

When viewing the healing narrative intertwined with the uniting narrative, one might argue there has been a shift in who the adversary is, or who is to blame for the war and its continuation in politics. In uniting the people through an economic crisis, the sectarian system is no longer beneficial to anyone but the elite. These contextual conditions are vital to understanding the width of the process, as people who previously gained from sectarian law and identity now might have more in common with former adversaries with similar, for instance, socioeconomic background than with religious leaders. The art might then be understood as promoting a transformation of relationships among grassroots while turning on those above, serving as a strategic tool in both the revolution and the reconciliation process. This narrative might lead to history being understood through the same lenses, fostering mercy between sectarian groups while shifting the blame to the elite. When looking at the who of reconciliation, the art might then be understood as a reflection of an organic grassroots movement in contrast to previous official reconciliation measures, where the transformation of relationships occurred on elite level rather than a societal.

The process of breaking free might be argued to reflect the changing of social and political systems, moving forward instead of repeating history. The use of the birth, or rebirth, of Lebanon, and standing up to the elite, is understood as changing the perception of the future, playing a part in a conversation of what should characterize the new Lebanon and promoting a shared vision. It would then be in line with Lederach's (1998) and Bar-Tal's (2000) arguments on reconciliation, with the united future argued as crucial in altering one's beliefs on ingroup and outgroup. In this way, the conceptual use of symbols also can be understood as promoting a narrative, and their location within the narrative processes in the artwork is then vital; as per example, who it is, that is depicted holding hands and breaking chains.

However, while these developments can be understood as essential to transforming relationships and therefore have a positive influence on the reconciliation process, few pieces explicitly deal with the contesting memories or facts of the civil war. Most scholars have argued justice and truth to be crucial parts of a reconciliation process, and the lack of commemoration in the art might point towards this

transformation being less significant. However, the importance of truth and justice on a societal level might need to be reconsidered if the blame is shifted from one's neighbor to distant elites. This shift might facilitate a process of acknowledgment and encourage truth-telling. If communities unify in being Lebanese and shape future goals on that basis, it might be possible to gather testimonies in a way where people do not fear for their security and pave the way for individual healing.

This thesis argues progress in relationships in the Lebanese case might, therefore, not be depending on apologies and factfinding missions, while such could be beneficial. Instead, it places considerable emphasis on breaking the institutionalization of divisive identities, forming an inclusive collective identity, and making relationships peaceful. In this, this thesis argues revolutionary art to have been transformative. However, the importance of it being followed by structural change, to solidify relations and not to reproduce the harm of the past, needs to be stressed.

## 7 Conclusions and future research

To conclude, the revolutionary art from the October revolution in Lebanon can be understood as both statements of and contributing to a process of reconciliation, through its discursive contributions in changing narratives and transforming relations. Through promoting an inclusive Lebanese identity and common societal goals, as well as facilitating healing and processes of unification, this thesis argues it contributes to deepening the level of reconciliation in Lebanon. Although it has to be accompanied by other steps, such as the transformation of the political, economic, and social system, it has served a reconciling purpose in the psychological and societal realm. This thesis has contributed in illuminating the reconciling and transforming power of art, arguing both the depiction of and promotion of narratives and change, influence societal beliefs and identity.

However, the possible interpretations of this art are in no way exhausted, and future research on this topic might benefit from a thorough study on who the producers have been, what their background and societal beliefs were, or how they have changed. That information might facilitate further analysis of how the reconciliation process might differ depending on gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and level of connection to Lebanon. Such an approach could strengthen these findings but potentially also undermine them, if the artists' purposes have been solely linked to the economic revolution, and the symbols interpreted mean less in their own opinion. Another intriguing option would be to compare how counter-discourses use conceptual and narrative symbols – to possibly deepen the understanding of the identity process between sectarian and national narratives – or look into how the art is received and perceived by different parts of Lebanese society.

