

WORKING PAPER NO. 5

The Art of Reconciliation

Understanding art from the October revolution in Lebanon



Author

Hanna Bergman

The Art of Reconciliation

Understanding art from the October revolution in Lebanon

Abstract

The art of the October revolution 2019 in Lebanon expresses narrative processes that this paper 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. The paper analyses 268 pieces of artwork from three Instagram accounts dedicated to the revolution. Through a discourse analysis, conceptual representations and narrative processes are interpreted in these works of art. The paper argues that the themes 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.

Author

Hanna Bergman is a master student of Global Studies at Lund University, Sweden. She recently completed a bachelor's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. (ha0083be-s@student.lu.se)

Acknowledgements

This paper is a shortened and adapted version of a bachelor thesis in Peace and Conflict Studies in the spring of 2020, with Maria Småberg as supervisor at Lund University's Department of Political Science.

Cover photograph: Hanna Bergman. The works of art are represented by screenshots from the instagram accounts, printed with permission from the account holders.

Introduction



(@art_of_thawra 136, Samir Tamari) *A chain of persons holding hands. Their heads all have the shape of Lebanon and are coloured as the Lebanese flag.*

On October 17th, 2019, a revolution started in Lebanon. As it took over the streets, so did art, covering buildings, walls, and dominating social media. 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. The ‘October 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 people turned on the elite in power. Hence it 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).

Looking at representations and processes in the art of the October revolution, national identity narratives and calls for unity over sectarian divisions are prominent. 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 a tool 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 an area for policy in peacebuilding, but this case positions itself in that art is neither prescribed for reconciliation nor dealing primarily with the past.

The purpose of this paper is to explore processes of change related to reconciliation in Lebanon by looking at art from the October revolution 2019, investigating how 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, the paper argues that the October revolution art is part of a reconciliation process to transform relationships, despite not explicitly dealing with the civil war itself.

The Lebanese civil war and sectarian system

Dating back to before Lebanon gained independence in 1943, the political system of the country has been built on confessionalism. Formally it is based on a census in 1932, 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).

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).

These sectarian and confessional divisions are to be the primary shapers of identity in postwar Lebanon. They are reproduced and constructed not only through the political, economic and educational systems, 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 blank 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, 46-49).

The October revolution 2019

On October 17th, 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 percent, 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 points 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).

Despite deep regional sectarian lines, people expressed solidarity with those under tighter sectarian grip, and rejected sectarian responses (Sullivan 2019). Yazbeck points to the width and diversity 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).

Rocky road to reconciliation

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. She agrees with Ghosn & Khoury on the root causes not being confronted or rehabilitated in the post-conflict process (De Clerck 2014:50-56, Ghosn & Khoury 2011:386-390).

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 and 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 paper 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. Contrary to 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 (Salloukh 2019: 356-357). This paper 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. For this purpose, reconciliation will be understood in its thick sense in this paper, 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).

Art and peacebuilding

In relation to 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 that 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). 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.

Methodological considerations

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 paper uses the tools of multimodal discourse analysis (Björkvall 2018: 355, 358), also described as image semiotics as discourse analysis (Skåreus 2014: 13). It aims to look to narrative and conceptual patterns in the visual material to make visible norms, values, and identities, and uses the interpretative repertoire of the researcher to analyze their relevance and possible implications (Skåreus 2014: 8, 15, Björkvall 2018: 359, Jewitt & Oyama 2011: 9-11). The analysis is structured around the key themes emerging in the material. Conceptual representations are first described, in order to facilitate interpretations of the processes portrayed.¹

For the purpose of this paper, 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, with November 17th being a mark for the first organizational elections post the start of the revolution (Daily Star 2019).

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 paper, opted to prioritize illustrative artworks over chants, music, videos, performative art, etcetera.

In total, ca 2630 works of art have been surveyed, and 268 have been selected to serve as the basis for analysis. These accounts have provided a wide range and scope of material. Importantly though, there is no information on how they are curated, the process of selection in place, or of the identities of the artists. This primary selection of the accounts 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. For the majority of the pieces with shorter texts, I could translate the Arabic myself using the translation technology of Google Translate and my

¹ When single pieces are described in the analysis, specific references are provided, while general trends are not referenced piece by piece. For an overview of the material, an appendix is attached.

background knowledge. 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.

Analysing loaded concepts and narrative themes

With illustrations from selected artworks, this section will bring forth the key concepts and narrative processes that have been identified in the material.

Flags, colours, animals and other loaded concepts



(@art_of_thawra
149, Swaha
Cartoons)
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 colours and flags is key to interpreting the picture. The colours on the flag in the bin are associated with sectarian groups and political parties, and the flag is the Lebanese one. All these colours are key conceptual patterns in nearly all the artwork – there are very few pieces that do not use the flag or its colours. 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 recurring 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 coloured 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 colours (@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.

Breaking free



(@art_of_thawra 5,
Ivan Debs)
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.

Becoming Lebanese



(@art_of_thawra

156, Adham Abi

Farraj)

*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 colour and wording, or emerging from sheep, illustrating the birth of Lebanon through revolution, turning the colours of political parties to the colours 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).

Unification



(@art_of_thawra
138, Nancy Najjar)
*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 colours, 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.

Healing



(@thawra_artists 42, Fatima Al Skafi)
A bleeding Lebanese flag in the shape of Lebanon, with a tear through the cedar. It is being sown 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).

Standing up to the elite

(@art_of_thawra 8, Yohann
Abdelnour)

*A suit-wearing, money-eating,
monster with multiple heads, each
bearing a sectarian flag, and a red-
coloured, 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 coloured in the Lebanese flag (the silhouette referring to a woman who, on October 18th, 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.

Towards transformation

This paper 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 Bar-Tal (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 above, 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 colours 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 contest 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 paper 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 paper 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.

Conclusion

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 promoting an inclusive Lebanese identity and common societal goals, as well as facilitating healing and processes of unification, this paper 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 paper 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.

