

Democratic movements in Lebanon and children's understanding of their rights

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ABSTRACT: Children's rights should be applicable for children, and be acknowledged by children themselves and practice them in the present and future lives. The increasing awareness and concern about children's rights need a thorough investigation of how children themselves understand their rights. The aim of this study is to analyze the perspective of children in Lebanon of their rights and examine the impact of democratic movements on their understanding of their rights. A qualitative research methodology was employed and data were gathered in the form of semi-structured VoIP interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. The analysis presented in this paper signifies that the democratic movements are being both a source and an approach of recognizing and practicing children's rights, especially the right to participate, freedom of expression, and equality, along with the right to education, social security, and protection from all forms of abuse. Hence, it could be concluded that democratic movements are important in constructing and reconstructing children's understanding of their rights.

KEYWORDS: Childhood, Qualitative Research, Children's Perspective, Sociopolitical Factors

1. BACKGROUND

Children's rights serve for the development of children with respect to their physical, mental, emotional, social, moral, and economic care and protection (Akyuz 2000). Children must be seen as social actors and rights holders rather than perceiving them as inactive and reliant on the adults (Qvortrup 1994; Mayall 2002). "There is a distinction between 'having' rights and being allowed to exercise them" (Freeman

2009:387), children's rights should be applicable for children, and be acknowledged by children themselves being applicable and practice them in the present and future lives (Liebel 2012:1). The universal recognition of children's rights and the increasing awareness and concern about the concept needs a comprehensive investigation of how children themselves understand their rights (Ben-Arieh, Khoury-Kassabri, & Ha-jYahia 2006; Helwig & Turiel 2002). Children can understand their rights and responsibilities in significant ways to their daily behavior (Covell, Howe, & McNeil 2008).

The study aims to adhere to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, which proposes a groundwork for integrating the different aspects correlated with children's views of their rights. The ecological perspective suggests that children's attitudes to their rights are a "dyad" between the child's individual characteristics and the circumstantial and environmental factors. Previous studies have found maturity as an eminent aspect of children's understanding of rights (Melton 1980; Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating 1989). Furthermore, perspectives on the suitability of maintaining children's rights and the significance of specific types of rights were found to be conditional on the social and economic situation (Melton 1980). Children's significant participation in civil society and their well-being persist an understanding of their rights being individuals in a family and society (Limber et al. 1999; Melton & Limber 1992). Still, little is known about the democratic movements that affect children's understanding of their rights. This insufficient knowledge is of interest as most studies to date have fixated on children from Western communities and colonial countries. Therefore, studies in non-Western societies and among postcolonial countries are crucial if we are to fully understand the special role of democratic movements.

Other earlier studies found social movements important in constructing and re-constructing the understandings of Human Rights (HR) (Stammers 2013). However, the impact of the democratic movements hasn't been examined to date. Democratic movements are defined as extensive, social public demonstrations that are particularly pro-democracy. Participants' requests necessarily include democracy, direct election, or change of authoritarian constitution, where participants articulate their views by physical demonstrations, protests, or strikes (Minier 2001:996). Saleh (2013:80) investigated the children's participation in the Syrian revolution against Bashar al-Assad. She declared that "The involvement of children in democratic social movements and regime transitions has not been addressed in the literature, although some works describe the role children can play in making public policy or in the humanitarian domain." She claims that "just as the role of women and of university-aged youth was gradually incorporated in the body of research on the social movements and regime transitions, so should the role of children be studied." (As cited in Sinha, Garofalo, & Olimat 2013:2). Henceforward, the main aim of this study is to use new data on democratic movements in Lebanon and to assess and analyze how children in Beirut city (7 children aged between 12 to 17 years) understand their rights and place in democratic movements. The ideas, attitudes, and knowledge they possess. Where and how did they develop these concepts. Based on the gaps in the literature, the research question is: *What Impact do the democratic movements in Lebanon have on children's understanding of their rights?* To acquire a more profound answer, the specific rights that children

mobilize and prioritize in their discourse; the main violations and challenges children experience in their social life, according to their view; the main influences that shape children's understanding of children's rights; and sources of information about children's rights they have access to, were tackled.

In consonance with previous studies involving children's perspectives of their rights, the researcher hypothesized that the democratic movement that took place in Lebanon contributes to the children's understanding of human rights in general and children's rights in particular since the democratic movements are being both a source and an approach of recognizing and practicing human rights, especially the right to freedom of expression, participation, and equality. Therefore, the researcher expected that most of the children might understand these aspects of children's rights.