Some levels of analysis that have not been the focus in this thesis are the gendered portrayal of Lebanon and other parallel narrative and conceptual processes relating

to aspects of human rights and nonviolence, such as LGBTQ-rights and antiracism. Exploring more narrow narratives within the art might also provide a greater understanding of the role of ideology in reconciliation. This thesis has not investigated outreach of the different pieces, which might vary depending on where the emphasis is within the piece, how inclusive or exclusive it is, or who the targeted audience is.

The revolution in whole would also prove a compelling case for the study of reconciliation, where one with a broader scope of material could look into its general contribution to peace in Lebanon. Such a study would also be able to look into how different sects have reacted differently to the revolution, and the security aspects involved in their responses. Scholars interested in the political use of memory could analyze the different use of history by politicians and revolutionaries – the artists whose work is analyzed in this study being among the latter.

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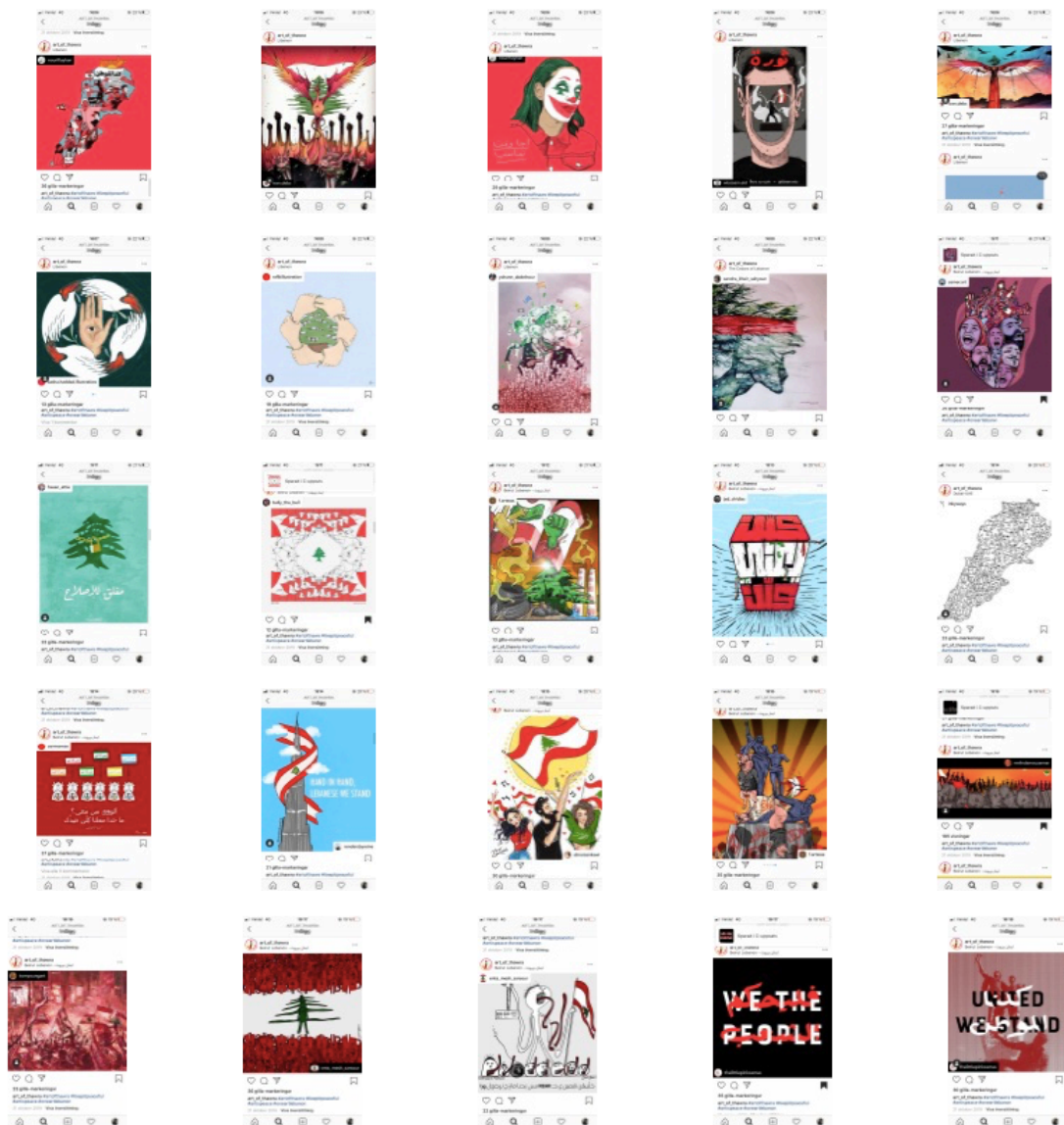
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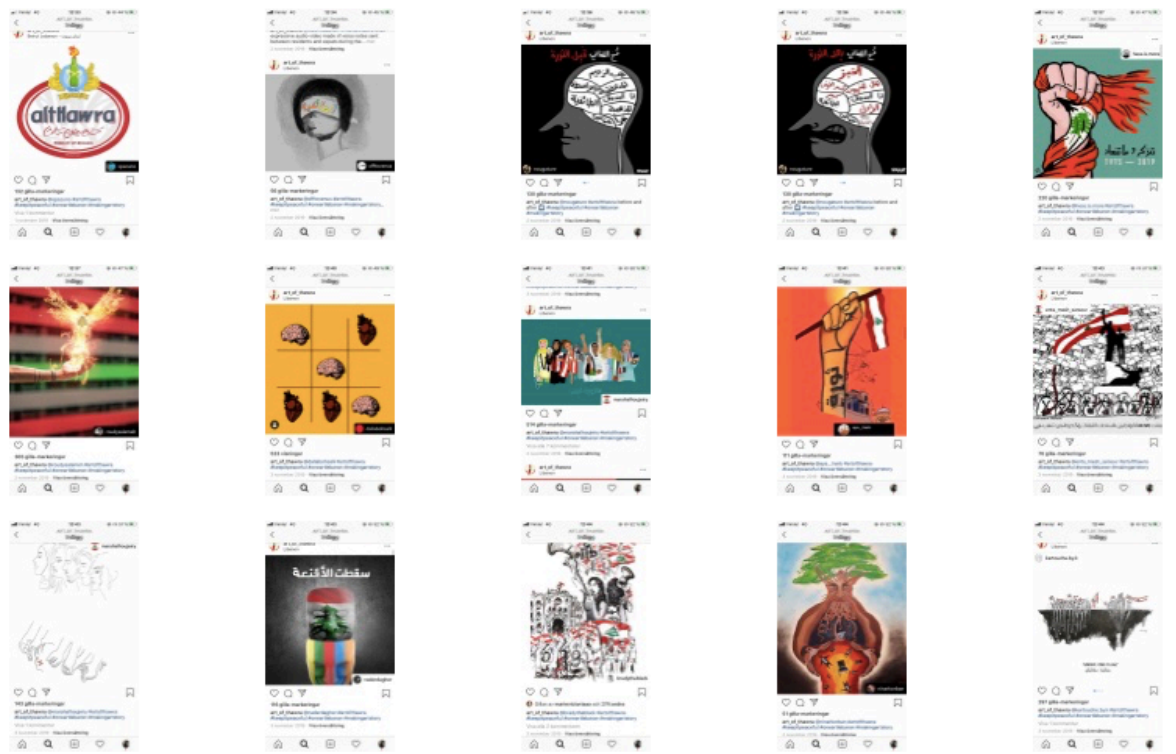
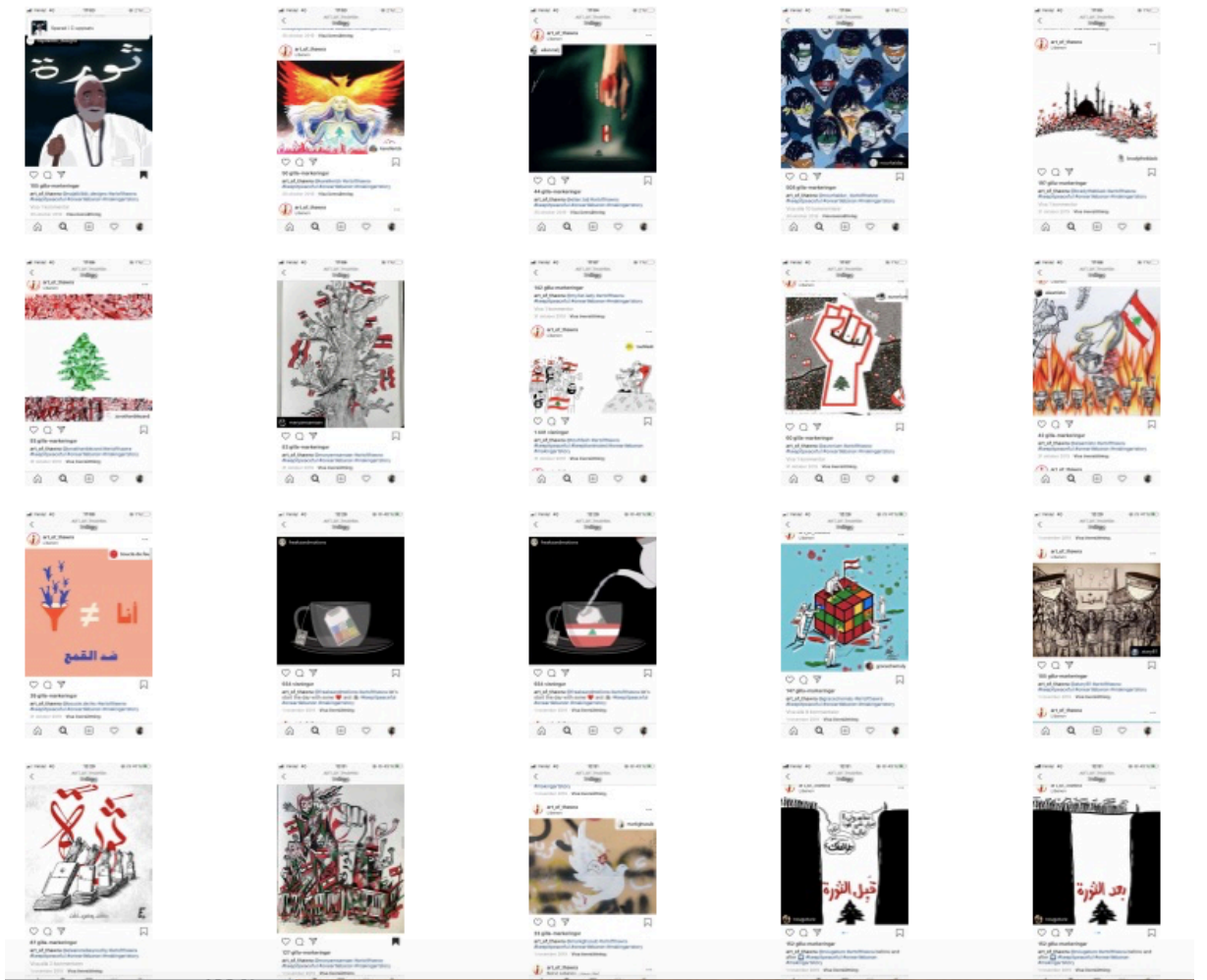
# 9 Appendix