References

- @art_of_thawra, 2020. [Instagram-account]. Downloaded from https://www.instagram.com/art_of_thawra/. Downloaded 2020-05-02.
- @thawra_artists, 2020. [Instagram-account]. Downloaded from https://www.instagram.com/thawra_artists/. Downloaded 2020-05-02.
- @wallsofthawra, 2020. [Instagram-account]. Downloaded from <https://www.instagram.com/wallsofthawra/>. Downloaded 2020-05-02.
- Abou Assi, Elsa, 2012. "Collective memory and management of the past: the entrepreneurs of civil war memory in post-war Lebanon" in *International Social Science Journal*. Vol. 202, pp. 399–409
- Ahmad, Tarek Ali, 2019. "'By the people, for the people,' Lebanese diaspora launches platform documenting Lebanon's revolution". *Arab News*. News Article. [Electronic] <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1578171/media>. Published on 2019-11-02. Downloaded 2020-05-12.
- Amnesty International, 2020. *Lebanon Protests Explained*. [Electronic] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/>. Downloaded 2020-05-10.
- Art of Thawra 2020. @Art_of_Thawra. [Electronic] <https://www.artofthawra.com>. Downloaded on 2020-05-02.
- Bang, April Hyoeun, 2016. "The Restorative and Transformative Power of the Arts in Conflict Resolution" in *Journal of Transformative Education*. Vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 355-376
- Bar-Tal, Daniel, 2000. "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis" in *Political Psychology*. Vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 351-365
- Barak, Oren, 2007. ""Don't Mention the War?" The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon" in *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 49-70
- Bergman, Ylva, 2019. "Protesterna i Libanon: Hariri avgår – "ikväll kommer vi fira", *Omvärlden*. News article [Electronic]. <https://www.omvarlden.se/Branschnytt/nyheter-2019/protesterna-i-libanon-hariri-avgar--ikvall-kommer-vi-fira/>. Published on 2019-10-29. Downloaded 2020-05-13.
- Berti, Benedetta, 2014. "Balancing Justice, Stability and Legitimacy: Lebanon and the UN Special Tribunal – Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Criminal Justice" in *Mediterranean Politics*. Vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 117-133
- Björkvall, Anders, 2018. "Visuell textanalys" in Boréus, Kristina - Göran Bergström (ed.), *Textens mening och makt*. Fourth edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur. Pp. 355-399
- Daily Star, 2019. "Independent Melhem Khalaf voted head of Beirut Bar Association", Daily Star. News article. [Electronic] <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Nov-17/495743-beirut-bar-association-elects-new-head-councilmembers.ashx>. Published 2019-11-17. Downloaded 2020-04-29.
- De Clerck, Dima, 2014. "Government-sponsored resettlement and reconciliation in post-war Lebanon" in Davey, Eleanor – Eva Svoboda (ed.), *Histories of humanitarianism*

- action in the Middle East and North Africa. HPG Working Paper.* Overseas Development Institute. Pp. 49-57
- Fahed, Ziad, 2018. "Lebanese National Reconciliation and the Contribution of the Maronite Church through the Purification of Memory" in *Politics and Religion*. Vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 43-52
- Gal-Ed, Hagitte, 2009. "Art and Meaning: ARTiculation as a Modality in Processing Forgiveness and Peace Consciousness" in Kalayjian, Ani – Raymond F. Paloutzian (ed.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. London: Springer Science+Business Media. Pp. 97-119
- Ghosn, Faten - Amal Khoury, 2011. "Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or Illusion of Peace?" in *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 381-397
- Jewitt, Carey - Rumiko Oyama, 2011. "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach" in Van Leeuwen, Theo – Carey Jewitt (ed.), *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Pp. 134-156.
- Kanyako, Vandy, 2015. "Arts and War Healing: Peacelinks Performing Arts in Sierra Leone" in *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*. Vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 106-122
- Kriesberg, Louis, 2007. "Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences" in *International Journal of Peace Studies*. Vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1-21
- Lederach, John Paul, 1998. *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace
- Lemon, Jason, 2019. "Mass Protests Persist in Lebanon, as Local Media Reports well over 1 Million in the Streets", *Newsweek*. Published on 2019-10-20. [Electronic article] <https://www.newsweek.com/mass-protests-lebanon-over-1-million-1466544>. Downloaded 2020-05-10.
- Majzoub, Aya, 2020. "Lebanon's Protests are Far from Over". *Human Rights Watch*. [Electronic] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/27/lebanons-protests-are-far-over>. Published 2020-04-27. Downloaded 2020-05-10.
- Pukas, Anna, 2018. "Lebanese across the globe: How the country's international community came to be". *Arab News*. News article [Electronic]. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1296211/middle-east>. Published on 2018-05-04. Downloaded 2020-05-09.
- Qiblawi, Tamara – Ben Wedeman – Ghazi Balkiz, 2019. "Lebanon is at a crossroads between a new start or a return to unrest", *CNN*. Reporting story. [Electronic]. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/26/middleeast/lebanon-protests-crossroads-intl/index.html>. Published on 2019-10-27. Downloaded 2020-05-12.
- Read, Zen, 2019. "Lebanon Sees Largest Protest Yet as Video of Woman Kicking Minister's Bodyguard Goes Viral" in *Haaretz*. News article. [Electronic] <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/lebanon-braces-for-largest-protest-yet-1.8010426>. Published on 2019-10-20. Downloaded 2020-05-21.
- Rouhana, Nadim N., 2004. "Identity and Power in the Reconciliation of National Conflict" in Eagly, A. H. – R. M. Baron – V. L. Hamilton (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Group Identity and Social Conflict: Theory, Application, and Practice*. American Psychological Association. Pp. 173-187

- Salloukh, Bassel F, – Rabie Barakat – Jinan S. Al-Habbal – Lara W. Khattab – Shogig Mikaelian, 2015. *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press
- Salloukh, Bassel F., 2019. “War Memory, Confessional Imaginaries, and Political Contestation in Postwar Lebanon” in *Middle East Critique*. Vol. 28, nr. 3, pp. 341-359
- Shank, Michael, 2005. “Redefining the Movement: Art Activism” in *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*. Vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 531–560
- Shank, Michael - Lisa Schirch, 2008. “Strategic Arts-Based Peacebuilding” in *Peace & Change*. Vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 217-242
- Skåreus, Eva, 2014. *Bilder i forskning – Visuella metoder, Konstbaserad forskning & Fallstudier*. Umeå: Institutionen för estetiska ämnen
- Stephenson Jr., Max, - Laura Zanotti, 2017. “Exploring the Intersection of Theory and Practice of Arts for Peacebuilding” in *Global Society*. Vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 336-352
- Sullivan, Helen, 2019. ”The Making of Lebanon’s October Revolution”. *The New Yorker*. Reporting story. [Electronic] <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-making-of-lebanons-october-revolution>. Published on 2019-10-29. Downloaded 2020-05-02.
- Tang, Shiping, 2011. “Reconciliation and the Remaking of Anarchy” in *World Politics*. Vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 711-749
- UCDP – Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2020. “Lebanon – Summary”. [Electronic] <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/660>. Downloaded 2020-05-28.
- Walter, Barbara F., 2010. “Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace” in World Development Report background papers; 2011. Washington, DC: World Bank
- Wood, Katherine, 2015. “The Arts and Peacebuilding: An Emerging Approach” in *United States Institute of Peace – Insights*, Summer 2015. Pp. 1-4.
- World Bank Group 2020. *Population, total – Lebanon*. [Electronic] <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LB>. Downloaded 2020-05-10.
- Yazbeck, Cybelle, 2019. ”10 Things Every Lebanese Should Have Learned from the Revolution”. *The 961*. Listicle [Electronic]. <https://www.the961.com/10-things-every-lebanese-should-have-learned-from-the-revolution/>. Downloaded 2020-05-12.
- Zahar, Marie-Joëlle, 2005. “Power Sharing in Lebanon: Foreign Protectors, Domestic Peace, and Democratic Failure” in Rothchild, Donald – Philip Roeder (ed.) *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Pp. 219-240

