# The Blueprints to Our Climate Future are in Their Hands:

# A Metamodernist Analysis

# of Lebanese Youth Activism on Instagram

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## Abstract

The most salient issue facing climate action today is how to communicate it. That is, "narrative" plays an overlooked, yet integral role in orienting our collective mindset to approach the climate crisis. The power that communication bears in spurring climate action is perhaps best exhibited by today's youth climate activists, who, I argue, have developed a new, distinct climate Grand Narrative. To investigate the themes of this narrative, I propose a novel conceptual framework, Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM). In utilizing the metamodernist Grand Narrative as a theoretical framework, YCM overarchingly characterizes how youth climate activists communicate climate education and promote stakeholder action. I break this narrative framework down into three central themes: Youth Grassroots-ism, the Cult of Infographic-ism, and Transmovement-ism. These themes focus on how today's activists have discursively initiated a movement focused on future generations, disseminated in a verbally and visually accessible manner, and assembled by and for voices from diverse backgrounds. To understand the intricacies by which they employ YCM, I execute a literature review on environmental activism in Lebanon, and I perform a narrative analysis on the organization Fridays for Future Lebanon. I selected Lebanese youth climate activism as a case study to focus on an under-researched, yet dynamic demographic in the Middle East and North Africa. This article concludes that the Grand Narrative of today's youth climate activists serves as a set of blueprints for a proudly naive, yet justly ambitious, future sustainable world.

## Keywords

Youth Climate Activism; Metamodernism; Grand Narrative; Youth Climate Metamodernism; Lebanon; Fridays for Future

Apocalyptic notions of climate change haunt my nightmares: raging floods consume each of New York City's five boroughs, rising sea levels drown the Maldives, and food scarcity is so severe that it forces hordes of starving people to wander an already deserted Democratic Republic of Congo. In the end, I find myself floating somewhere outside the exosphere, eye-to-eye with the light-less, life-less pale-blue dot we once called home. I wake up, staring at the ceiling, and ask myself, "what can I do?"

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to solving the climate crisis. Between reducing our consumption, implementing sustainable technology, conserving natural ecosystems, and rethinking agricultural production—on top of, garnering the global social, economic, legal and political collaboration necessary—we have our work cut out for us (Esty and Moffa 778). I do know, however, that the "alarmist" climate narrative does more disservice than service to the climate movement by scaring us into languishing rather than persuading us to act. As such, a climate alarmist accepts the very real consequences of climate inaction, understands the practically innumerable complicated solutions obligatory, and, overwhelmed, persuades themself into apathy. What we are missing is a new climate narrative.

A new narrative can serve as the agreed-upon blueprint necessary to construct a future, sustainable Earth. Over the last ten years, youth climate activists have emerged as willing and able architects of a new climate narrative. In particular, these activists have disavowed previous generations' nihilistic tendencies and embraced a collective vision of progress that has spurred mass climate action globally (Mann 173). To investigate how this generation of climate activists has distinguished themselves from the previous generation, I have developed a novel framework, Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM).

YCM characterizes how youth climate activists communicate climate education and promote stakeholder action through a metamodernist Grand Narrative. This framework is a tool for unpacking activists' discourse and is broken down into three central themes: Youth Grassroots-ism, the Cult of Infographic-ism, and Transmovement-ism. These themes focus on how today's activists have discursively initiated a movement focused on future generations, disseminated in a verbally

and visually accessible manner, and assembled by and for voices from diverse backgrounds. To understand the intricacies by which youth activists apply YCM, this article: (1) introduces YCM in the context of the climate movement's recent history, (2) explores the historical, political, and social condition of Lebanese civil society and modern environmental activism, and (3) builds off this historical contextualization to perform a narrative analysis of *FFF Lebanon's* engagement with YCM on Instagram. This article develops a framework for evaluating how youth climate activists narratively present themselves as stewards of a future, sustainable planet. This research poses the following questions: How is metamodernism, and the metamodernist Grand Narrative, critical for assessing youth climate communications? How can Youth Climate Metamodernism be used to evaluate Lebanese youth climate activism on Instagram? Finally, how do today's young people narratively present themselves as the architects of our sustainable future?

## I Missed School for This: The Newest Generation of Climate Activists

Modern youth climate activism is generally exemplified by two pioneering, western organizations: Fridays for Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR). Though akin organizations exist from the Philippines to Mexico, Canada, and Uganda, these two organizations have played a distinct role in popularizing this activism around the world. To understand why and how FFF and XR ascended to global acclaim, we must look to the 2015 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris, France. Organized by the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the COP is an annual intergovernmental meeting where leaders from around the world gather to attend climate negotiations. 2015's COP had a particularly "high profile" due to the landmark environmental agreement it produced (de Moor et al. 620).

At COP21, almost every country in attendance signed "The Paris Agreement", a binding treaty for sweeping climate action ("What is the History of the Paris Agreement (2015)?"). This agreement's goal was to limit anthropogenic warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels—preferably less than 1.5 degrees ("The Paris Agreement"). Only re-negotiated every five years, the Paris Agreement required signatories to submit nationally determined

contributions (NDC) by 2020. NDCs detail the actions each nation will undergo to reduce their fossil fuel emissions and establish a climate change resilient infrastructure. While this agreement notably recognized the global, governmental necessity to take climate action, climate activists deemed it a lot of talk with little enforceable walk (Rubin and Peltier). Consequently, in the years following COP21, youth activists decided to "take matters into [their] own hands" to impose the terms laid out in the Paris Agreement, specifically NDCs, through grassroots activism (de Moor et al. 620). Great Thunberg is a vehement symbol of this activism.