1.1. CHILDREN'S DISCOURSE OF THEIR RIGHTS

1.1.1. POSTCOLONIAL CHILDHOODS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Children's rights are to be considered human rights (Freeman 2009; Invernizzi & Williams 2011). The verifiable truth that the universality of human rights is not assured but only a procedure of their universalization has results for how every perception of human rights should understand itself and should act towards itself: it should endure a constant self-criticism (Liebel 2020:127). Undoubtedly, human rights in their fundamental manner date back to the European Enlightenment in the 17th century. The issue here is not of the idea and its European inception, but of the affirmation that the history of human rights represents a linear and unrestrained progress of the Enlightenment, and is an exclusive accomplishment of Europe, where the people outside of Europe would only have to follow it, which means, its claimed as a task (ibid:130). The allegation of universality was firstly ignored by the colonies, whose ambition is to attach the concept of human rights to themselves. Strictly speaking, human rights were betrayed by the brutal forces of European powers. To the present moment, the imperial allegation and the analogous instrumental use of human rights in the 'development message' demonstrate that the Western 'democratic' powers had to teach human rights to the 'underdeveloped' societies (ibid).

Edward Said (1978), in his influential book 'Orientalism', addresses the claimed universalisms, not only that it camouflaged power structures and their bias but also firmly advocated and maintained the existent deprived polarizations. Said recognized them as an indication of the 'doctrines of European superiority' (Said 1978:14), which are entrenched in a 'formidable structure of cultural domination' (ibid:26). It is bizarre that time after time, double standards are applied to human rights, and the Global North conventionalize itself as the trustee of human rights, in the time that the Global South is exposed to the accumulation of demands in human rights (Liebel 2020:129). In accordance with Mutua (2002), the reference of governments of the global North and the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), towards the Global South is placed in an inappropriate continuous link with the former colonial officials and commissioners. Mutua suggests, as a substitute, an inclusive and participatory method on a global level and conceives a 'multicultural' conception of human rights

that perceives and adapts to none-western cultures' attitudes towards human rights (Mutua 2002).

The majority of the world's children live in economically destitute areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America (Punch 2003:1). When examining the minority (First) and majority (Third) worlds, quantitatively, the most prevailing form of 'childhood' is, accordingly, the one of 'Third World' children, where many of them work. On the other hand, in a contradictory manner, Third World childhoods are likely to be deemed as abnormal when investigated within the universalism model of childhood that depends on the western standards where children only play and go to school but not work (Boyden 1990). Within media and popular discourses, children of the majority world who start working from an early age: "burdened with adult-like duties and responsibilities" (Kefyalew 1996:209), are apt to be conceived as 'miniature adults' (Boyden, Ling, & Myers 1998; Ennew 1994; Green 1998). In such a manner, the popular perception of childhoods that do not adhere to such standards is that they have 'abnormal' childhoods (Edwards 1996; Save the Children 1995:40). By the same token, research on the majority world children aims the attention, vehemently, on their work while disregarding their play (Punch 2003:3). As a substitute for considering the childhoods of the Third World children as 'abnormal', one must bear in mind the fact that First World children are more likely to live protected and privileged childhoods juxtaposed to the rest of the world's children. Oversimplified differentiations between childhoods of the minority world and the majority world are precarious for the reason that children's lives differ based on a scope of aspects including gender, age, culture, class, ethnicity, religion, birth order, and disability (Punch 2003:1). Hecht (1998) mentions the distinction between the protected, nourished childhoods of the rich (minority world) and the self-reliant, nourishing childhoods of the poor (majority world).

In the last decade, research approaches have arisen, which can be beneficial for a discerned assessment of children's rights – as well as in the postcolonial frames of reference (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys 2013; Liebel 2012; Reynaert et al. 2015). In their perception, "children's rights are not only about rules but also about structures, relationships, and processes" (Reynaert et al. 2015:p.5). Notwithstanding the foregoing, these new approaches do not distrust the fact that children's rights and the UNCRC are the most substantial legal fundamental for all the children in the world (Liebel 2020:2).

Only a few studies have examined children's understanding of their rights connected to their own participation in research. Research demonstrates that children understand what they are being requested to do in the investigations, but only a few of them understand the purpose of the studies. Younger children are hardly sure that their feedback is confidential and less certain of how to withdraw from the study if they desire to (Hurley & Underwood 2002:134).

1.1.2. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Participation in social and community events is significant for the children, for the community, and for democratic realities (Melton 2006). Empowering children to com-

municate their viewpoints and feelings about incidents happening in their surroundings and to engage firmly in their lives indicates respect for children as human beings here and now (Weithorn 1998). The aforementioned respect bolsters the children to prosper a positive perception of self and self-respect, like Weithorn so delightfully asserted, “to enable children to stand” up for themselves, for others, and to those who will try to influence them, we must help them develop their dignity and self-worth”. Child and youth participation, via cultural, communicative, and political procedures, develops into a debated resource for several individuals, institutions, and networks (Khalil 2017:703).