References to artistic material

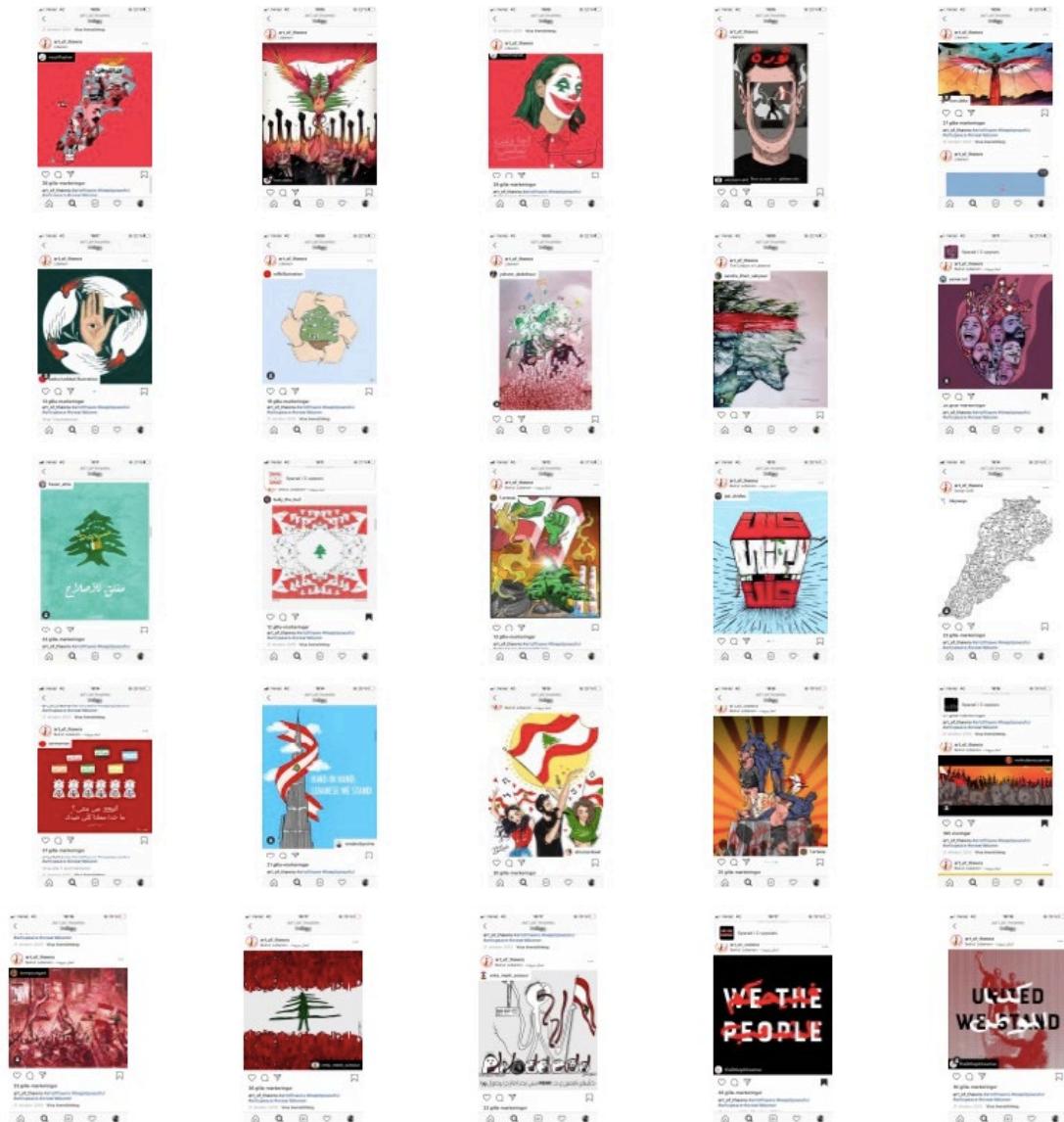
- @art_of_thawra 2, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B333sqnABQB/>
- @art_of_thawra 5, Ivan Debs, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B334Nb2g34t/>

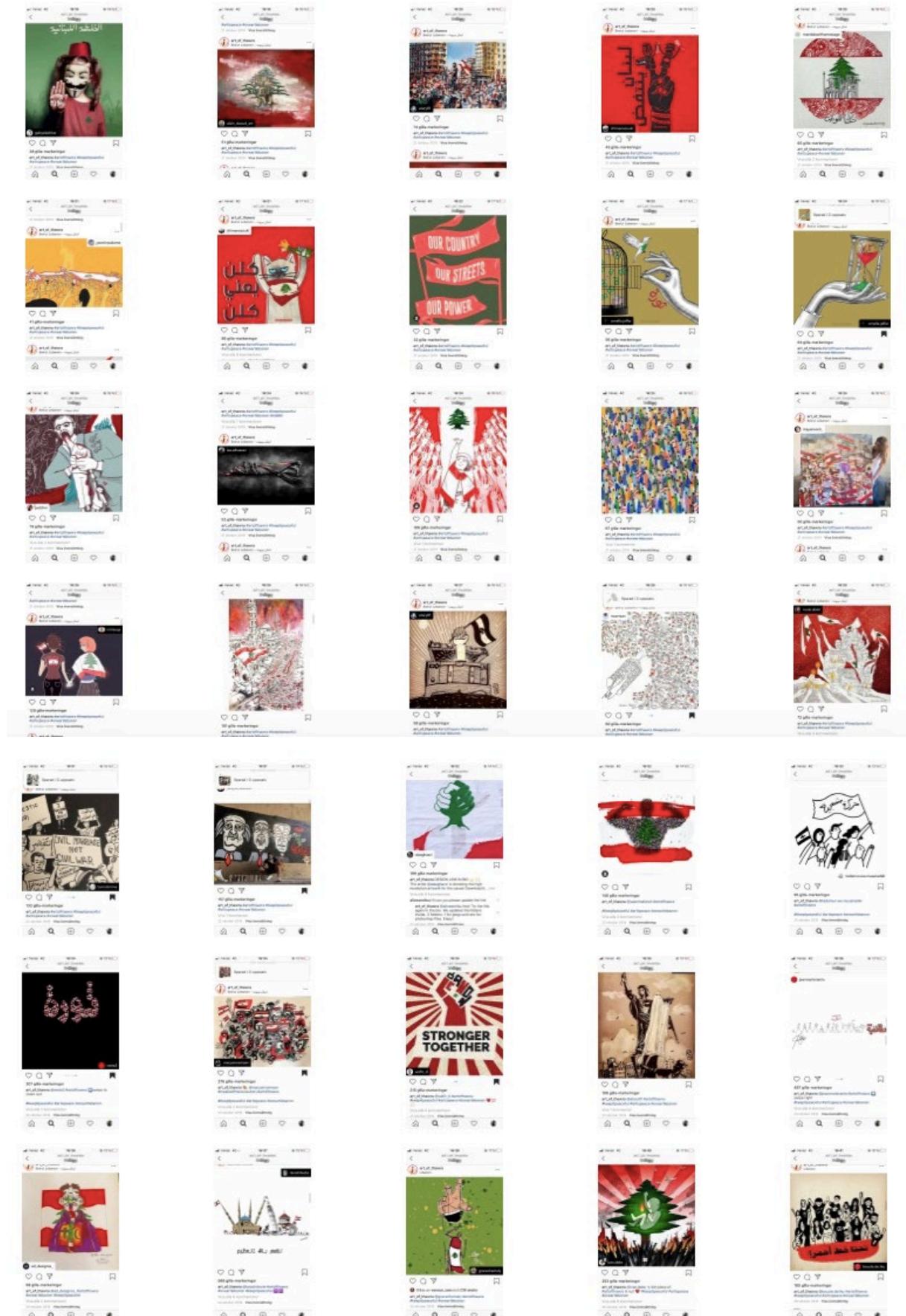
- @art_of_thawra 8, Yohann Abdelnour, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B336XYAgjwz/
- @art_of_thawra 19, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B34CiF8ghwf/
- @art_of_thawra 30, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B34WnQzgw_g/
- @art_of_thawra 34, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B34wgATgmqH/
- @art_of_thawra 36, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B34w62wA7qu/
- @art_of_thawra 97, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-30, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4PfrswH8zJ/
- @art_of_thawra 98, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-30, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4P24XhnBL5/
- @art_of_thawra 99, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-30, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4QDyBoHrkK/
- @art_of_thawra 119, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-02, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Xds-HAijo/
- @art_of_thawra 120, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-02, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Xk8CuA5wh/
- @art_of_thawra 130, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-03, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4azEn7A1wm/
- @art_of_thawra 136, Samir Tamari, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-04, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4c_vICg72q/
- @art_of_thawra 138, Nancy Najjar, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-05, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4eYrtDAKLo/
- @art_of_thawra 149, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-08, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4nJ1bmHrHO/
- @art_of_thawra 156, Adham Abi Farraj, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-10, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4saVZIJRaK/
- @art_of_thawra 164, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-13, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B40V0uwJJ_Y/
- @art_of_thawra 169, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-15, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B44wQYap6z7/
- @art_of_thawra 173, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-21, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B335QjaA10y/
- @thawra_artists 10, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-27, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4G1vcwAmsH/
- @thawra_artists 16, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-28, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4JXnMfgjzF/

