



The tragedy is not fated. Rather, it may provide an extraordinary opportunity

The vision of "Citizens in a State" for the transition

The Facts

Historical records have been set on the one-month anniversary of the popular uprising in Lebanon: one month of continuous protests in all the Lebanese regions, albeit at varying frequencies; closure of the banks for three weeks out of four; and failure of the traditional political mechanisms of government, parliament, due cabinet formation consultations and appointments. These simultaneous occurrences are not coincidental: banks' closure is a result of the severe and unprecedented financial crisis, persistence of the people in the streets is also a consequence of the same reason. The third consequence to this crisis, albeit less obvious, is the fall of the political system, a system based on an alliance and quota allocation of six leaders for four sects and their subjugation of others. This system has collapsed due to an interruption of the flow in its basic artery, that is, the interruption of the flow of dollars into the distribution cycle.

It is important to assert that the bankruptcy was not caused by the demonstrations, nor was it caused by the cowering of some politicians behind the protests after they had resigned from their responsibilities while other politicians arrogantly attempted to exhaust and threaten the people. Nor did the bankruptcy occur because of external interventions, and the longest arm of intervention nowadays is the US hegemony and its Western partners, and especially its local arm, Israel. None of this is to say that these foreign interventions are not occurring; they are present and they are active whenever societies are divided.

We, in the political movement of 'Citizens in a State' (Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla), see this juncture in the history of our country as very delicate and tainted with great dangers that may lead to the devastation of the society. We also recognize this juncture to be a valuable opportunity to undertake a historic correction in our political course through building solid foundations for a true state, i.e. a civil state. Only a civil state is capable of protecting the society, and thus protecting everybody.

Because this historical juncture is extremely delicate, it is inevitable to address the problematic challenges in the Lebanese political scene, starting with the most urgent— the escalating financial crisis — all to the very root of the tragedy unfolding today: power formation in society,

with no disregard to the controversial issues that may be seen as dividing the social and confusing therein symptoms and causes of its very ailment.

Bankruptcy and resulting consequences

We have long warned from bankrupting the country. Today, bankruptcy has become an actuality. But what is bankruptcy? It is not the end of the world but a crisis and also a, historical juncture that may induce change in societies' course depending on how it is handled.

How is bankruptcy manifested? Quite simply, it is manifested through a sudden deterioration in the value of people's incomes and savings, in what these incomes and savings can buy of goods and services, irrespective of fluctuations in exchange rates. Incomes fall very rapidly as a result of bankruptcy, either due to the closure of enterprises or the reduction of work hours to cut salaries; including those foreign workers who will find no dollars left to be earned and sent back home. Bankruptcy will also reach the savings deposited in banks: depositors will no longer be able to withdraw or obtain such savings. Equally affected will be basic goods that importers will fail to buy from overseas suppliers while consumers' income and deposits sit in the banks. Lack of goods in the market started already, most critical are such basic medical equipment that hospitals declared they only have two months of stock left in their warehouses; such shortages threaten to increase the number of deaths by 2,000 per year, according to the same hospitals.

Such are the consequences of bankruptcy. We thus arrive at the second question: what will happen if the failed authority remains clinging to power? Practically, those who can emigrate will and only those who cannot will remain mostly with need of social benefits, care and protection. Will remain as well owners of capitals and speculators, awaiting and eager to profit from bankruptcy where people sell their property at the lowest price to secure such basic necessities for survival. The state will equally sell its properties and productive institutions to meet its expenses; let us recall the so-called 'reform paper' that enunciated the sale of the airport, seaports, cellular networks, Middle East Airlines, and others.

This is precisely what is being talked about every day: preparing the country where we all have dear memories, sweet or bitter, for a fire sale. And this is what we feared four years ago when we launched our political movement, 'Citizens in a State' (Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla).

In spite of it happening, is bankruptcy an inevitable fate? We believe it's not: the alternative exists and the alternative is the State. Today, our society, our citizens, are in need of a State, not for an ideological or doctrinal reason, they are in need for a State for its function as an instrument that secures a minimum of social cohesion.

The state as a tool and as a necessity

What is this state? How does it have the capability and strength to face this dreaded legacy: bankruptcy and a fragmented society; and interventions, conspiracies, and external aggressions?

What does it mean for a state to be? It means it has sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens to manage their resources with no costs of hesitation, retreat, bribery, or oppression.

How does a strong state come to be? Here, too, the issue is neither dogma nor ideology, but rather a matter of actualities and necessities.