1.2. THE LEBANESE CASE

1.2.1. POLITICAL HISTORY OF LEBANON

Lebanon’s unique political and social dynamics coupled with its history of civil war and sectarianism are factors that continue to shape the environment. Though Lebanon has reconstructed its government, social services, and infrastructure relatively successfully, its history appears to have a continued impact and to inform the current political context, the weak state, socioeconomic disparities, the treatment of refugee communities and social violence. These factors deeply impact the situation and wellbeing of the child, not only in terms of protection and service provision, but also in terms of discrimination, violence, and safety. Understanding the history and current political trends in Lebanon is pivotal to developing and implementing effective child-centered projects. (Save The Children 2008:16)

The Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) was characterized by societal separations along sectarian lines with powerful armed groups that dominated different districts of the country (Nagle 2016:51). One of the ongoing inheritances of the civil war is a displaced populace who have not been able to return to their homes, for different reasons such as the destruction of the houses; possession of properties by other people; restricted employment opportunities; a deficiency of infrastructure; and a deficiency of conciliation between the displaced and present populace (NRC/IDMC 2006:8). Another continuing inheritance of the civil war was Syria and Israel’s presence in Lebanon, and political sectarianism and armed groups. Israel’s long occupation of the south has acutely impacted the political, social, and economic growth of the country as a whole. From 1990 to 2005, the Syrian army and political forces were entangled in the political realm of Lebanon. During this period, Syrian intelligence played a critical role in political growth and security. All through the civil war and afterward, armed factions, associated with political or religious groups of all sects, have dominated regions of Lebanon and have had a strong impact on the political realm (Save The Children 2008:19-20).

After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and the popular revolt that occurred on 14 March 2005, the Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon. The public required improved governance, greater transparency, and reduced clientelism and

sectarianism. Following the withdrawal of Syrian forces in 2005, congressional elections took place, with the attendance of EU observers, and a broad range of economic and political reforms was conferred with the international community (ibid:20).

Lebanon has been reconstructing itself since the violent conflicts that occurred at the end of the 20th century. The well-being of children has predominantly been sabotaged by recent geopolitical circumstances. While moderately improving, Lebanon still has much to improve, for the full protection of children's rights (Humanium n.d.).

Lebanese youth are broadly involved in politics and humanitarian activities. Yet, the political crisis and the heritage of the civil war made youth extremely mistrustful of politics and social systems. As echoed in their identity endeavor, youth are also seeking solutions, more engagement, and motivation to avoid withdrawal (Save the Children 2008:10). When children in Lebanon were asked about their awareness of the children's rights, Lebanese children were most adept to recognize their rights, while refugee and migrant children were hardly aware of their rights (ibid:143).

1.2.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS

Lebanon has witnessed repeating influxes of mainly youth-led through protests since 2005 when the alleged Beirut spring compelled the withdrawal of the Syrian military that had occupied the state for almost 30 years. In the past, the state's leaders have usually homogenized the movements to dragging the youth into their particular political encampments (International Crisis Group 2019). The Lebanese have had many reasons to demonstrate in recent years, with a desolate economy that causes many young people to depart the country for satisfying jobs; with landfills and beaches overflowing with rubbish; with the government constantly paralyzed over amendments. But since October 2019 it has gone beyond the usual humiliations: a stumble currency; a crisis over wheat and gas; and, earlier in 2019, forest fires for which the government was not prepared, necessitating a call for firefighting assistance (The New York Times 2019).

In October 2019, Lebanese citizens actively protested, across sectarian, class, and regional lines. Demand for the Lebanese government (formed in January 2019) to resign is what unites the protests. For the 10 months prior to these protests, the government has failed to protect Lebanon from an aggravating financial crisis mainly induced by government mismanagement and corruption. From the beginning, protesters started characterizing their actions as revolutionary. Although it could not be predicted whether the protests would lead to a political revolution, it was clear that we have witnessed a social one (Aljazeera 2018). Bishara (2019:3) stresses further that Lebanon's protests were historic and were the first real challenge to the sectarian system. Bishara proposes a title which is „citizenship” for what is currently happening in Lebanon, i.e. rejecting sectarian affiliations as the organizer of the relationship between the individual and the state, emphasizing the idea of citizenship and the nation-state and rejecting the idea of political sectarianism and quotas resulting from it, and in this, the revolutionary movement that is taking place in Lebanon reshapes the national identity and highlights it in *Confronting political sectarianism* (ibid:2).