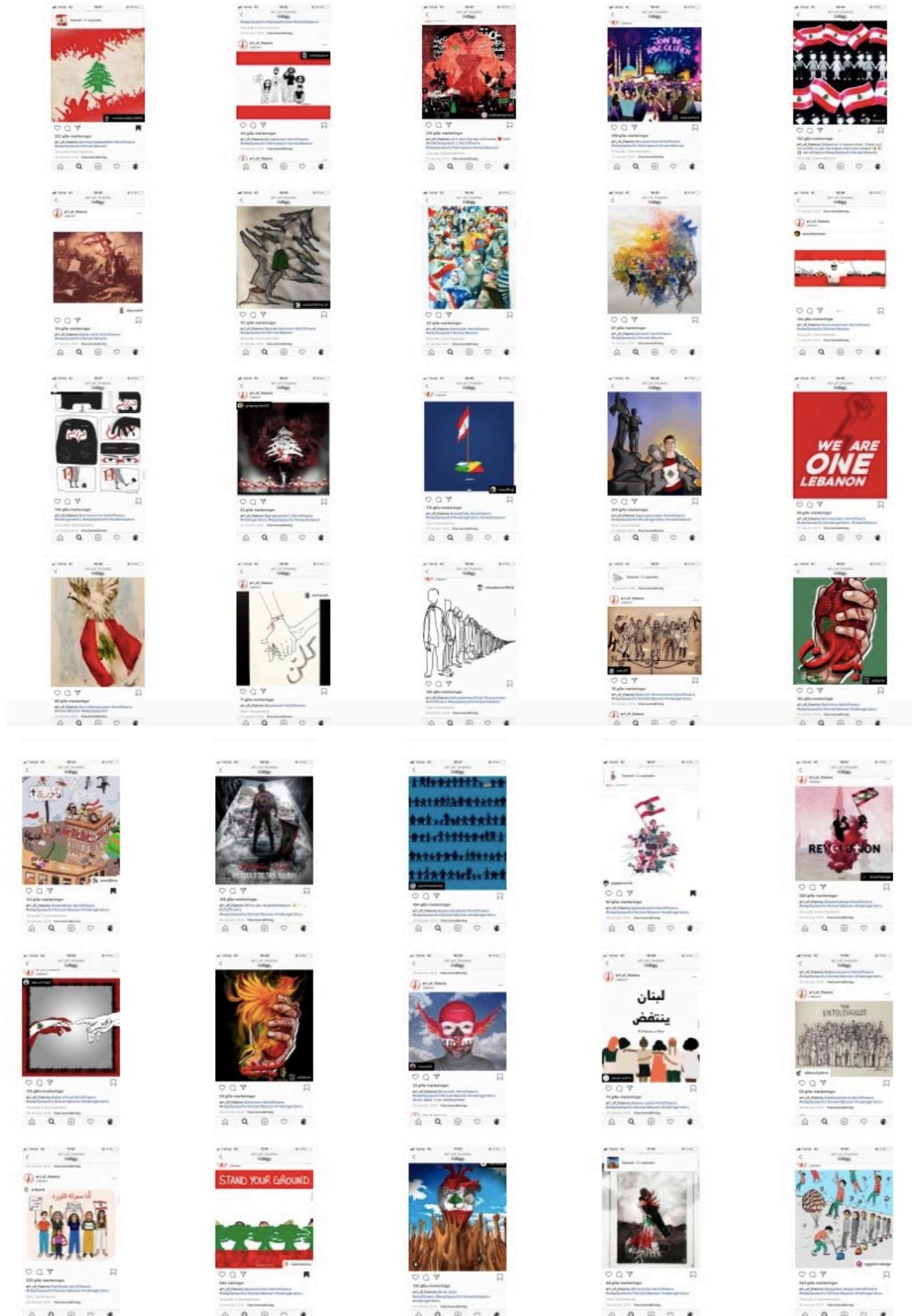
- @thawra_artists 21, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-28, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4KrtX2ggyF/>
- @thawra_artists 30, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-02, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4WMsdRgxWI/>
- @thawra_artists 33, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-03, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Zn6tpgasC/>
- @thawra_artists 34, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-03, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4aa-Kqgcz9/>
- @thawra_artists 35, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-04, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4bdgYVAoFV/>
- @thawra_artists 40, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-12, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4wBlBwpTT-/>
- @thawra_artists 42, Fatima Al Skafi, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-12, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4wuP04JtPp/>
- @wallsoftahra 35, , 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-10-30, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4P82mrnRed/>
- @wallsoftahra 42, 2019. Published on Instagram on 2019-11-02, [electronic]. Accessed latest on 2020-05-25. https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Wg_0MHI4U/