If the country were united around a nationalist ideology, if the majority were to follow the same religion, or if there were a strong, united military force, then the state could borrow its legitimacy from nationalism, religion, or military might. Around us are states of such types. Our society cannot legitimize authority on similar grounds: the only way for Lebanon to be a true state is for it to gain political legitimacy through a civil state and thence is the very contrast with the current political system that is based on a confessional and a sect-quota coalition.

How would the State act?

Let us attempt to answer this question simply while avoiding the pitfalls of over-theorizing or complexifying technical details.

We want a government able to take responsibility for the cursed legacy and to pilot through the transition phase that we are currently engaged in and through which we are struggling while navigating without a direction. The management of this phase should respond to clear objectives. This is why the government should be endowed with exceptional legislative prerogatives for a period of 18 months in order to capture reality and deal with the cursed legacy that we are left with.

What will its program be?

Phase 1: Capturing reality

In the first two to three weeks, the government would make a careful inventory of monies that are still available to the state and the banking system. It would not cheat, nor would it be cheated, with a dramatized reserve declaration, alleged liquidity, artificial financial engineering, or fraudulent attempts to present debt or deficit-free budget while the administrations, institutions and families lay in ruins. The government would also identify the location of our gold, and how much of it is actually available.

Alongside this inventory of the available assets, a number of extraordinary and highly credible ambassadors would be sent to negotiate, without naivety, with such far or near countries, and international institutions that have an interest in Lebanon. Negotiations would be economic, financial, and political. We would then gather, in a clear manner, what is acceptable and available to us from abroad, in kind and financially, and under what conditions.

During this period, the government, through its legislative powers, would suspend all financial contracts' effects.

We hope this inventory leads to a result that gives the government enough room to maneuver, although we would not be surprised if such result would be unpleasant. Why? Because the arrogant stubbornness that lasted many years under the slogan of buying time has actually increased the burdens and accumulated losses. Six months ago, the situation was better than it is today, so imagine how the situation was three years ago, and imagine how today is better than it will be in a month's time.

Phase 2: Controlling the effects of bankruptcy

On the basis of the results of this inventory, there would be a transition to a second phase of three to six months. During this time, the executive branch, with its legislative powers, would monitor all financial, social, and security developments, on daily and hourly bases. Immediate respective actions would be taken based on such monitored developments. These actions should not be subjected to wasted time or petty rivalries in the parliament that answers to a divided, perplexed sectarian leadership.

Actions would fall onto two tracks, which together translate into an equitable and just distribution of losses.

Social justice is the first track. We are facing real losses. Covering up those losses or inflating them would be a crime. Losses must be distributed, which is what is actually happening, but such distribution must be fair, in contrast to what is prevailing. Even a fair distribution would not be a sweet endeavor; rather, it would be quite bitter. A fair distribution means that not all people will face the same burden: more would be imposed on those who can tolerate a larger share and much more on those who should be charged because of their assault on people's money (public money) or their infringement on the environment. There are those, on the other hand, who cannot bear any losses at all, and they must be guaranteed basic rights even if the burden becomes heavier on others. Thus, the government, through its exceptional legislative powers, would establish universal health coverage and free basic education for all its residents. This will not only ensure the cohesion of society but will also strengthen the dignity of the people and will establish the legitimacy of and need for the state.

Economic justice is the second track. The apparent and still hidden distribution of losses must protect the post-crisis social and economic potential. The government, by virtue of legislative decrees and based on the internal and external inventory and on ongoing developments, would restructure all financial and economic relations in the country; such a concern does not depend on public debt and deposits. People have commercial relations, at home and abroad, and these relations must be managed so that materials and resources are not lost and conflicts not accumulated. People pay and collect rents and depend on wages and on due funds that have not been paid to the guarantor institutions such as the National Social Security and others for years, and all at risk of being lost, same for the mandatory savings collected by professional syndicates and union funds of teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, and others. Techniques would be numerous with varied severity depending on what the inventory reveals and exposes; they would include changing legal terms, ranking of rights and risks, interest rates, returns, monetary values and currency calculations. Some of such interventions would be final, while others would be temporary or conditional.

It is no secret that the role of the public administration, in its broad sense, would be central in this phase and the next one. Therefore, at the beginning of this phase, necessary administrative, judicial and security appointments would be carried on based on adequate capability of keeping up with the political project in all its junctures.