Bishara adds saying what occurred in Lebanon in October 2019 is, to a large extent, a political and cultural revolution (ibid). Lebanon witnessed the rise of a central balancing stream that is clearly hostile to the sectarian system and adheres to the „state of citizenship” and the civil state. This happened in Lebanon for the first time since 1863, and this is a great historical event. There were always anti-sectarian movements but they were ideological movements, leftist or nationalist parties that reject sectarianism from their ideological-political perspectives, and not a general civil trend that represents a central trend in society that violates the sects and crosses over them, rejecting sectarianism out of citizenship (ibid:3).

Lebanese children’s identities are defined by social and political engagement. They have the education, power, and capacities to play an active beneficial role in Lebanon. Nevertheless, this is restricted by feelings of instability; regardless of the pressure of the political crisis. The majority of youth have conviction and trust in their capability to affect the system ultimately and persist to search for opportunities and measures for improvement (Antoun 2007:33-35). Bishara (2019:3) emphasizes that the great civilized step in the revolutionary wave in Lebanon is that it is also a generational revolution and that the starting point of the young generation that filled the streets is moral, not ideological. The liberal civil spirit is very clear in the Lebanese movement.

2. METHODS AND ETHICS

A qualitative methodology approach was conducted to answer the research question/s, as it allows the researcher to thoroughly investigate the respective topic and themes. The qualitative research approach is suitable for social relations researches for two reasons: It can be used to answer questions about the experiences and perspectives, mostly from the participants’ points of view; It leads to developing theories from the empirical studies through a bottom-up approach (Flick 2014:11-12) as it accentuates processes, meaning patterns, and structural features (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke 2004:3).

The destined participants of this study were 6-8 children aged 12-17 years from Beirut. The participants were recruited by asking acquaintances, hence, a snowball approach was applied, which engages in getting the researcher’s acquaintances to recommend relevant people to participate in a study (Saunders and Thornhill 2012). Despite the fact that such an approach could be biased, if there are obstacles in determining the target population for the study, the sample may be procured in this way (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Participation in the research was rigidly and deliberately of one’s own free will. On one hand, the main considerations and worries were to ensure that sampling was the embodiment, which is a very critical point here due to the time-consuming nature of such a study. On the other hand, all sampling methods are purposeful and aim to recruit samples, which can supply plentiful and deep data about topics that are fundamental to the purpose of the research (Patton 1990). In the beginning, eight children were recruited, but, unfortunately, one of them apologized and had to cancel at the last minute, for personal reasons, their participation in the research. All of them gave their own assent, as well as their parents.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a question guide to keep the researcher on track through the interview process and gather all the necessary information. The question guide was developed explicitly and independently for this study based on the literature view. It maintains some structure but also allows additional questions or a conversation to evolve, encouraging the participant to share more and more details. The method of a semi-structured interview provides both flexibility and structure, which is important for young researchers (Flick 2014:217-218).

Within this study, the interviews were conducted via video conferencing technologies (Skype). The application of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) for interviews is a comparatively new phenomenon in qualitative research. While other technologies have been applied to manage 'remote' or 'distributed' sessions (Stevens 2008; Yankelovitch et al. 2004). The adoption of VoIP video interviews in this study was propelled by the difficulty of the researcher in traveling to Lebanon, contacting individuals, and organizing face-to-face interviews with the potential participants.

After collecting the information from the children, interviews were transcribed accurately (Flick 2002:176-220) in Arabic, the original language of the interviews—as it is both the mother tongue of the participants as well as the researcher—aiming to keep the exact genuine meaning of the participants' inputs. Selected quotes were translated to English by the researcher. The data was analyzed on the basis of a thematic analysis of these transcribed interviews, which is a form of constant comparison used to analyze documents in a textual form. It involves making inferences by systematically identifying characteristics of messages and is related to a process of ascertaining meanings about a written phenomenon being studied (Henderson & Bialeschki 2002).

Within this study, the researcher guaranteed that potential participants give their informed consent for participating, discerning the voluntary essence of their participation and that they could freely end their engagement whenever needed, for any excuse; understand the advantages and disadvantages of their participation; comprehend the conditions and standards under which they will participate, such as confidentiality (Abramovitch et al. 1995; Abramovitch et al. 1991; Leikin 1993; Weithorn 1983). Aside from ethical accountabilities, the validity of most of the data relies on the understanding of children of the research agenda and their rights as research participants (Hughes & Helling 1991).