Thunberg's global campaign symbolically launched on August 20, 2018, when she wrote in a caption on her Instagram, "we children usually don't do as you tell us to do, we do as you do. And since you grown-ups don't care about my future, I [won't care either]. I school strike for the climate until election day" (@gretathunberg, Photo of first Skolstrejk för Klimatet). With a sign reading "Skolstrejk för Klimatet," Schoolstrike for Climate, 15-year-old Thunberg skipped her Friday classes and sat outside the Swedish parliament in staunch disapproval of her country's climate policy. Thunberg's peaceful protest captivated young audiences by illuminating a dark truth: her current education is meaningless if her country's government does not act to alleviate the future effects of climate change (Kraemer).

Three weeks after her first strike, following Sweden's 2018 election, Thunberg pledged to continue skipping school each Friday until her country met its NDC set in the Paris Agreement (Kraemer; de Moor et al. 260). In inviting her global peers to do the same, this pledge launched her Fridays for Future (FFF) campaign. This effort called on young people worldwide to strike on Fridays and share their protest via social media using the hashtags #FridaysForFuture and #ClimateStrike ("How to Strike"). Guided by three core demands—(1) "keep rising global temperatures below 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels"; (2) "ensure climate justice and equity"; and (3) "listen to the best united science available"—FFF quickly gained momentum ("Our Demands"). Their strikes peaked on September 20, 2019, when an estimated six million people from 155 countries in 3,851 cities participated ("List of Countries"). Since establishing FFF, Thunberg has delivered a Ted Talk with six million views, received a nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize, traveled on an

emissions-free racing yacht across the Atlantic Ocean to attend the UN Climate Summit in New York City, and, most recently, spearheaded youth climate activism at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland (Thunberg, "The Disarming Case;" Watts).

At COP26, while government leaders discussed "Youth and Public Empowerment" inside the conference center on November 5, 2021, thousands of young people took to the city's streets to demand urgent action. Organized by *FFF Scotland*, Thunberg spoke at one of COP26's largest demonstrations (Piper et al.). In declaring that the conference's attendees had failed to listen to FFF's requests, she called the conference a "global greenwashing festival" and a "two-week long celebration of business as usual and blah, blah, blah" ("Greta Thunberg Slams COP26"). Thunberg's unique rise to fame and her movement's specific demands are emblematic of the popularity of youth climate activism's new narrative that centers itself as a call-to-action.

Two months after Thunberg's first Friday strike, on October 31, 2018, a like-minded environmental-activist movement launched in London, England: Extinction Rebellion (XR). At their first protest, XR activists read their "Declaration of Rebellion" aloud outside England's House of Commons (Taylor). In part, this document asserts that they are in rebellion against the English government because they have proven "inept" in mitigating the climate crisis and, consequently, "threaten [their] future" ("Declaration of Rebellion"). Like Thunberg's call to action, XR's initial declaration rebels against the status quo by narratively asserting that their government is incapable of mitigating climate change.

The "brainchild" of a small group of activists, academics, and friends, XR's approach to climate activism is guided by three main goals. These goals are "to tell the truth about the climate and ecological emergency; to halt biodiversity loss and commit to net zero emissions by 2025; and to follow the lead of a citizen's assembly" (Taylor). In April 2019, the group held its largest, arguably most defiant protest. For almost two weeks, thousands of XR protesters occupied locations around London; authorities ultimately arrested over 1,000 people. Drawing inspiration from the civil rights movements in the US and India, XR's style of grassroots climate activism aims to compel any person on the street to participate in "peaceful civil disobedience" and, in turn,

to "overwhelm the court system" by getting as many people arrested as possible (Taylor). XR quickly became a global movement with branches popping up in cities worldwide.

In early 2019, a group of activists established a youth branch of the organization, *XR Youth*, composed of climate activists born after 1990. Ideologically, this group branched off from the parent organization to feature more activists from the global south, and to alter the narrative of climate change as more of a future than present struggle. As Daze Aghaji, a 20-year-old student, founding member of XR, and early member of *XR Youth*, said, "I felt pretty early on that as a young person I didn't really fit into main XR … there was so much love of young people, but not in the right way" (Taylor). Apart from social media marketing and outreach, Aghaji felt the organization's youth could play a more significant role. Thus, she, and like-minded activists, launched *XR Youth* to shift the organization's motive from it is time to "save ourselves" to it is time to "save our grandchildren" (Taylor). This ideological distinction is essential for understanding my proposed framework, Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM). That is, YCM captures how current youth climate activists have narratively distinguished themselves from previous generations (de Moor et al. 621–23) by mobilizing around new ideals.

**It's Time to Save Our Grandchildren: Developing the Grand Narrative**

FFF and *XR Youth* have engaged the youngest generation of climate activists with remarkable success through three core distinctions from older generations' environmental activism: mobilization, faith, and storytelling (de Moor et al. 621-23). While the rate at which these activists have mobilized global support is extraordinary, and the contradictory nature between their distrust of politicians and faith in the political system is fascinating, this article focuses on the third key distinction, storytelling. I developed Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM) to evaluate how youth activists have engaged this youngest generation in climate action through narrative. This framework provides a new, critical foundation for evaluating how young people call others to action and communicate their demands, and, as the name denotes, metamodernism is central to the development of YCM.

Metamodernism is a theoretical framework for perceiving how the world's increasing connectivities, and seeming complications, have shifted our delineation and conveyance of "meaning" (Andersen 7). That is, rather than a philosophy, it is the characterization of a "structure of feeling," of how the cultural conversation and, consequently, social action have uniquely evolved in recent years (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2). Building on modernist and postmodernist discourses, defining underlying socio-cultural frameworks from previous decades, metamodernism serves as a theoretical marker for categorizing this newest generation's zeitgeist.