Phase 3: Formation of a cohesive society and of an economy with defenses and balanced relations with respect to the outside

After acknowledging the reality of the situation and limiting the consequences of the bankruptcy, the transition to the third stage would begin. This stage would be aimed at reconstituting a cohesive society around a legitimate state, instead of a coalition of anxious sects, and a fortified economy instead of an economy of begging and lying. The lack of social cohesion and economic strength since the 1970s is precisely what established, after the civil war, the failed power system

that is crumbling today and the consequent bankruptcy that has been gathering steam since the end of the 1990s and has become the reality today that pushed people out into the streets. To address the causes of failing society's defenses precedes the need to end the street protests and manage the bankruptcy.

This is not a task for technicians, experts, or technocrats, who may be used as masks of the de facto power system that led to all the prevailing disasters. Rather, such an undertaking should stem from a historical political decision that must be fortified by the solid legitimacy of erecting a civil state: the first civil state in this East.

The mission falls under three headings.

The government would permanently establish the civil legitimacy of the state with its realistic handling of sects as community entities, but without any prejudice to the legitimacy of the state's authority. What do we mean by this and how can our discourse be differentiated from what has become repeated about the establishment of a civil state and the establishment of committees to overcome sectarianism and the interpretation of confused texts?

1. The government would first conduct a census of all its residents to know who are the actual inhabitants of the country, their profession, employment and residence. The census would be complemented by the necessary procedures to include Lebanese emigrants. Political representation would become connected to the people's place of residence and not to their familial or sectarian ties. In addition, the census would provide the information for healthcare coverage to the actual residents, and would allow for the tax mandate to reach all the income of all the residents, whether their income is derived from within the country or from abroad.
2. A uniform code of personal status would then be issued, by legislative decree. The census process would not categorize anyone within a sect. Rather, by virtue of the constitutionally enshrined absolute freedom of belief, after this census, anyone who has attained the legal age can choose between being a citizen with direct relations to the state or through sectarian mediation by applying to belong to one of the sects. The state would thus protect the freedom to practice religious rites and would protect the sects from each other. The uniform code of personal status would be the framework for all laws that apply to those who choose to belong to one of the sects, and would transcend them in the eyes of the public authorities. The religious faith of believers does not acquire its true meaning unless it is based on personal belief and on a free decision.
3. The government, with its legislative powers, would issue parliamentary and municipal electoral laws. Voting would be on the basis of actual residence, and each voter in the parliamentary elections would have the right to choose to be directly represented by non-sectarian candidates or to be represented by candidates belonging to sectarian systems. Seats would be divided between the direct (non-sectarian) and the sectarian representation based on the people's choice during the election. The laws would preserve sectarian distribution, or sectarian balance as they call it, among those elected on a sectarian basis.

Meanwhile, the government would adjust the foundations of the economic system that have been established in the country since the civil war, but not by repeating slogans about rentier economy, productive economy, job creation, etc., but, rather, through an organizational endeavor. The economic system is determined by the distribution of manpower and capital among sectors and by their levels of efficiency as compared with foreign efficiency. The labor and capital engines are distributed according to prices and costs, and according to sectoral policies, public investments, distribution mechanisms and tax systems. All these areas would be covered by standard and legislative decrees.

The crisis is manifested through a sudden drop in both the actual incomes and the domestic prices. The first downturn threatens to increase poverty and migration, and the second brings in the threat of selling assets at the lowest prices. The argument that a “spontaneous correction” would take place because of the shrinking consumption, based on the neoliberal approach, has failed, as experience confirms. Decisive policies would be adopted during the transitional period to prevent an adaptation to the crisis from reproducing its very causes after society incurs additional losses. This is what is meant by the statement that the distribution of losses should be fair but also meaningful.

It is in our interest to curb youth immigration. This does not mean that the elderly are of no concern, but faced with a trade-off, we give preference to the youth in this respect. We are concerned that enterprises capable of export do not collapse. We are interested in trade agreements that enhance the external demand for our production and also enhance our production capabilities. It is in our interest as well that the decline in domestic asset prices translates into a reduction in production and living costs and not in a liquidation of assets and an increase in immigration.

It will not be easy to move from an economy built on exporting the youth and begging and foreign dependency to a capable one. Many people will lose their work, and whole sectors will be impacted. Moving from one profession or sector to another is not a technical process. It requires time, skills, and changes in work and living patterns. We have to deal with our actual society — human beings, women and men, educated and uneducated, poor and rich, Lebanese and non-Lebanese — and not regard our community as sects. Such a transition requires ongoing due diligence, and we mean to ensure it.