3. FINDINGS

In this chapter, first and foremost, the compelling findings of the interviews are presented in a manner that stays sincere to the children's perspectives of their rights and lives.

As stated in the previous chapter, thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method. Therefore, the results are presented based on themes and categories, derived from the coding process.

3.1. MAIN RIGHTS THE CHILDREN MOBILIZE AND PRIORITIZE IN THEIR DISCOURSE

In what follows, presented are the children's rights that participants themselves referred to in the interviews.

Child Participation

One of the most valuable and crucial rights according to the children is the right to participate. All of the children talked about the importance of freedom of expression and having the right to express their views freely in all matters impacting their life. This could be exemplified by the words of participant D (16 years old):

So I believe as a child, adolescence, or a teen I should have the freedom to make my own decisions, this is my life. I believe this is one right I don't know if it is proven or if it is said by people.

According to participant F (15 years old), when children are able to choose the things they like to do, they feel happiness, satisfaction, responsibility, comfort, and relaxation. Summarizing their idea at the end of the interview aiming the attention on children's agency and participation in the family, saying:

The child, whether a boy or a girl, should have the possibility to choose what he wants, to do and try the things he desires and is interested in, parents shouldn't prevent their children, of course, they should give guidance and advice, but not forbid their children from doing so.

Another aspect of the children's participation significance was highlighted in the interviews when the researcher asked about the children's motivation for participating in this study:

I was interested in participating in this research because our thoughts and rights are our messages, and we want it to be delivered to the community, parents, government, even other countries around the world, simply to everyone. (Participant A, 12 years old).

Education

All of the participants talked about children's right to education. They brought it up within the first few rights. They named and explained their views about education, discussing its significance and positive value for their present and future:

The child has the right to education, children should go to school, learn and expand their knowledge and skills, and for that to happen, I believe the state has to provide complimentary education, so all the children in Lebanon can go to school. (Participant A)

This point was backed by participant D, mentioning the link between education and civilization, saying:

Children should have a proper education because that would lead to a good civilization in the future, so it has several advantages.

Equality

One of the most significant rights the participants focused on during the interviews is equality, to live without facing discrimination of any kind, regardless of one's religion, gender, national, ethnic ancestry, political opinion, socio-economic status, or any other factor.

First of all, equality, irrespective of sex, color, or age. It is the most important right in human rights. For example, racism based on color or the distinction of nationality, and other rights. By the country or at home, for example, the child should not be subjected to discrimination between the siblings by the parents. (Participant C, 14 years old)

Regarding gender equality, participant F stressed:

Parents should trust and grant freedom for all children, despite their gender. Some parents restrict the girls' choices and movement while allowing the boys to do whatever they want and go wherever they want.

Furthermore, they have stressed that all children have the right to be registered in the country or, for refugees, to receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance:

I think that if, for instance, I am here in Lebanon as a migrant or displaced person, I do not want to be treated with violence or not to be allowed to attend school, because I am a human being as well just like any other person. Even if I have a different nationality, I would still care for my future when I return to my homeland. (Participant G, 13 years old)

Approved by participant A:

All children have the right to receive medical care if they are sick, and someone to take care of them and take them to the hospital, it doesn't matter if they are Lebanese or refugees. Once, we had a research assignment in school and found that only the Lebanese citizens and children can go to the hospital and get treated.

In addition, the findings reveal that adults, in particular parents, tend to have higher expectations from older children than younger ones, so they treat them differently, strictly holding them accountable on almost everything, just for being older than their siblings. It could be that parents focus on the „maturing” progress of the children, the older the child is, the more mature they would be, and the more responsibility they would take in their personal and social life, emphasized by participant A:

They mostly blame me or put the responsibility on me just because I am older, so I should understand and act accordingly, but I don't like this actually. I mean, even though he is younger it is still his fault, so he should be responsible. It is

my right not to be blamed for things I didn't do, we should be treated equally, it doesn't matter who is younger and who is older.

Protection from all forms of abuse

Children have a right to be protected from any physical or mental abuse, injury, neglect, maltreatment, or violence. Children deserve a loving caring environment and good relationships between them and their parents and family:

Unfortunately, there is a high percentage of violence in Lebanon, 63% of the children aged between 1-14 years, face at home at least one type of violence.” (Participant B, 16 years old)

Furthermore, it is not safe enough for participant A' to go by himself to his social activity as it is quite far. As he mentioned, there have been some kidnapping incidents, and their parents don't let him go by himself out of fear. Further emphasized by participant G:

I think the situation in Lebanon is critical for another reason, the absence of safety, and for me, this is the minimal of the basics of children's rights, for them to feel secure and safe in their surrounding community and their country.