While modernism, beginning in the first half of the 20th century, signalized a period where writers, artists, and philosophers chose to increasingly reject realism and break "tradition", postmodernism, beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, marked a time where thinkers urged skepticism of authenticity and global progress. Metamodernism, beginning in the early 2000s, is the rejection of postmodern cynicism and re-acceptance of modernist individualism and absurdism ("Modernism;" Andersen 81). As Seth Abramson, a metamodernist theorist, writes, metamodernism is a theoretical framework that "[reconstructs] things that have been deconstructed with a view toward reestablishing hope and optimism in the midst of a period … marked by irony, cynicism, and despair." In other words, metamodernism rejects the postmodern tendency toward nihilistic complacency and embraces a new hopefulness (Vermeulen and Akker 4). This transition from postmodernism to metamodernism, though not widely recognized, is most often attributed to significant global events in the early 2000s, such as "climate change, financial crises, terror attacks, and digital revolutions" (Vermeulen and Akker 2). These events, shocking and dispiriting, have necessitated a new ideological framework for perceiving meaning, resulting in metamodernism.

Within metamodernist discourse, this collective narrative is characterized as the "[G]rand [N]arrative" (Corsa 242). The Grand Narrative is a reflection of how we commonly filter and frame the world. In metamodernist dialogue, our collective consciousness rejects the familiar, postmodern notion, 'nothing means anything' and, instead, embraces the claim, 'everything means something.' Increasingly, in this discourse, we choose to radically seek action for the sake of action over the probability of result. We no longer ask, 'why should I care," and now ask, 'why not care?' Such

intellectual alignment is essential to envision and enact a future, more sustainable world (Corsa 247; Andersen 29; Gare 116). As such, metamodernism is a practical framework for exploring how today's youth activists have narratively formed a renewed optimism for climate action.

## Why Not Care? Classifying Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM)

Youth Grassroots-ism, YCM's first theme, largely revolves around the necessity of large-scale, youth-driven change. Their language on social media platforms and in speeches generally focuses on distinguishing between the work of youth activists and that of adults, specifically governmental leaders. Narratively, they draw a line in the sand: it is "us" young people, against "them"¾the rest of the world. Often, their work beckons grown-ups to think critically about how their present actions will more significantly affect young people's future livelihoods. In demanding that the voices of tomorrow's leaders be heard today, these activists seize a social and political opportunity to redesign our climate future ("Transcript").

The Cult of Infographic-ism, YCM's second theme, exhibits these activists' ability to be social-media savvy advocates. Indeed, these activists utilize social media to strategically disseminate information. Through event posters, infographics (a series of images outlining the key points of a topic), and hashtags (phrases preceded by the # symbol which links similarly tagged posts), current youth climate activists have established a coded, social-mediafied mode of disseminating information about climate change and circulating protest details. This mode of communication allows these activists to convey very complicated issues succinctly and, subsequently, to reach broader audiences. This theme additionally illuminates an interesting dynamic of sincere, potentially naive, trust between the person or organization posting the information and the viewer absorbing it.

Transmovement-ism, YCM's third theme, characterizes the presence of intersectionality (Harb, "Beyrouth Madinati" 18). Unlike previous climate movements, current organizations highlight the essential role identity plays in their activism (Yom et al. 3). In providing a platform for historically under- and misrepresented activists, these organizations illuminate climate change's

disparate impact and the necessity of an environmental justice framework—a framework that seeks to address the role climate change plays in exacerbating existing inequalities. Additionally, today's youth climate activist organizations team up with other movements globally (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Women's March, and LGBTQ+ Pride). This focus on the intersection of identity and movement significantly differentiates this movement's narrative from that of previous generations.

To youth climate activists, these three themes establish the necessary intellectual alignment to envision and enact a more sustainable future. Indeed, in discursively initiating a movement that is focused on future generations, communicated in a verbally and visually accessible manner, and assembled with voices from intersectional backgrounds, these activists are re-imagining the blueprints to our climate future. To substantiate this claim I perform a narrative analysis on three Instagram posts from the organization *FFF Lebanon*. To execute this analysis, I first give an overview of the historical, political, and social context of Lebanese civil society; and a modern case study for Lebanese environmental activism.

## In Unity There's Strength: An Exploration of Lebanese Civil Society

My case study on Lebanese youth climate activism focuses on an under-researched, yet dynamic demographic in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). While youth climate activism is a global network, MENA's youth activists have not received the same research attention as others despite there being significant regional precedent for their digital activism (Sowers 27). In fact, according to ASDA'A BCW's 2021 Arab Youth Survey, more than half of Arab youth are concerned about climate change in MENA, specifically countries in the Levant—the area nearest the mid-eastern coast of the Mediterranean which includes Lebanon ("Arab Youth Survey: Top Findings").

Beyond the Arab Spring, regional youth activists have organized mass demonstrations to expand their political agenda (Yom et al. 3, 5). A 2014 case study entitled *The Youth Policy in Lebanon* classifies this group as unmarried people ages 15 to 29 years old (Kiwan 570). This classification amounts to approximately 27% of the country's total population (*Factsheet:*

*Lebanon*). These young people symbolize both hope and fear for the future and, subsequently, play symbolically dynamic roles in Lebanon's civil sphere (Kiwan 570).

Though only a slim, 149-mile land strip on the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon has an ecologically rich and diverse natural environment (Makdisi 207). Lebanon is also home to diverse species of trees including firs, pines, junipers, and the famous Lebanese Cedar. As pictured on the country's flag, these cedars once proudly blanketed three-fourths of the country's 4,000 square-mile area. According to Karim Makdisi, "the environment occupies an important place in the construction not only of Lebanon's natural heritage but also its national and cultural identity and its political economy" (207). Today, Lebanon is already reeling from the effects of climate change (Rochdi). Between hotter temperatures and scarcer water, the country's agricultural output is in short supply, and its ability to meet increased energy demands is insufficient. Even the country's beloved cedars, which are creeping to higher and higher altitudes to escape the heat, are predicted to be extinct by the end of this century (Barnard and Haner). Consequently, Lebanon's recent environmental history has unfolded around its rapid degradation (Makdisi 209).