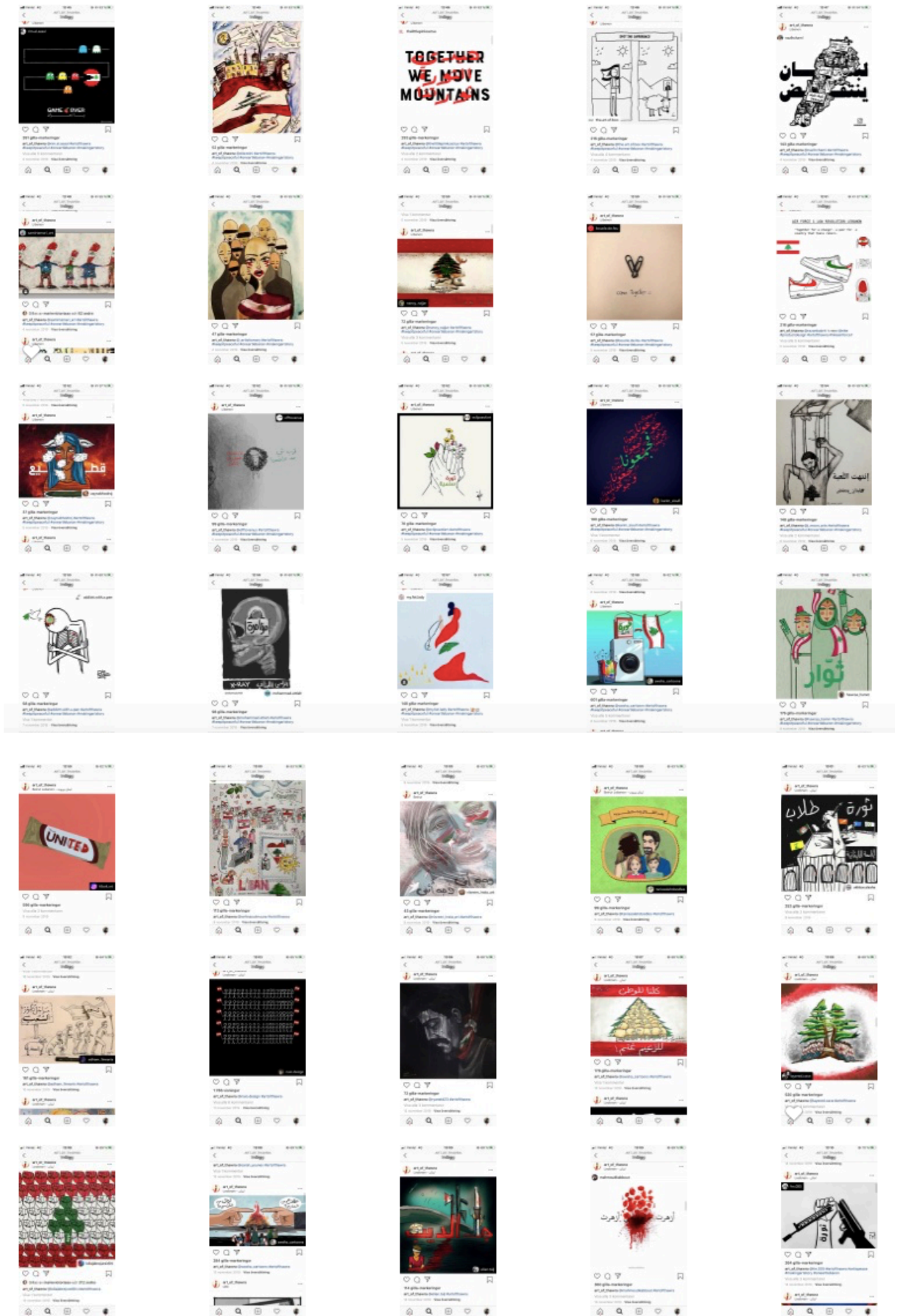
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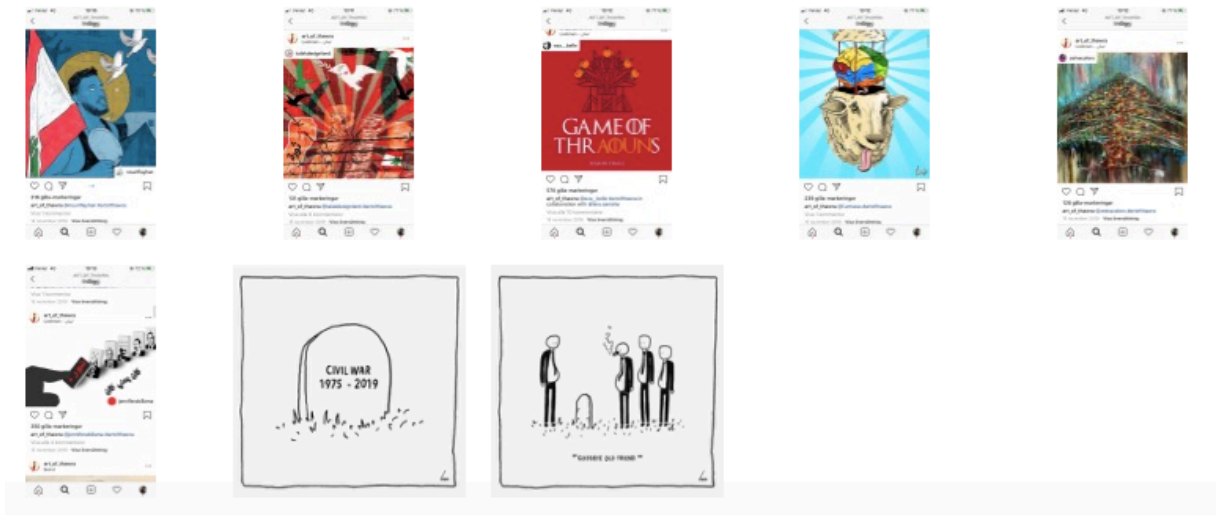