There was another point mentioned only by one participant, participant E (12 years old), explaining that some legislations or restrictions are for the child's safety. Stressing that maturity experience in life is accumulated by age, and that's why there are particular rights that are provided only after a certain age, such as driving license, living alone, etc.

Social Security

The right to social security, to access and claim benefits in order to obtain protection at the economic level, particularly for families with children, as the state shall enforce and realize the socio-economic rights of children:

I believe that the state should maintain social security for the families, and this is not met in Lebanon, a lot of families cannot guarantee adequate living conditions for their children. And I believe this situation leads to some violations of children's rights and human rights in general. (Participant C)

Social security would protect citizens from the loss of income caused by unemployment:

The government shall provide financial protection for the unemployed people, and help them find jobs after finishing their education. (Participant F)

3.2. CAUSES FOR CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

School System

The children expressed their dissatisfaction with the school system and curriculum. For instance, participant C said:

The curriculum, in my opinion, is a critical issue within the Lebanese state school system, it is very old, and not developed or adjusted to meet our generation or the age we live in.

Furthermore, participant D mentioned another aspect regarding the curriculum:

I believe that in Lebanon the curriculum in the traditional schools, I mean the state schools, will not build focused determined and confident children for the world. That is what I believe in because all the schools care about is getting high grades and a good rank in the official exams.

Concurrently, participant A is not satisfied with the break time in the school day and addressed the need for extra time for rest and play. At the same time, he further talked about a different element of the school system hindering the implementation of children's rights, which is the school staff attitude towards the students, saying:

Not all of them, but some teachers keep shouting on the children all the time, even if they are not causing any trouble or disturbance in the class.

Bullying

Bullying is extremely critical phenomenon children endure and suffer from, which violates the children's rights and its principles:

Children frequently encounter bullying in school and the bullied child might just get depressed and left out. Indeed, sometimes the situation gets so bad, it gets to the point where the child has suicidal thoughts and intentions, especially if he or she doesn't get the support needed for dealing with and surviving the bullying. (Participant E)

A disturbing and alarming fact is that adults, as well, tend to bully children while they are supposed to empower and support them and their developmental progress, educationally, socially, and mentally:

Every now and then, the bullying comes from the teachers themselves, not only the classmates, and this is very harmful and immoral, in my eyes. (Participant G)

3.3. THE PRESENCE OF DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Child and Youth Awareness

All of the participants have referred to the democratic movements happening in Leba-

non as a “revolution”. The Lebanese children are aware of the real critical situation in Lebanon, regarding government corruption, human rights violations, and much more:

The government is not taking responsibility and not even interested in applying or planning community projects raising awareness on human rights, children’s rights, gender equality, etc. because the politicians themselves don’t believe in these things and don’t want citizens that are aware, knowledgeable, intellectual, and open-minded, so they can benefit individually more. (Participant F)

While the government treats their people in this manner, both children and adults, through these democratic movements, show their awareness of the critical situation it has lead Lebanon to:

We are protesting for our rights. They thought that we as children are going to be quiet and go to school as always, however, we did not. On the second day when the bell rang, we sang the national anthem and then we all sat down on the floor and we didn’t agree to continue our classes unless the school let us go to those protests. And this is, I’m telling you, this is a small protest that happened in our school, so if we continue in our protests in the whole country, we can get them, we will get our rights. (Participant D)

Future-makers

All of the children expressed their demand and need for adults to take them seriously and uphold their political potential as future-makers, in a situation where there is a critical need for social change:

If we go down the streets now, we can see that the majority of the protesters are between the ages of 15 and 30 years old, and without this aware generation, we wouldn’t be holding this revolution. We as students are not attending school for being in protests, we might tolerate ‘losing’ this educational year, but we won’t tolerate losing our future. (Participant B)

This point of “future-makers” could be further emphasized by participant C:

For us as children, in these protests, we are establishing our futures and strengthening the spirit of our homeland within ourselves. We are all together, without sectarianism. The revolution must start from the students not adults, and schools should abate and moderate its schedule so we, students, can attend both the protests and school because we do care for our educational future.

The words of participant C, mentioning the spirit of their homeland, bring us to the next category.