The Lebanese environmental movement rode the coattails of the global environmental initiatives of the early 1960s. As primarily western-educated, middle-class professionals, the first Lebanese environmentalists were greatly inspired by the movement's success in Europe and North America. As a result, the country formally joined the first Earth Summit in Stockholm in 1972 (Makdisi 216). In fact, Lebanon represented one of 14 countries from MENA to participate in this monumental conference. Their participation launched the country's regionally significant role in these intergovernmental climate summits. Today, Lebanon has signed more international environmental agreements than any other country in MENA (Djoundourian 429). Since 1990, national and international actors have established and directed funding to a great deal of NGOs in Lebanon (Kiwan 570; Nagel and Staeheli 223). Lebanon has an exceptionally high number of NGOs for a country in MENA. These organizations' efforts have played an indisputable role in shaping the country's post–civil war reconstruction (Djoundourian 434), specifically in molding young people's civic engagement.

Nonetheless, in 1975, just three years after the first Earth Summit, a nationwide civil war abruptly halted the country's environmental progress (Makdisi 216, 221). The civil war officially began on April 13, 1975, after the Phalangists, a Maronite Christian clan, attacked a bus on its way to a Palestinian refugee camp, killing 27 Palestinians ("Lebanese Civil War"). After the approximate deaths of 20,000 people and the displacements of 75,000, the war officially ended in 1990, when the fighting sects signed the Ta'if Agreement (Kiwan 568). It spread an "optimistic vision" about achieving political "reconstruction, reconciliation, and revision" (Karam 36; Kiwan 568–9). During this reconstruction period, two primary actors played opposing roles in shepherding this reformist vision into environmental action: Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Makdisi 222; Djoundourian 434).

When Prime Minister Hariri was first elected in 1992, Lebanon's environmental movement was making progress. Amidst the civil war's visible tolls on the country's natural environment, the influential 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and the growing international aid from NGOs, Lebanon's post–war environmentalists had restarted the country's movement (Makdisi 224, Djounjourian 434). However, in the middle of the 1990s, this progress hit a wall (Makdisi 222). To the new Prime Minister Hariri, physical reconstruction was essential to undo the socio-economic and political turmoil of the preceding 15 years. As Makdisi explains: "Mountains were literally cut open to feed the concrete and construction industries, while the coast was ravaged first by the removal of fertile soil and later by land reclamation for building and development schemes" (223). Even though Lebanon's government prioritized economic growth over environmental protection, it has struggled to consistently supply electricity, public transit, waste management, and drinking water (Talty). As reporter Alexandra Talty remarks, "the lack of basic services impacts poor and working-class families especially hard, and the environment also suffers, with people turning to diesel-powered generators and relying on plastic water bottles." This severe degradation has not been overlooked by the country's environmentalists despite grave post–war economic turbulence.

Both "environmental" and "youth" NGOs play significant roles in the country's civil sphere today. As of 2009, there were approximately 130 environmental organizations (ENGOs), and as

of 2015, there were around 117 registered youth-focused groups (Harb, "Youth Mobilization"12; Djoundourian 428). Lebanon's youth NGOs have worked to advance a model of "'active citizenship', global consciousness, tolerance of diversity, and acceptance of individual responsibility" (Nagel and Staeheli 225). They have fostered an "ideal" national identity among the country's young people and have shifted the national narrative from young people as "impulsive revolutionaries" to young people as the country's greatest "hope for the future" (Nagel and Staeheli 225, 233; Yom et al. 3; Kiwan 570).

Through educational initiatives and large-scale campaigns to restore the country's natural environment, ENGOs have similarly advanced this national youth narrative. At the grassroots level, they generally function to foster awareness for environmental emergencies and instill a mentality of social responsibility (Djoundourian 434).

## "You Stink:" A Narrative Prelude to YCM in Lebanon

The 2015 "You Stink" movement is an apt precursor to today's youth climate activism in Lebanon (Ekdawi). The "You Stink" protests began after the Naameh landfill south of Lebanon's capital, Beirut, closed and the leading waste-management company could not continue to collect the city's garbage (Kiwan 575–6; "Lebanese Protest"). Within one week of Naameh's closure, over 20,000 tons of garbage piled in the streets of the four-million-person city ("Lebanese Protest"). Subsequently, the government came under severe scrutiny for failing to hire an alternative waste-management company in time. Activists quickly mobilized in downtown Beirut to demand the government urgently remove the mountains of trash rotting on their streets in the summer heat (Kiwan 575; Sikimic).

The smell of this trash and the government's mishandling of the situation inspired the movement's name, "You Stink" (El Deeb). Founded by influential Lebanese bloggers, creative media strategists, journalists, a rights lawyer, and an actress, this movement quickly garnered a mass of "revolutionary supporters" (El Deeb; "Lebanese Protest"). Indeed, these supporters demanded both adequate waste management and the resignation of Lebanon's Parliament ("Lebanese

Protest"). As Sami Nader writes, they called "for the removal of both literal and symbolic garbage." In a Youth Grassroots-ism manner, this movement exemplifies the inherently political nature of environmental activism in Lebanon. That is, this movement utilized an environmental concern, trash collection, as a vessel to air their political concern, government corruption.

Additionally, given that the word for "spoiled food," or anything with a "trash-like smell," in Arabic is the same as the word for corruption, Fassad (فساد), their slogan, "You Stink" served as an effective mobilization tool (Ekdawi). On social media, these activists shared posts about the movement using the hashtag, "#YouStink" (El Deeb). In a Cult of Infographic-ism manner, this slogan played a crucial role in mass-circulating information about these protests as well as connecting like-minded individuals.