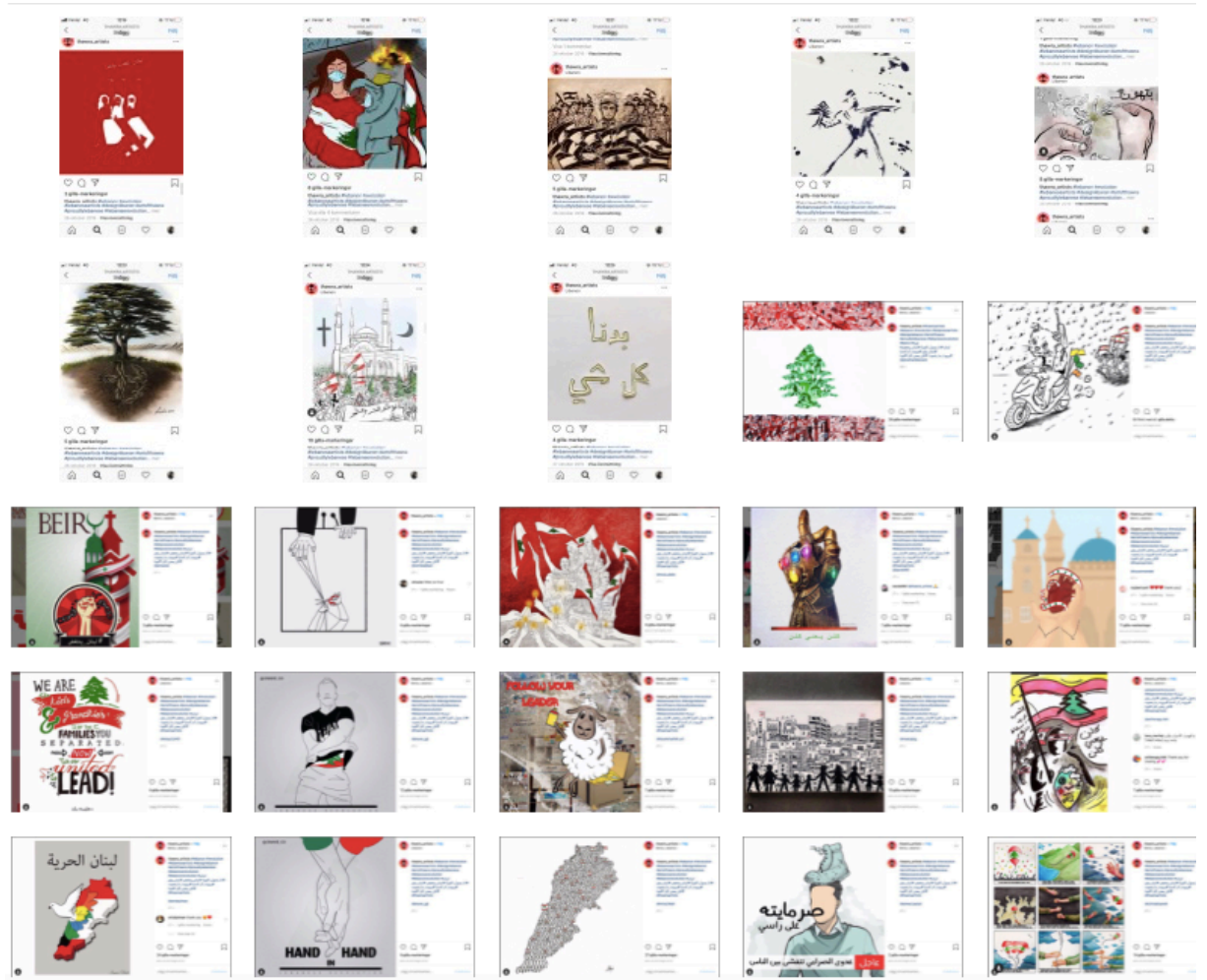


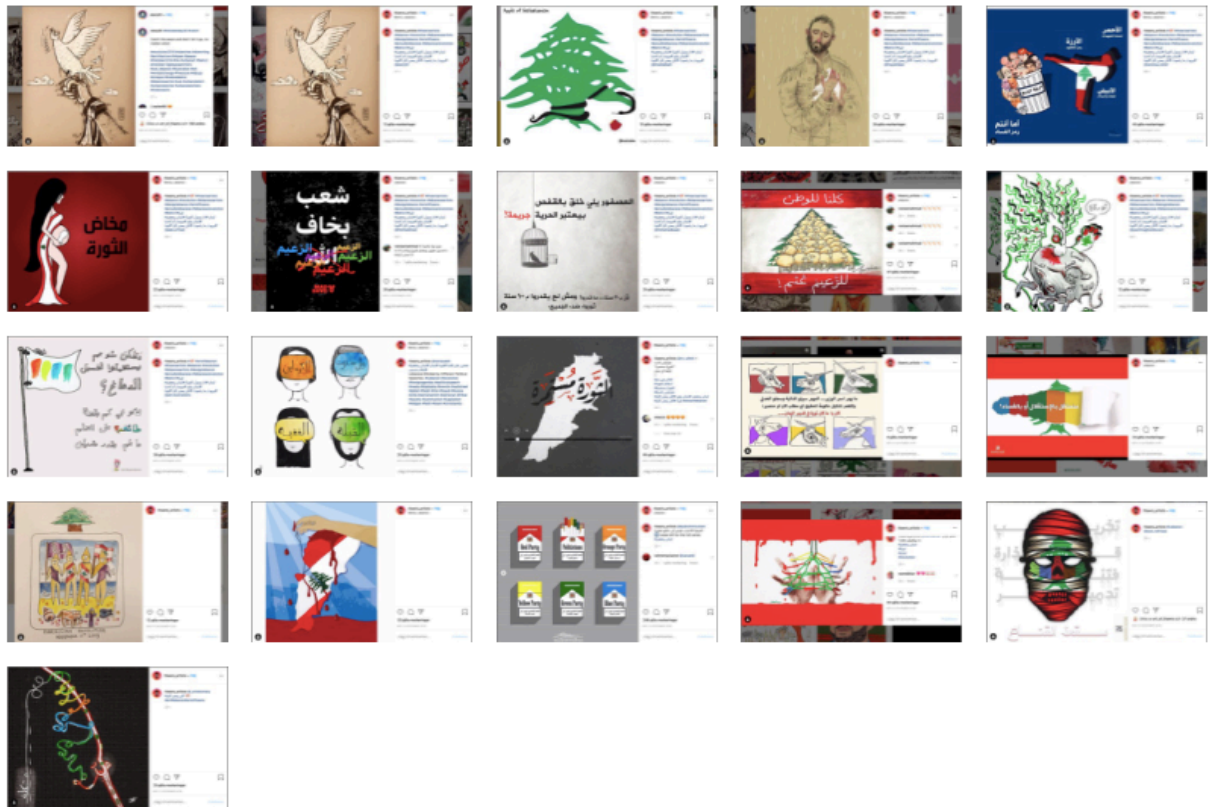






## 9.2 @thawra\_artists





### 9.3 @wallsofthawra