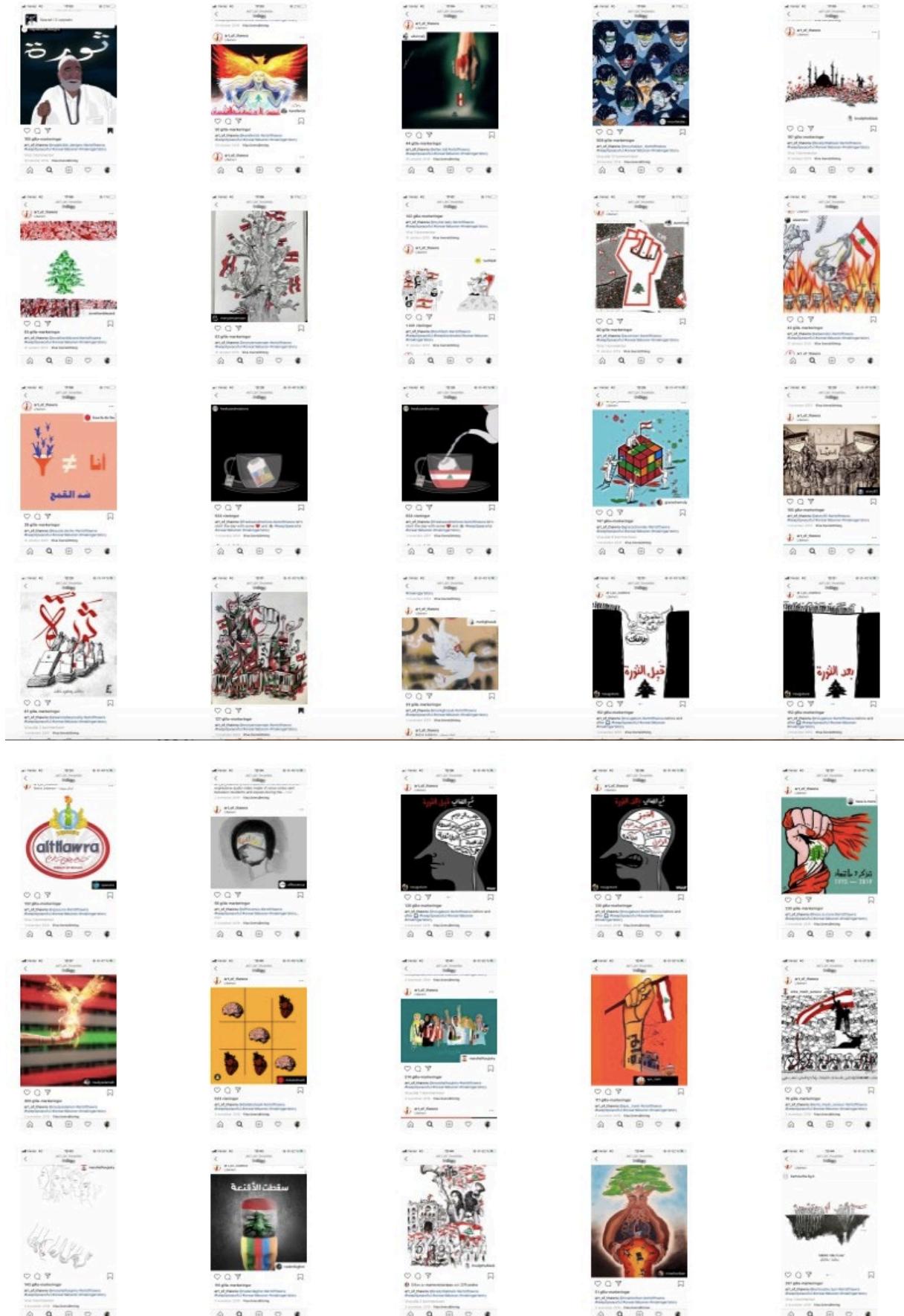
Appendix

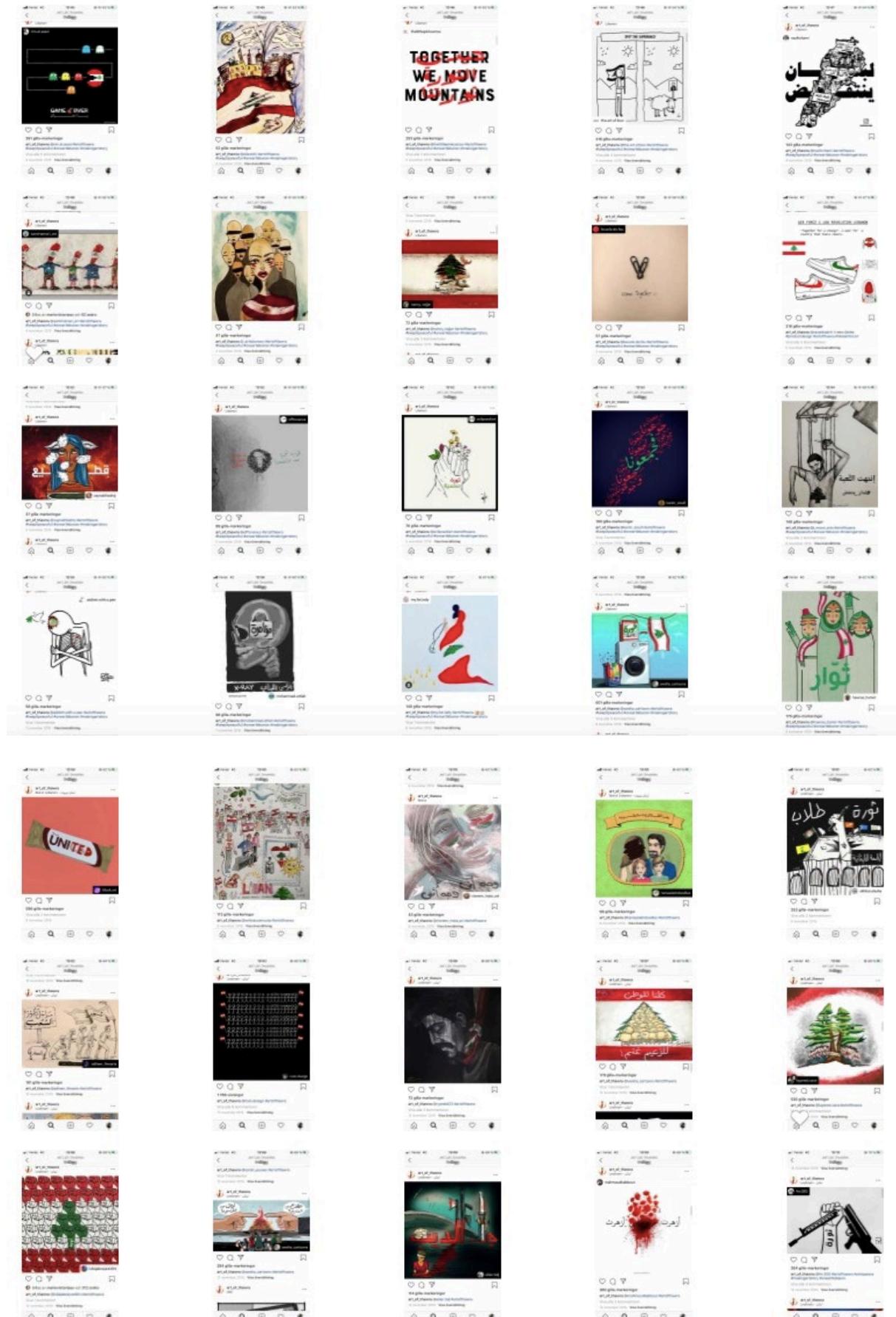
1. @art_of_thawra

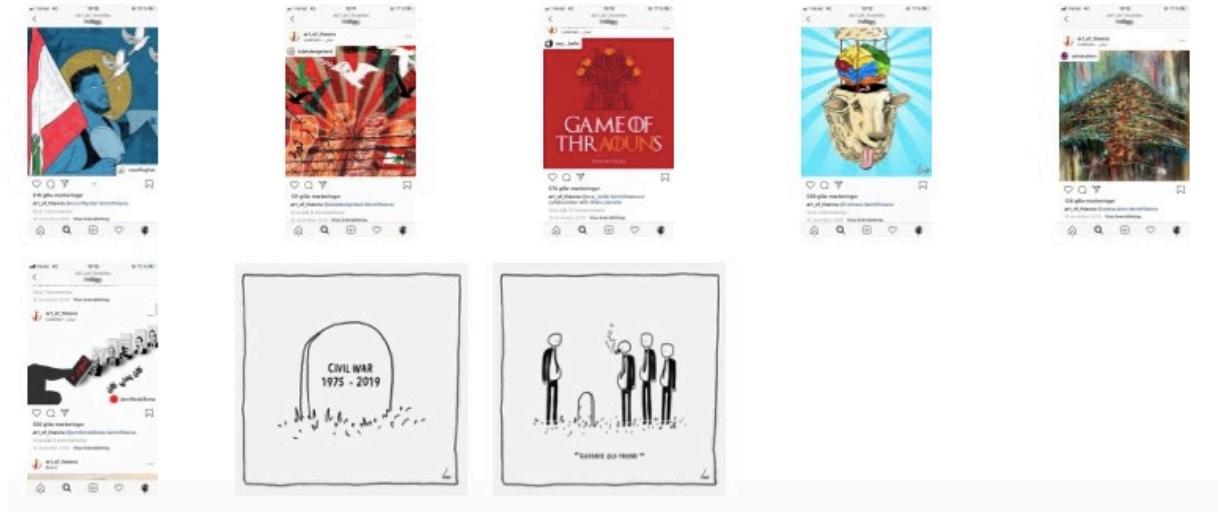




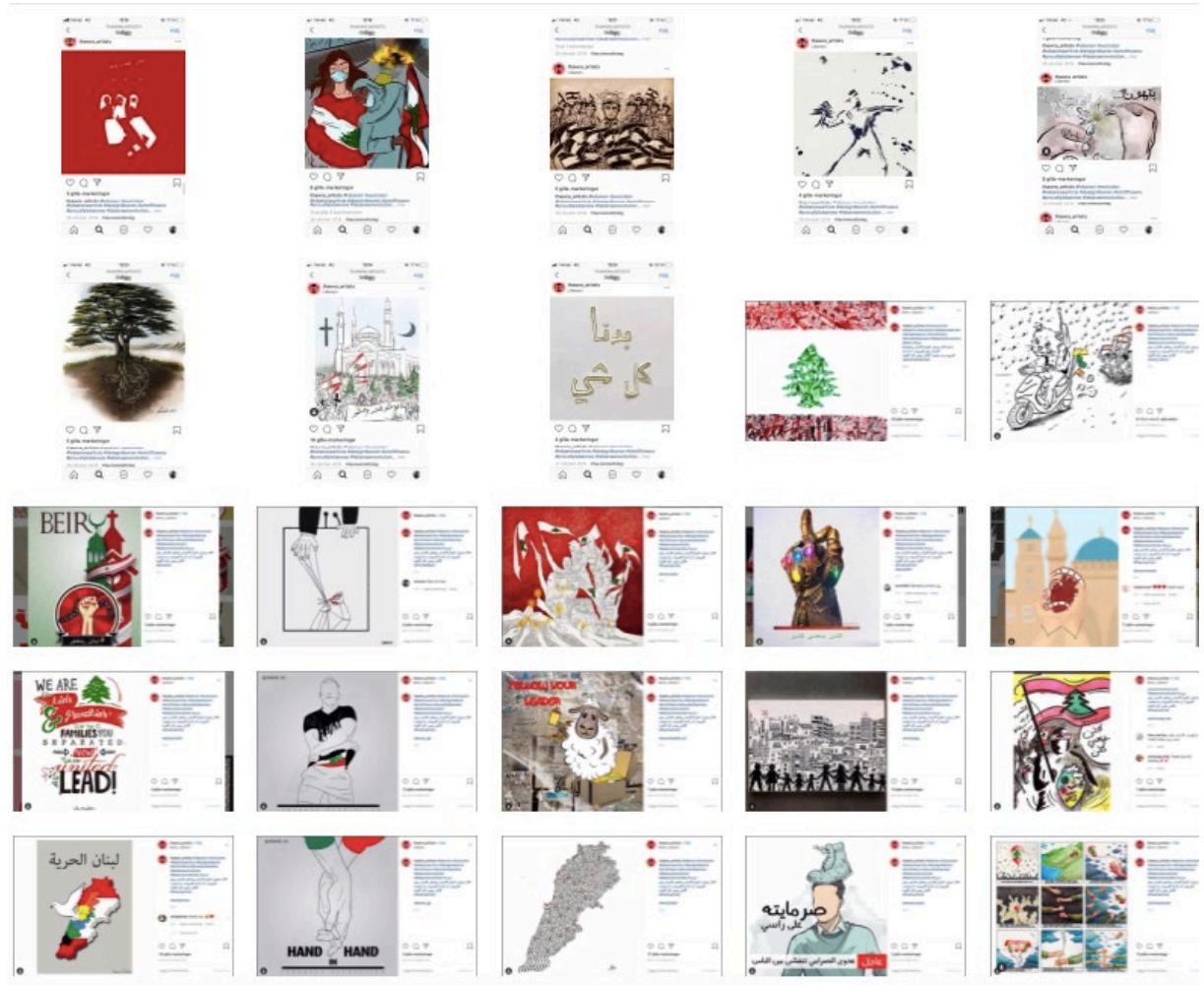


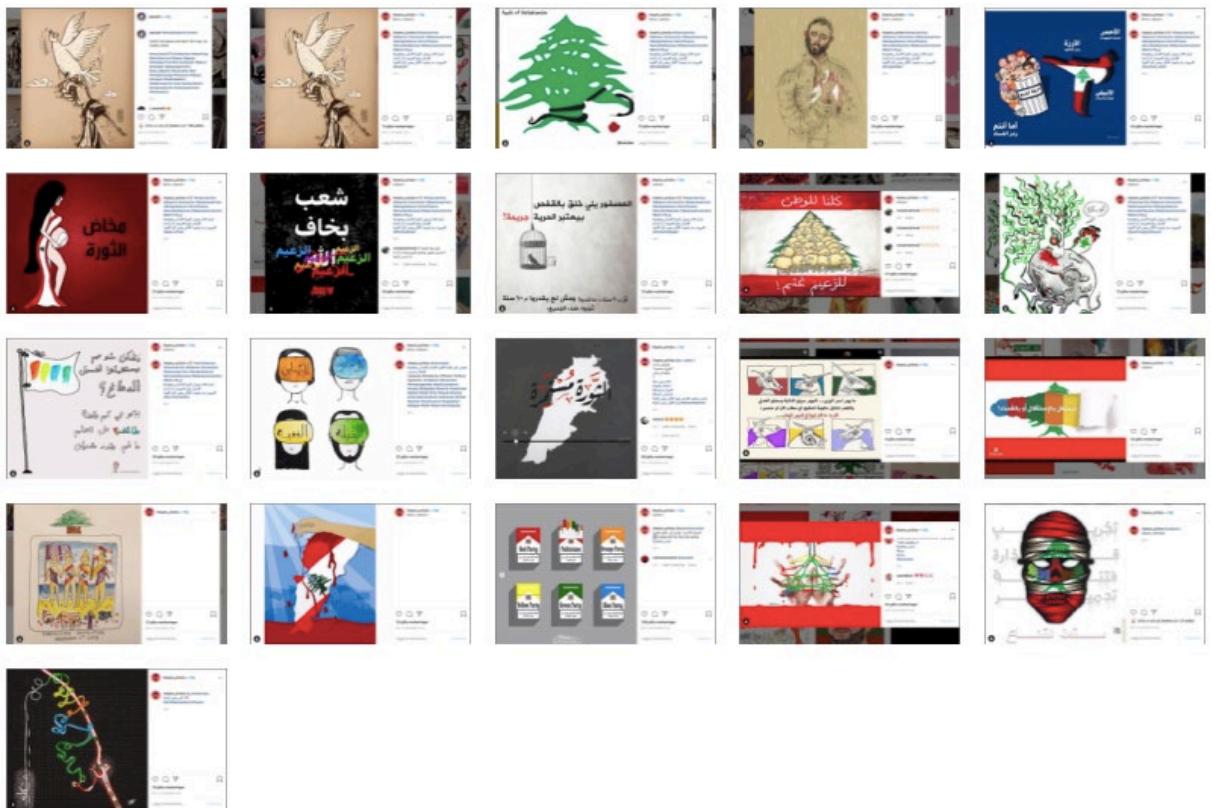




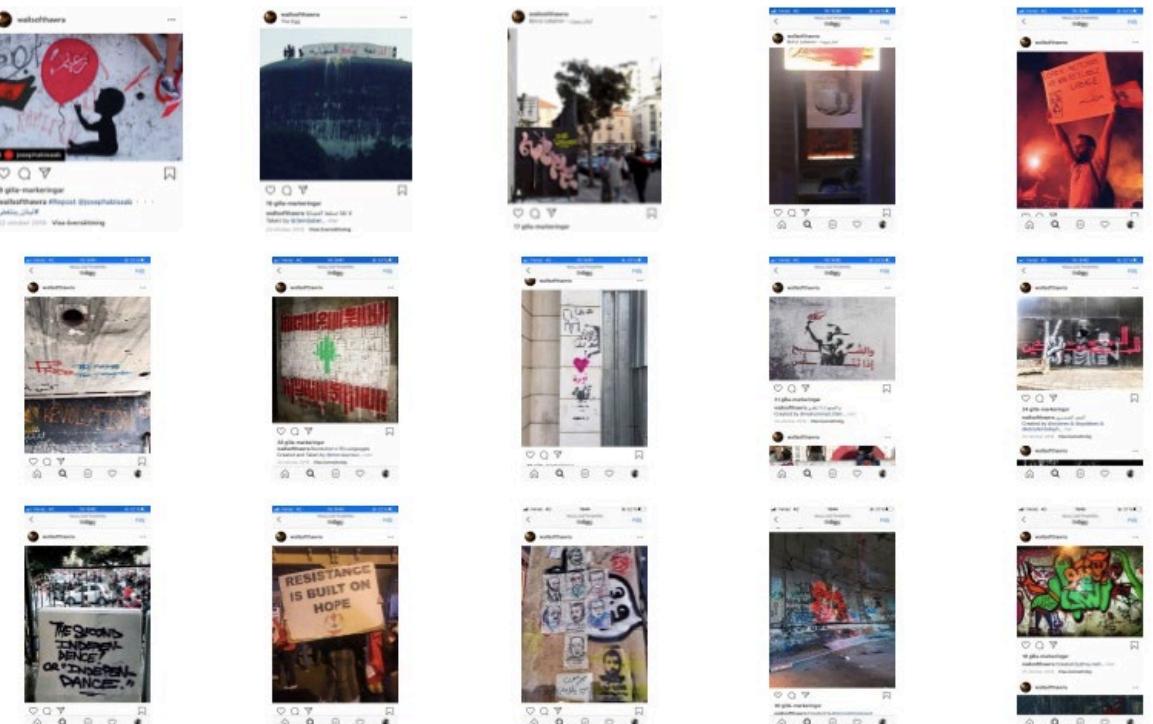


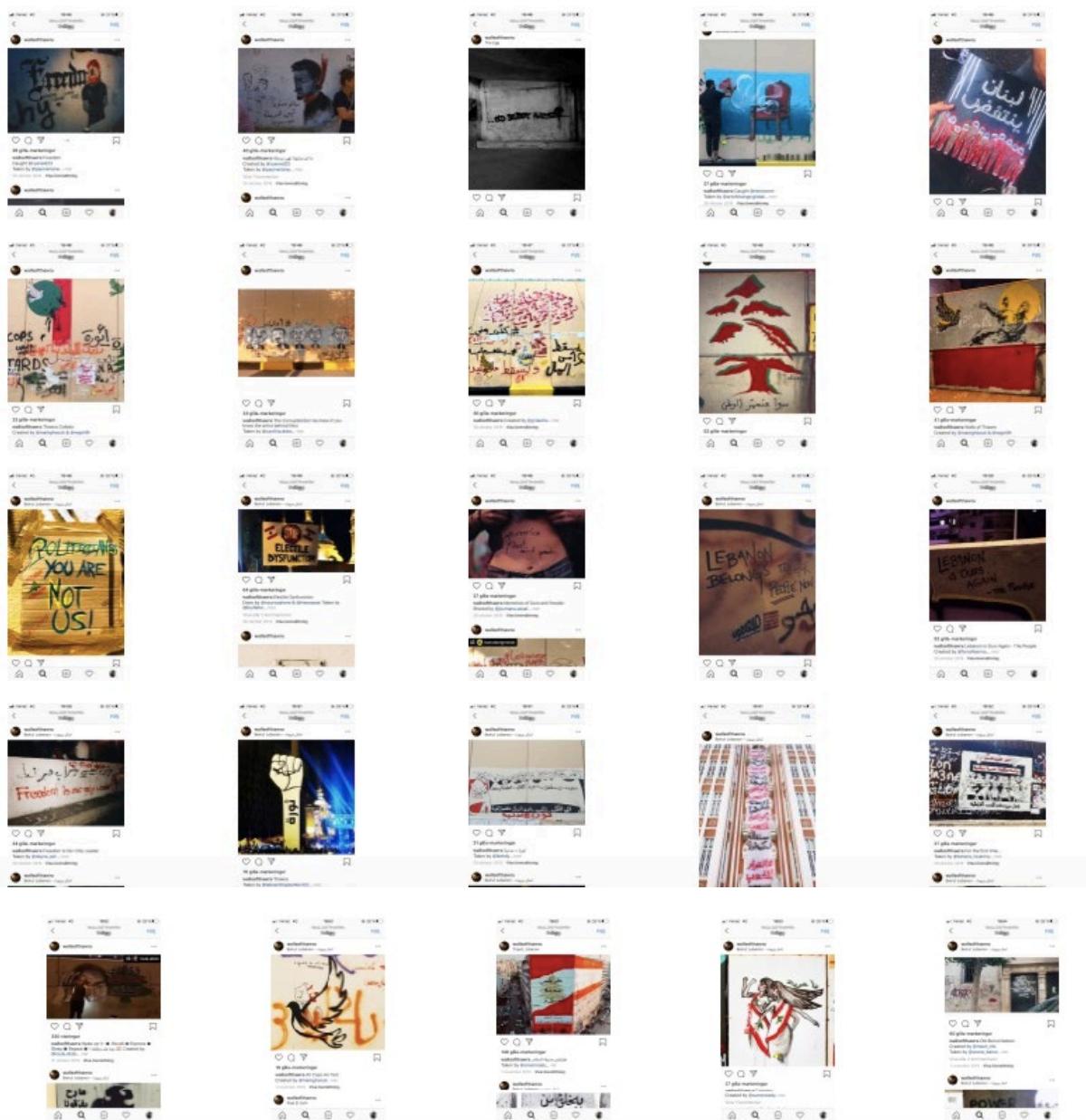
2. @thawra_artists

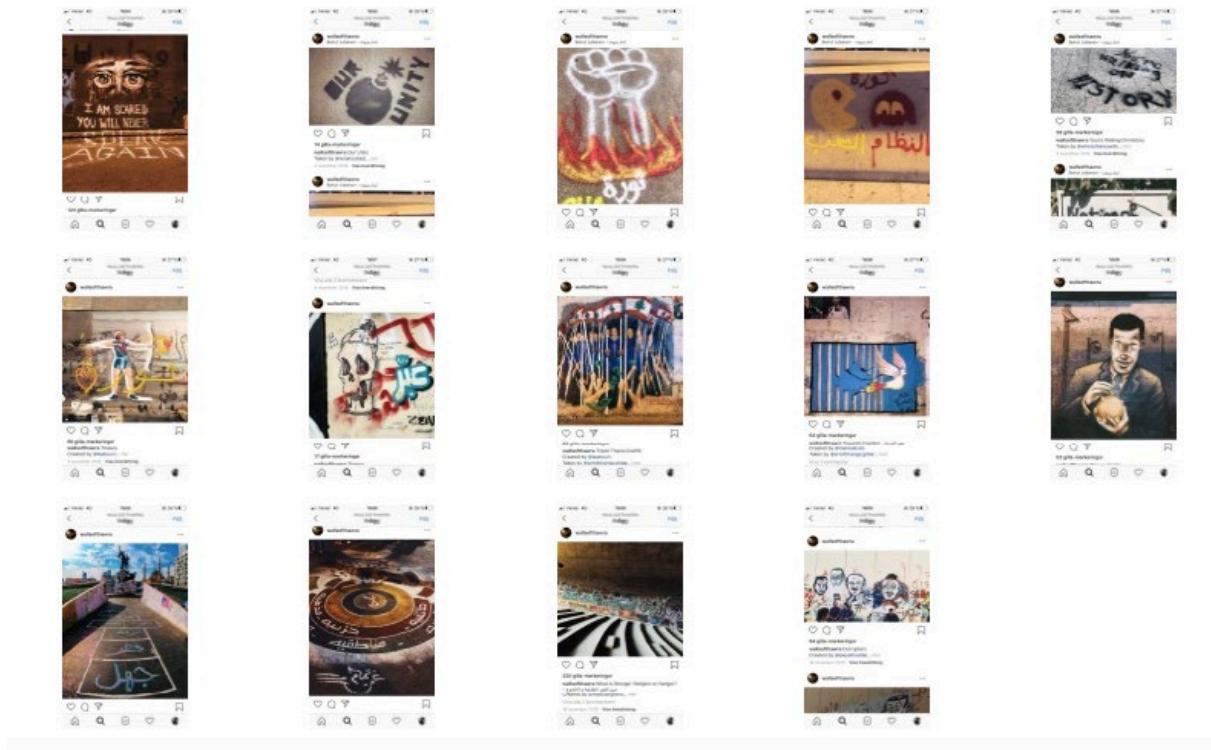




3. @wallsofthawra







About the Working Papers Series

The Working Paper Series is an in-house refereed online publication in the field of peace and memory studies, published by the Research Cluster on Peace, Memory and Cultural Heritage. It offers an opportunity for members and other researchers to publish their work continuously in various stages of development. The authors hold copyright to the papers. Papers published in this series may be cited as follows: Author. Month, Year. Title. Peace and Memory Working Paper no. X.

Series Editor: Johanna Mannergren Selimovic

Correspondence to: johanna.mannergren@ui.se

Visit the project's website: www.peaceandmemory.net

In Series

1. Björkdahl, Annika, Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Stefanie Kappler, Johanna Mannergren Selimovic and Timothy Williams: *Memory Politics, Cultural Heritage and Peace. Introducing an analytical framework to study mnemonic formations*
2. Dugandžić, Danijela: *Politics between Art and Space: Sarajevo, after 1995*
3. Rios Oyola, Sandra Milena: *Human Dignity, Memory and Reparations. Towards a new understanding of transitional justice*
4. Reinermann, Jan: “*They Should Cremate It*”: *Youth Perceptions towards Skeletal Remains in Cambodia’s Genocide Memorials*
5. Bergman, Hanna: *The Art of Reconciliation. Understanding art from the October revolution in Lebanon*