Patriotism

The participants have mentioned their refusal to leave the country when they get older, as most young Lebanese people do, due to high academic expenses, and unemployment regardless of their academic accomplishments. They want the best for their

community and country. They want the Lebanese government to do better for its citizens and for Lebanon to have a better reputation, rights wise, worldwide:

At first, I told my mother that I want to participate in the protests, she agreed and supported me, so we went down the streets. I gained a lot from this experience because when I get older, I would like to remember that I took part in this revolution for improving the situation in Lebanon. (Participant G)

Adults attitude towards children

From the data presented, we can see that children are assuredly demanding their right to co-create their present and future or even be the main creator. Furthermore, their participation in the democratic movements has also raised the awareness of adults on children's agency and competencies:

In this revolution, adults have discovered that we, the younger generation, can comprehend what happens in life. Despite our age, we are conscious and aware, not as everyone was thinking before, so we can participate in society. (Participant E)

The greatest change that happened during the revolution is nonsectarianism, we, all of the Lebanese people from the different communities, religions, went together down the streets hand in hand for the same purpose, sharing the same demand, which is claiming our rights. (Participant B)

3.4. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & HUMAN RIGHTS SOURCES

This section of the results presents the main resources and influences on shaping the children's conceptions of human rights in general and children's rights, in particular.

Family

The family, in particular parents, plays a crucial role in their children's lives by teaching and providing children's rights, and being a role model for adhering to human rights generally in life:

My father always tells me: your freedom ends when it starts impinging the freedom of others. My parents also support my right to participate in the house and broadly in my social life, for example, when they tell me 'We are proud of you' for the things I make in my life, I say that without them I would not even get to this point. But I see the need for this being the case of all Lebanese parents and families. (Participant B)

Supporting the last point, participant B has claimed, by participant D's observation of the situation in Lebanon, that parents are responsible for teaching and passing the basics of human rights and children's rights to their sons and daughters, saying:

I believe our parents owe us to teach us how to be independent, and this is some-

thing that we lack here in Lebanon, in my opinion.

School

It was noticeable in the findings that children recognize the role of the school in spreading awareness and information about human rights:

What developed this sense within us is the school, every week we have seminars or workshops on human rights, and we would have assignments researching different topics regarding human rights or women's rights for example. (Participant E)

Moreover, school and education influence children's understanding of their rights, as well as, their comprehension of the social and political situation in their country:

Our education is our weapon. With our knowledge we are able to face corruption, I mean, if we hadn't realized the reality, we couldn't have reached this stage of the revolution. And where did this awareness and knowledge come from? from our education and from our thoughts, the mental reflection of the young Lebanese generation came this way. (Participant B)

Democratic Movements

The democratic movements, or the revolution as children call it, played a significant role in the children's lives as a source for human rights and children's rights. For children, revolution means resisting an oppressive regime, whether it is a political or a social system, and in this case, they mention both systems. The revolution also means changing the course of these oppressive regimes to democratic courses that give a place for the child and their own social and political opinions, and the beginning of society to take them into consideration:

I watched a TV interview during the protests, interviewing people both adults and children, and when listening to what they have to say, I realized then that this revolution is occurring for the sake of children's rights and human rights. (Participant E)

Participant B, as well, emphasized the function of the democratic movements in shaping the children's understanding of their rights:

Before the movement, we had the same thinking, the same values, and the same national impulse, but the difference now is that I am capable to express my opinion more freely. I mean, before, when I was telling them this is our homeland and we want to protect it, or those are our rights we should get them, they did not accept me, while after the revolution started everyone now understands, accepts, and supports what I say on this topic.

4. DISCUSSION

A total of 7 children between the ages of 12 and 17 years were interviewed about their perspectives on children's rights and the Lebanese democratic movements that occurred in October 2019.

The findings indicate that the democratic movements, the 'revolution' as children referred to it, have impacted on two levels: The first one is that children have begun to recognize they can all live together and be with each other and meet children of their generation yet from different communities, such as different religions, sectors, or political factions. In addition, they have started to discern their significant place, among adults, in the demonstrations, the ability, and significance of expressing their opinions and demanding certain rights. Correspondingly, it could be said that for Lebanese children and youth, 'patriotism' is a participatory culture, a valuable way for them to be active in society, participate and express their views, work and put effort for the sake of improving the critical situation in Lebanon regarding human rights, children's rights, and all other aspects such as economics, social security, transparency, services supply, etc. By doing so, they can practice their agency in the community and country as they aspire to.

At the same time, on the second level, we can discern the influence that democratic movements have on adults, who have begun to perceive children and youth as possessing a role in society and having the ability to assert their views, and that their voices must be listened to. In other words, it raised adults' awareness of the children's agency and competencies.

Furthermore, the data presented in this study suggest that the Lebanese children and youth are involved and active, striving to conceive and build a new identity in the greater political and social tensity surrounding them. Their thorough comprehension of street politics along with technology development generated habitats for connectiveness and togetherness across and past Lebanon.