Beyond this successful social-media activism, "You Stink" critically distinguished itself from previous movements for its quality of Transmovement-ism. That is, these protests transcended "all denominations, gathering young people from different religions and sects" (Nader). Given Lebanon's violent sectarian history, such radical tolerance exhibits the Transmovement-ist ideal that diversity is an ideological and assembling strength. As one of the movement's founding members Nadyn Jouny, a 25-year-old Lebanese freelance journalist, said in an interview, "We are the future of this country and the agents of change. If the youth didn't do this, no one will do it" (El Deeb). Jouny's remark engages with the outlook that these young people are Lebanon's necessary revolutionaries. Though their actions may be innocent, and to some ineffective, their hope for the country's future are sincere.

Despite being massive in scale, radical in notion, and intersectional in purpose, "You Stink" lost momentum (Nader). Even so, it continues to inspire young activists today. In 2019, for instance, a small group of high-school students skipped school for 26 consecutive days to collect garbage from the "17 October Revolution" protests. This uprising is an ongoing series of civil protests sparked by the country's severe economic downturn (عام علىٰ 17 تشرين!). Akin to Greta Thunberg's FFF commitment, these students "considered cleaning up after the protests … more important than studying" (Talty). Exemplary of YCM, these youth activists' sense of obligation

in protecting the environment radically defies social norms by taking the position many would reject as naive. As Mira Raheb, 17, told Talty, "We don't want to see trash in the street … if we clean here, it will change [the mentality]." This compulsion to act for the sake of action uniquely characterizes YCM.

**Rewriting Our Climate Fate: Narrative Analysis**

With those who deny the realities of anthropogenic climate change on one end of the spectrum, and those who doom humanity's ability to develop feasible mitigation plans on the other, the subject of climate change is uniquely polarized. Despite living in a political and social arena shrouded by "denialists" and "doomists," youth climate activists have effectively embraced and communicated the threats and opportunities of their movement globally (Mann 173). Simply put, how they talk about climate change affects how we understand the issue and act. This section evaluates how youth climate activists utilize a metamodernist Grand Narrative to convey the threat of, and potential solutions to, the climate crisis in a new way (Roser-Renouf et al. 164).

To make an acute observation about this cultural shift—from adolescent to activist—I developed Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM). To exhibit how YCM Grand-Narrative thinking can be discerned in day-to-day communications, I perform a narrative analysis of three Instagram posts from *Fridays for Future Lebanon* (*FFF Lebanon*). That is, I evaluate how this account's written and photographic communications both do and do not align with the three "isms" of YCM: Youth Grassroots-ism, Cult of Infographic-ism, and Transmovement-ism.

I selected social media as the central mode for my original narrative analysis for two reasons: reach and use. As of 2020, the daily consumption of social media (i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) in MENA averaged 3.5 hours. This is longer than in any other global region. Additionally, in 2020, a record 79% of young Arabs cited social media as their central source of news (Radcliffe and Abuhmaid 20-21). This statistic is consequential and points to the importance of evaluating how young change-makers are communicating climate advocacy. The 22 countries comprising MENA vary dramatically socially,

politically, and economically (Nathaniel et al. 14602). Therefore, to avoid wrongfully equating the region's national youth climate activist movements and because of its distinct national history, I have selected Lebanon as my central case study. In addition to Lebanon's rich environmental-activist history and uniquely engaged civil society, there are a significant number of discoverable youth climate activist organizations on social media.

To analyze these activist's written and visual communication, I selected Instagram as the central platform for my original research. Though Facebook is the most popular social-media network in Lebanon, and reaches 58% of the country's population, there were no discoverable *FFF Lebanon* accounts on Facebook. Additionally, while there is an *FFF Lebanon* Twitter account, less than 3% of Lebanese citizens use Twitter. On the other hand, as of 2020, a total 1.6 million people, 23% of the country's population, used Instagram (Pinto et al.). With 1,386,000,000 users globally, Instagram has the largest concentration of young people (Statista Research Department, "Most Popular Social Networks"). Instagram is also designed especially for sharing photographs and informational materials.

To paint a fuller picture of how youth climate activists engage with YCM, I undertook a narrative analysis of three posts from *FFF Lebanon*. This analysis offers a qualitative way to approach varying representations—written, visual, or spoken (Bryda 121). Considering that I am interested in both what and how these youth climate activists are posting to Instagram, I undertake two forms of narrative analysis: thematic and structural (Bryda 123). While a thematic narrative analysis pays special attention to meaning, a structural one focuses on how that meaning is shared. Given that narratives are utilized to construct our identity—and in the context of the Grand Narrative, a collective identity—this method is a flexible way to qualitatively consider how we assign meaning to our lived experiences (Bryda 121–122).

In November 2021, I created a matrix of 49 youth organizations' Instagram account information and statistics (i.e., number of followers, engagement rates, average likes per post, and average comments per post). First, I looked at the 'following,' the accounts the youth climate activist organizations subscribe to, and 'followers,' the accounts that subscribe to these

organizations (i.e., Fridays for Future [FFF], Extinction Rebellion Youth [XR Youth], and Arab Youth Climate Movement [AYCM]). Having then discovered national branches (e.g., *FFF Lebanon* [@fridaysforfuture.lb], *XR Israel* [@xryouth_israel], *Arab Youth Climate Movement Palestine* [@ aycm_palestine]), I surveyed those followers. At this stage, I discovered smaller, country-specific, youth climate activist-led organizations (e.g., *Earth Ambassadors Tunisia* [@ambassadors.tunisia], *Green Generation Foundation Jordan* [@ggf_jordan], *Global Youth Biodiversity Network Morocco* [gybn_ma]). From 18 different countries, I recorded 49 Instagram accounts ranging from pages with as little as 47 followers to as many as 18,000. As expected, this original research pointed to a significant engagement with three parent organizations—FFF (13), AYCM (10), and XR (9)—and a considerable number of youth climate activist organizations in Israel (10) and Lebanon (6).