Thirdly, to overcome the causes and effects of the crisis, and according to what the inventory reveals, and for a small country like ours, the government will seek to establish economic enduring agreements with such non-hostile foreign countries with no threatening positions with regard to our social cohesion or legitimate authority: Economics is inherently political.

We know very well that it is difficult for Lebanese who are entrenched in sects, in general, and for sectarian leaders, in particular, to imagine that we could be in a state that deals with the external world as made of foreign powers, just as it is hard for them to imagine that the local residents constitute a real one society. This is due to the fact that sects are, by definition, an alienation from society and a contradiction of the very understanding of a state, without which there can be no meaning for the divide between internal and external. Succinctly speaking, sects represent a deviation from balanced and appropriate relationship between society and authority.

Based on our conviction that our society functionally needs a capable state, and based on our conviction that a capable state can only be a civil state, we will discuss the thorny political issues that are based on some foreign relations and from which internal divisions presently emerge: (1) our enmity with Israel; (2) Hezbollah’s weapons; (3) our relationship with Syria; and (4) the regional and international dimensions of Lebanon’s transformation.

The issue of our enmity with Israel

To regard one as an enemy is not a linguistic matter; rather, enormous burdens are born by those who are committed to it. Enmity is not serious if it were not justified by reasons and objectives. We, in the political movement of Citizens in a State (Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla), regard the Zionist entity as a direct manifestation of imperialism. It performs a vital regional function for imperialism by aiming to recruit the capabilities of Jews around the world as part of

a racist, hostile, religious project. Our enmity towards it does not depend on an occupied area of land, which may be 'resolved', or on the criminal injustice inflicted against the Palestinian people, which some of its representatives may succumb to oppression and thus accept it. Rather, our enmity stems from the fact that, as a political project, Zionism contradicts the legitimacy of the state, the civil state, that alone can frame and protect the interests of our society. Thus, it becomes a genuine enemy. The Zionist project treats societies in general as sects and power networks, and treats our region as strategic straits and oil, and continuously persists in undermining the internal legitimacy of political regimes, especially the modern nation type, and strengthens racist currents therein (even in Western societies), and extorts regimes and rulers.

The issue of Hezbollah's weapons

We believe that the high combat effectiveness accumulated by the Lebanese men and women in the resistance against the Israeli enemy, the most prominent of whom is 'Hezbollah', and not the weapons that are mere commodities that can be bought and sold, constitutes a great asset for Lebanon. It is not permissible to forfeit or bargain on it. The debate around it must be centered on its transition, while maintaining its effectiveness, from the resistance of a 'sect' to a national, military, and of course, social and economic system whose burdens are distributed upon all just as its benefits reach everyone.

The issue of the relationship with Syria

The relationship between the Lebanese and Syrian republics has never been normal since their independence from the French colonial mandate. Since then, they have been moving in two directions at the economic, political and social levels because of their different class structure and positions of power in each of them. The structure of the Syrian-Lebanese domain was modified, and trade links between them were weakened. Their trade in goods and services decreased, while the pace of labor and capital transfers increased. In addition, Syria has exercised direct political and military domination over Lebanon for thirty years.

But today, nearly one and a half million Syrians have fled to Lebanon, and the Syrian landscape has been torn apart internally and has become an arena of international conflict: both societies incurred deep distortions in their internal balances. Thus, both the reconstruction of Syria and the bankruptcy in Lebanon call for the need to manage their social and economic distortions in an integrated manner, and to enhance the importance of their markets integrally and abroad. This can only be based on the establishment of an effective, civil and capable state in Lebanon that would support a similar, integrated project in Syria.

The regional and international dimension of transformation in Lebanon

Our political project, which we are presenting today in a clear and detailed way, is a Rescue project for Lebanon. It is also a project for the region, which is living one of its worst experiences of civil wars, social explosions, and fragmentations. The civil state project in Lebanon and in the region, starting with Syria and Iraq, is a fortification for societies from internal tyranny and civil wars and a protection from the always-present threat of external hegemony. It is the fundamental contrast of the Zionist project. This regional dimension is a Lebanese responsibility that does not stem from a Lebanese preference, but rather from the clear fact that Lebanon has already lived through civil war and domination of warlords since the end of the civil war, before the rest of the region by three or four decades.

This regional dimension, in return, provides considerable regional momentum for a just and capable civil state project in Lebanon. This dimension, if exploited politically, is poised to restore the region to play its natural role in the world and to restore its balance, rather than being taken over first by the Zionist enemy and imperialism and then by the conflict between other states in the region.

Phase Four: Parliamentary elections.