One of the reappearing themes is a consideration and apprehension for the future, especially as it is linked with the capability to afford a safe and secure environment for children. This emerged in the interviews and the movements' media coverage as well as in social media posts. Children's political involvement is indeed not a new phenomenon. Offered the exceptional media reportage, the options granted by social media, and the deplorable conspicuous indication of corruption. Children's political engagement in the democratic movements and its discussion illuminate to the people what childhood studies have been demonstrating for years, most markedly that children, far from being inactive and innocent, are knowledgeable social actors who manage, every so often, also to function as change agents. What couldn't be conveyed further in the academic realm is distinctly conveyed by children themselves at a national, even international, level through their activism, seeking to be perceived solemnly as future-makers, confronting adult power and control, and requesting a definite change.

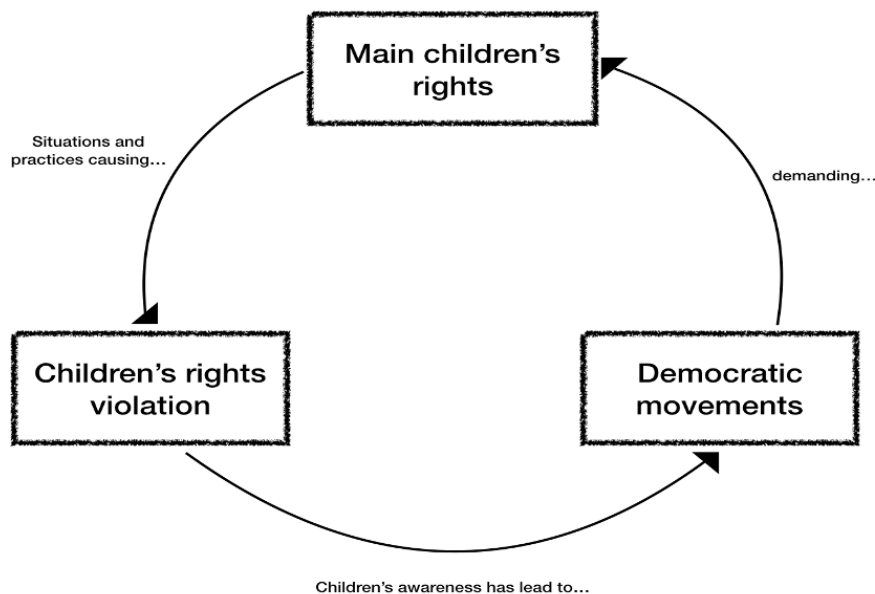
Furthermore, the findings signify that children themselves refer to their rights in accordance with the universal rationale of human rights and children's rights mentioned in the literature review, showing that children themselves can now place re-

liance on rights, which are endorsed internationally. At the same time, the argument here is a bottom-up approach where children's rights ought to be fulfilled in their real context, what Liebel Manfred (2012) call 'children's rights from below'.

Various discussions about children, participation, democratization, and social change assemble in these democratic movements. In an exceedingly politically polarized country, the protests' organizing groups could captivate youth and children, accompanying their parents. Participatory politics incorporate street to digital practices to eagerly involve in matters of public concern.

The results fit with the socio-ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), showing that children's attitudes towards their rights are assembled from their circumstantial factors, environmental determinants, and their personal characteristics. Based on the literature reviews as well as the results of the interviews, a theory could be developed. The children address the crucial rights they prioritize, explaining that, mainly, these rights are violated in Lebanon, therefore, they give them greater weight. For the children being able to analyze the surrounding circumstances in the way that the state and society do not adhere to these rights of the child—which was themed under the children's awareness. Eventually, the children's awareness and comprehension along with their patriotism and sense of belonging to their homeland and society, lit up their will, motivation, and impulse to claim their rights, and engage in the democratic movements, realizing that adults are actually protesting for the same exact intention, demanding their rights from the government.

Figure (1) illustrates the suggested above theory demonstrating the relation between democratic movements and children's understanding of their rights:



Source: Developed for this study by the researcher, based on the findings.

The generalizability of the results is limited by the fact that all participants are from Beirut city and it, probably, might not be representative enough. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies take into account interviewing children from rural areas and villages. The situation in Beirut, the capital city, cannot generalize the situation to different regions in Lebanon, living in dissimilar conditions and traditions, where children might have different views and perspectives on their rights, and endure distinct experiences in the democratic movements affecting their understanding of their rights in another way.

5. ORIGINALITY/VALUE

The researcher's aspiration was that this study would add much-needed data and information to the literature of children's understanding of their rights, especially related to democratic movements within the context of government corruption and deficiency of social justice, particularly in a postcolonial context.

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