After collecting this information, I quantified each account's engagement rate utilizing the Phlanx Instagram Engagement Calculator ("Instagram Engagement Calculator"). Typically, this rate is calculated by dividing the total engagement—number of interactions over account size—by the total number of followers ("How to Measure Instagram Engagement"). The pages with the highest engagement rates are those considered the most relevant and are favored by the platform's algorithm. If the algorithm favors an account, its posts are most likely to be shared near the beginning of a viewer's feed and, consequently, to be further engaged with. On average, accounts with fewer than 5,000 followers have an engagement rate of 5.60%, whereas accounts with more than 1 million followers have an engagement rate of 1.97% ("Instagram Engagement Calculator"). Of the 49 accounts I surveyed, the average engagement rate was 13.48%. Interestingly, similar political organizations across the region also have higher than average engagement rates. For instance, Black Lives Matter Tunisia (@blacklivesmattertunisia) has an engagement rate of 8.41% and Feminism Middle East (@feminisim_middle_east) of 8.74%. These engagement rates are in line with the figures discussed earlier about MENA's above average social-media consumption. Of the six Lebanese accounts I surveyed, their median engagement rate was 6.78%. This is in line with the average engagement rate, 5.60%, for accounts with fewer than 5,000 followers.

Though I spent many hours surfing Instagram to create this matrix and am confident in its

usefulness, there are, undoubtedly, gaps in my survey. Firstly, I could not find accounts for youth climate activist organizations in Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Western Sahara, and Yemen. Yet, there are likely youth climate activist organizations in these countries—FFF has recorded marches in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen ("Strike Statistics: Countries"). Secondly, I could not verify any of the owners. Given that these accounts' handles are the organizations' names, not the name of the person posting, I cannot confirm with full certainty that youth climate activists run them. However, it would seem unlikely that any other party may be posting. These accounts are generally utilized to share organizational information such as logistics for or photos taken from strikes. Thirdly, some accounts post more frequently than others and, therefore, offer a timelier perspective. The aim of this research, however, is not to comprehensively review youth climate activism in Lebanon or regionally, but to survey organizational engagement and investigate how metamodernism, as a theoretical framework, can be used as a tool to understand current global youth climate activism. This narrative analysis is key to contextualizing how current youth climate activism shifts our global climate consciousness and, potentially, contributes to global environmental policy.

To specifically establish Lebanese youth climate activist engagement with YCM, the following section reports on the qualitative narrative analysis I performed on three of *FFF Lebanon*'s (@fridaysforfuture.lb) Instagram posts. There are various Lebanese accounts I could have selected, but I chose *FFF Lebanon* because it has the largest following and is the most active on Instagram, posting weekly if not daily. To survey the organization's content, I selected three compelling posts between October 17 and November 17, 2021. During this period, *FFF Lebanon* posted 16 times. I selected the three analyzed entries below for their variety in topic and mode of communication.

Beginning in chronological order, from least to most recent, the first post I highlight was published on October 17, 2021. This marks the two-year anniversary of the October 17 Revolution—a series of civil protests sparked by the country's severe economic downturn (عام على 17 تشرين!). In this image, four young adults hold garbage bags filled with sorted trash, and a young girl wields a cardboard sign with "Fridays for Future" in marker written across it. These

**Fig. 1.** @fridaysforfuture.lb, Photo of the Second Anniversary of the October 17th Revolution, *Instagram*, 17 Oct. 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CVJHzIpMZju/.

activists have joined their fellow Lebanese in a fight not only against environmental degradation but also political corruption. This alignment is a primary example of Transmovement-ism, of utilizing an association with other movements as a tool for assembling and ideological strength. In line with the trajectory of global climate action, Lebanese activism from the 1960s to the early 2000s relied heavily on guidance from and attendance at intergovernmental climate conferences. However, governmental institutions have increasingly disappointed these activists in failing to enact effective mitigative measures against climate change. So, even though the second anniversary of the October 17th Revolution is about the political resiliency of the country's civil sphere, youth climate activists utilize this space to emphasize the relationship between politics and climate.

This political despondency has additionally fostered a 'David versus Goliath' storytelling strategy. *FFF Lebanon* is different from previous environmental grassroots efforts because they portray themselves as the 'little guys' taking on the nation's political fabric. In this post's caption, for instance, the organization writes in English:

Two years ago, Lebanese finally took a decision: that we can all play a positive role in society. We refused to keep being used by politicians and bankers. To be victims of our ideologies, anymore. Let's not protest in demanding our local, nor global oppressors to simply stop their comfort. Let's just take our rights now without asking (@fridaysforfuture.

lb, Photo of the Second Anniversary).

The utilization of language like "used," "victims," and "global oppressors" suggests a smallness to their advocacy. Indeed, the image itself, of four people collecting trash and another holding a poster, urges that each person has a small part to play to change the future. This sense that their actions, though small-scale, are effective, is alternatively supported by strong phrases like "we can all play a positive role;" "we refused to keep being used;" and, "let's just take our rights." This image and text are also primary examples of Youth Grassroots-ism. Narratively, this activism focuses on the dichotomy between their political immobility and propensity to affect change. Regardless of past or present failures, these activists' faith in individual and collective efforts remains steadfast. And, regardless of their adversary's power, they ambitiously, and perhaps naively, continue to act. Thus, while youth Grassroots-ism draws a line in the sand—it is young people against the political establishment—it also recognizes that we're all playing on the same field and collaboration is our most effective weapon.



**Fig. 2.** @fridaysforfuture.lb, Photo from Martyr's Square by Chris Trinh, *Instagram*, 23 Oct. 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CVYgsw7MJf4/.