By the end of the transitional period, parliamentary elections would be held in accordance with the new electoral law. It would become evident then to what degree our society has consented to the sacrifice — not loss — to gain from a project that has been missing in this East for decades, if not centuries.

How will the transition be achieved?

People are asking two critical questions: Where is the leadership of the movement? And how does the transition occur?

What is the basis of these two questions? They arise from the concern for both the movement and for its results, from the worries and concerns of the whole society, from those who participate in the movement and those who stand on the sidelines and criticize it, and from the history of our society's bitter experiences. Such concerns are inherent to the sects, for the very concern regarding external powers constitute the process of sects' formation. As such sects produce obsessions between and about each other: whether those sects that feel stronger with respect to others under particular circumstances or anxiety from them, with associated threats or temptations from abroad; or whether some others feel weak and seek to borrow power or protection domestically or from abroad. None of this is accidental or specific to any particular sects. Rather, it is a translation of the relations of power in society, in Lebanon, and throughout the region (Syria and Iraq), and it is on the basis of such relations that the imperial project, from colonialism to Zionist, are built.

With regards to what is referred to as the 'leadership of the movement,' it is no secret that numerous foreign influences are interfering in the landscape on the street. Interferences take place, either directly or through local agents, through guidance or funding. Most dangerously, they also happen through certain media, particularly television, through the manufacturing of 'symbols' and the presentation of such symbols as the headlines of 'the revolution.' This began shyly at the start of the uprising, and has grown larger day by day. Respective objectives range from settling internal accounts within the domestic power parties, to dis-owning the past and positioning oneself for after the crisis. New capitalist players are also seeking to strengthen their own fortunes by taking advantage of the bankruptcy to acquire assets left in the country. In addition, there is the objective of targeting the resistance, because of its facing the Israeli enemy, and not because it is a Shi'ite party in some sectarian composition.

The romantic statements about the 'leadership of the revolution', whether naive or malicious, tend to break up popular pressure by presenting symbolic faces to nurture conflicts within it, and to scatter its purposes by offering partial demands or popularly justified slogans. However, they do not affect the reality of what we are witnessing and its causes.

The popular movement is a phenomenon of rejection and overthrow of the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime whose very functioning is stalled and disrupted. The responsibility towards

the movement lies in the clarity of the political proposition towards a different regime, one based on knowledge, courage, and independence. This is what we are keen on, what we seek to protect, and what we present today.

As for the transition and how it may occur, first we say that the transition must be peaceful because we know the country's internal and neighboring conditions. What does this mean?

It means that the de facto power that has been functionally rendered inoperative is still holding large parts of our society. The pressure on it must continue, and it is continuing by virtue of the accelerating bankruptcy: pressure by constraint, demonstrations, and the actualities. Pressure is also maintained by presenting an alternative political discourse, and putting each of the leaders - five or six or seven – in front of their historical responsibilities and presenting them with a choice between two options. After their best illusory option is gone, which is to maintain the regime they have created, they would have two choices: either violence and loss, or negotiating a peaceful transfer of power through a transitional phase according to the specific political formula that we present in this document.

We all know each other's situation. We are all the children of this country. We know and embrace our responsibility. We are ready for the management of the dreaded legacy. We want a peaceful transition, that is, negotiation, but on the terms of this transition. We defined our basic choices, and we do not confuse causes and consequences. Even if it were not identical to the familiar images of the authority over the past few decades, but the responsibility of each of those leaders is enormous today, and it is rapidly inflating with the fall of their denials. The race today is between their certainty of this responsibility and the deteriorating financial, social and security realities.

Because Hezbollah is the largest force today, and because it is also a target, we state that we disagree with Hezbollah because it is an active participant in this system, and we have a fundamental difference regarding the internal political approach. We believe that today, by using all its credit - which is great - to protect the dwindling political system, it faces and prevents the chance of a serious rescue opportunity of society. It is the strongest amongst its allies; it is from Hezbollah that they derive their electoral and political power, albeit with a louder voice. We fundamentally disagree with these allies - such as the Amal Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement - just as we fundamentally disagree with the forces that are trying to confiscate the street after they jumped out of government with their resignation even while they remain at the heart of the political power system through their sectarian position — such as the Lebanese Forces, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Future Movement.

Today, we state that we are ready to discuss our political undertaking with anyone who believes that we all need to be responsible for the country, that our tragedies are not inevitable, and that participation is a duty. This responsibility lies on the shoulders of political parties, personalities, and the forces that see the threat in the future of our society. We stand to take the initiative, nonetheless.