The second post I highlight was published on October 23, 2021. This post shows eight activists holding protest signs beneath a statue at Martyr's Square. This place pays tribute to those executed in the early 1900s for protesting against Ottoman rule (Sharif). Erected in 1960, this

square's famed statue also divided the city into East and West Beirut. This split represented opposing sects during the 15-year civil war (Sharif). Today, the square is a conventional gathering spot for protestors. Given this site's historical significance, posing for this post at the statue suggests a face-value alignment with the original anti-Ottoman martyrs and similar contemporary groups that utilize the square for civil protest. This symbolic association is an example of Transmovement-ism.

In the caption, *FFF Lebanon* addresses their followers as "martyrs" and argues that the country's strength is its diversity. *FFF Lebanon* writes in English: "We have learned and progressed in togetherness by disagreeing on personal spiritual decisions." Since France's colonial rule, religion has been the crux of the country's political tension and violence. Nevertheless, these activists maintain that what once was the most divisive factor is now one of Lebanon's greatest strengths. This caption also spotlights the unequal rights women face under Lebanese law by questioning, "How can we be called a democracy when half of our population is prevented from their full rights?" Indeed, the country's law only extends citizenship rights to children of Lebanese men (Le Borgne). Essentially, a child born there to a Lebanese mother and non-Lebanese father is not legally a Lebanese citizen. Hence, the caption reads, "girls and women are always at the forefront … yet excluded from basic institutional rights." Though religious conflict and women's citizenship rights are not directly related to climate action, this organization once again utilizes
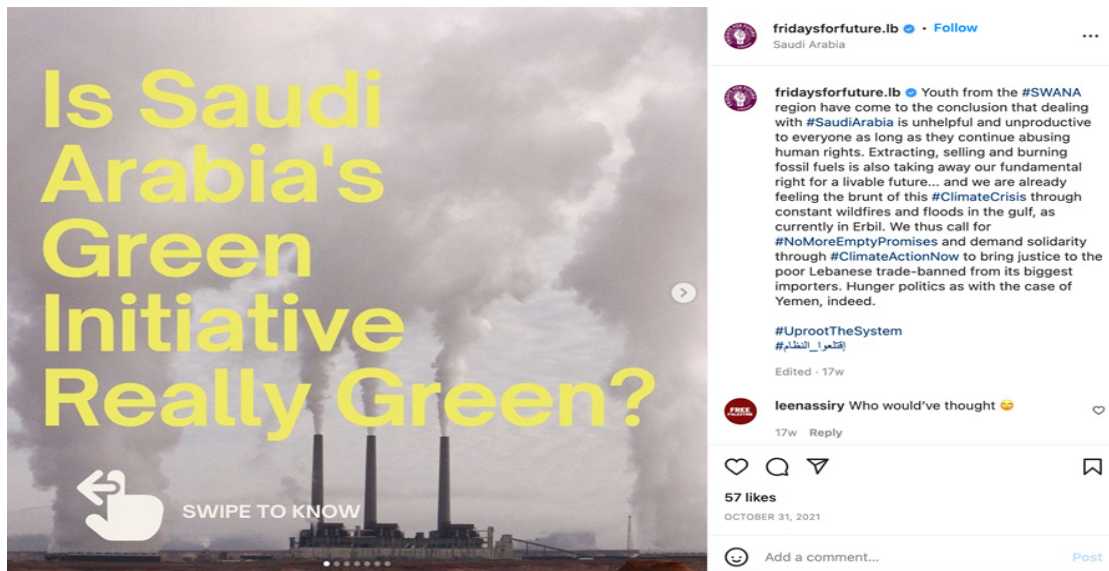


**Fig. 3.** @fridaysforfuture.lb, "Is Saudi Arabia's Green Initiative Really Green," *Instagram*, 31 Oct. 2021, www.instagram.com/p/CVsfUgCM-yV/.

its platform to weigh in on the national conversation. In YCM, Transmovement-ism uses cross-movement connections to support like-minded initiatives and emphasizes the critical, intersectional role identity plays in effective climate action. To youth climate activists, the equal participation of all people, and the recognition that all living things have an intrinsic value is central.

The final post exemplifies each of the three YCM Grand-Narrative threads: Youth Grassroots-ism, the Cult of Infographic-ism, and Transmovement-ism:

This post was published by *FFF Lebanon* on October 31, 2023. The six slides of this infographic work to confront Saudi Arabia's Green Initiative. The first slide answers the graphic's question: No, Saudi Arabia's green initiative is not green. The second, third, and fourth slides offer a brief history of Aramco, the country's oil company, and dispel their use of "net-zero" to describe their reductive emissions efforts. Finally, the fifth and sixth slides share three quotes, two from Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy and one from Aramco's CEO. This post has no citations. In fact, to youth climate activists, the deployment of the infographic itself from this account is the citation. This can mean one of two things. One, *FFF Lebanon* is both the infographic's creator and its sole source. Or, two, the ethos of the Cult of Infographic-ism is the assumption that the reader trusts the organization's authority and veracity.

Additionally, the final two slides, titled "bla, bla, bla," utilize Youth Grassroots-ism rhetoric. Greta Thunberg first said "blah, blah, blah," during a speech she gave at COP26 ("Greta Thunberg slams COP26"). In this speech, she spoke about her anger with the intergovernmental community. To her, these governments only ever spew false promises about large-scale climate action. Hence, in using this phrase on the fifth and sixth slides, *FFF Lebanon* nods to their belief that Saudi Arabia's green initiative is no more than vain blah, blah, blah. Once again, this language establishes the 'us versus them' Youth Grassroots-ism distinction. In the case of this infographic, the 'us' are those taking climate action and the 'them' are the political entities who are not. This contrast is furthered by the Transmovement-ist language deployed in the caption: "Youth of the #SWANA region have come to the conclusion that #SaudiArabia is unhelpful and unproductive." In calling out the young people of Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA)—a regional distinction like MENA—*FFF*

*Lebanon* appeals to the follower's identity, as well as their sentiments toward regional tribalism. This caption emphasizes that these activists are stronger collectively.

Taken together, these three posts suggest that how we talk about climate action on social media affects how we take climate action. Firstly, these posts demonstrate Youth Grassroots-ism in one primary way: they emphasize an 'us' versus 'you' sentiment. These activists narratively drew a line between young and old, specifically 'young' activist and 'old' politician. This distinction is essential to stake their claim on climate policy and to indicate why they should have a seat at 'the table' for important conversations about climate mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency. Youth Grassroots-ism does not appeal to the political establishment for validity. They state that they are not going to wait around for current indecision to disproportionately affect them in the future. Instead, these activists believe that some climate action, no matter how small, is always better than no climate action.

Secondly, the Cult of Infographic-ism took shape in the "Is Saudi Arabia Really Green?" infographic. The employment of this social-media technique allowed these activists to convey a complex history and an association to varying movements rather succinctly. The Cult of Infographic-ism is an imperfect, coded, and social-mediafied mode of circulating information. As exemplified by the infographic, the factualization of these details is difficult to verify. Without citations, this information is not verifiable. This is not to say that the portrayed concepts are falsified, rather that they are presented as undeniably true. In the internet age, if something is shared as fact, especially by a trusted organization, it is often read as fact. This trust is a two-way street, trusting the accounts we follow to be factual, and trusting these accounts to admit when they are wrong. Thus, the Cult of Infographic-ism revealed something unexpected and important about not only youth climate activists' Instagram pages, but also about social media more generally.

Thirdly, Transmovement-ism shows how activists use their platform to weigh in on the national political, social, and economic conversation, how they express a want for the equal participation of all people. They support like-minded individuals and initiatives to emphasize the critical, intersectional role identity plays in effective climate action. Doing more than highlight the

ideological strength of intersectional climate activism, Transmovementism also calls attention to its assembling strength. In offering trans-movement support to historically under- and misrepresented movements, these activists expand their following and strengthen their message.

This article is by no means a comprehensive study of youth climate activists' social-media communications in Lebanon, MENA, or globally. Rather, it outlined the usefulness of YCM as an analytical framework. Having developed YCM, I believe it can be considered in varying other contexts. Some areas of further research may include utilizing YCM as a framework to analyze the narratives of young indigenous activists, other youth environmental activists (e.g., biodiversity, plastic pollution, or environmental justice activists), or activists from differing nationalities. I imagine, for instance, a longer study about two youth climate activist organizations from different countries in different regions, or from different countries in the same region, will make a compelling case for the framework's usefulness. Similarly, a contrasting narrative analysis across social media platforms, Facebook versus Twitter or Instagram, will test the comparability and flexibility of the framework. Lastly, a study specifically on youth climate activism and the Cult of Infographic-ism may offer a fascinating and well-reasoned analysis about the cultural use of un-cited 'facts' on social media. Each of these areas for supplementary research will further explore YCM's practical application as well as add to the important, global conversation about metamodernism and youth climate activism.

## The Blueprints to Our Climate Future

This article developed Youth Climate Metamodernism (YCM) to investigate how today's youth climate activists communicate their advocacy. YCM revolves around three themes of communication: Youth Grassroots-ism, the Cult of Infographic-ism, and Transmovement-ism. Youth Grassroots-ism beckons grown-ups, especially those in power, to think about how their current actions will more significantly affect future generations. Young climate protesters act for the sake of action, not for the probability of results. The Cult of Infographic-ism captures youth climate activists' capacity as social-media savvy advocates. Through digital posters, infographics,

and hashtags, youth climate activists have utilized social media platforms to establish a coded mode of disseminating trusted information. Finally, Transmovement-ism characterizes how these activists present intersectionality and cross-movement coordination as a tool for assembling and ideological strength. At the intersection of identity and movement, youth climate activism opens the floor to historically marginalized and under-represented activist communities. In particular, this theme embodies the activists' belief that a just, sustainable world is only possible with all hands on deck.

To understand the intricacies by which they employ YCM, I executed a literature review on environmental activism in Lebanon and performed a narrative analysis on the organization *FFF Lebanon*. In using this country's youth climate activism as a case study, this article focused on an under-researched, yet dynamic demographic in MENA (Sowers 27). Lebanon's social and political history additionally lends itself to a metamodernist mindset. Specifically, the cultural reconstruction following the Lebanese Civil War fostered the belief that the country's youth are socially responsible for the protection of the natural world, regardless of their political immobility. While this research centered on Lebanese activists' conveyance of YCM, I believe this framework can be considered in varying other contexts. The most critical area for further research, however, would be to utilize YCM to analyze these activists' impact.

It is far too easy to feel helpless about the current state of the climate crisis. With little large-scale intergovernmental political progress, insignificant economic incentives for gas-guzzling superpowers, and a pop culture partially stalled by climate doomism, there is no clear answer to the first question I posed in the beginning of this article: What can I do?

However, today's youth climate activists exemplify the extraordinary power storytelling may bear. Having developed a new, distinct climate Grand Narrative through YCM, these activists have grounded their collective approach to the crisis. They present themselves as the climate's necessary revolutionaries, who, wielding words rather than weapons, have the power to inspire previous and future generations to look to the future. Their narrative rejects postmodern nihilism and embraces a new, metamodern optimism. As opposed to asking, "why care about the climate crisis,"

these activists increasingly ask, "why not?" Their naive, though radically sincere, communication

establishes the blueprints to our sustainable future.

## Acknowledgments

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