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LEBANON'S INJURED IDENTITIES WHO REPRESENTS WHOM DURING A CIVIL WAR?

Ghassane Salamé *

I

The ten-year-old conflict in Lebanon calls up at the very outset the fundamental problem of identity. This, of course, should not come as a surprise. Indeed, the notion that national identity in complex societies – going into what is generally called a process of modernisation – is attained with great difficulty, is widely accepted. As Lucian Pye defines it “The identity crisis involves the resolution of the problem of traditional heritage and modern practices, the dilemmas of parochial sentiments and cosmopolitan practices. As long as people feel pulled between two worlds and without roots in any society they cannot have the firm sense of identity necessary for building a stable, modern national state.”¹ This process of nation-building could not automatically follow the establishment of the modern state. Indeed, a long period of adaptation to the political framework and the reorientation of political socialisation to a state-dominated political culture were needed. And even so, the final result was far from guaranteed. Noting that this problem was as pronounced in some European societies as it was in the Third World, Erich Fromm had underlined the link between one’s attachment to a traditional group and the concomitant feelings of security thus generated: “The identity with nature, clan, relation gives the individual security. He belongs to, he is

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1. Lucian Pye, *Politics, Personality and National-Building: Burma's Search for Identity* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 63.

rooted in, a structuralised whole in which he has an unquestionable place. He may suffer from hunger or suppression, but he does not suffer from the worst of all pains – complete aloneness and doubt.”²

The creation of modern Lebanon typically called for the transfer of an individual’s loyalty from a family, a sectarian, or a tribal community which provided the security of yesteryear, to an abstract and alienating structure – the State. To feel Maronite or Druze thus should have become archaic for passports stipulated that everyone had become Lebanese and had to feel as such. But this transfer was not simple: “The loss of the self and its substitution by a pseudo-self leave the individual in an intense state of insecurity. He is obsessed by doubt since, being essentially a reflex of other peoples’ expectations of him, he has in a measure lost his identity. He is compelled to conform, to seek his identity by continuous approval and recognition by others.”³ The individual feels as though driven to live, in suffering, Rimbaud’s dilemma, rendered by Sartre in a famous sentence: “Je est un autre.”

The war in Lebanon is, to some extent, a savage expression of this dilemma, of the deep frustrations it generates and the aggressiveness which these frustrations produce. There is, at times, a sort of refusal to acknowledge the Other, a tendency to regard his origins with haughtiness and disdain and at the same time reject his desired status of citizen. If I recognise you as a Shi’i, it is only to scorn you; if I call you Lebanese, I still doubt your “conversion.”

This permanent flux regarding the issue of identity has become a constant source of irritation in Lebanon, particularly to those who harbour political projects. If they had hoped that the religious cleavage (Christian/Muslim) would become the determining factor of one’s identity, they were soon disappointed by the fact that many of their compatriots did not consider themselves sufficiently Christian or sufficiently Muslim. In fact, in order for me to better assert myself as a Christian, I am not only in need of the Christians’ solidarity, but also of that of the Muslims who define themselves as Muslims first, and can thus participate in the assertion of my Christian identity, in an uninterrupted game of mirrors.

The same applies to a lower level, that of the confessional community which is more restricted than the dualistic religious one (Christian/Muslim). To better assert myself as a Maronite, I must see other Lebanese define themselves as Greek Orthodox, Sunnis, Shi’a, and Druzes. If they define themselves more generally as Christians or Muslims, my specificity as a Maronite or a Druze, a Shi’i or a Syriac, is threatened. Thus those who harbour political projects based on the sectarian identity object to its dilution in a wider religious framework. Some Druzes might, for example, find that other Druzes

2. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1960, p.29.

3. *Ibid.*, p.177.

identify too much with the broader Lebanese Muslims’ goals. The Sunnis might want to dissociate themselves from a Shi’a demographic boom, and some Greek Orthodox might feel the effects of the Maronites’ political hegemony and reject it out of a desire to preserve their own confessional identity.

The contradiction between these two levels (the religious and the communal) can become acute. Both Christianity and Islam are proselytising religions – witness the invigorating effects that new conversions have on them in various parts of the world, or their sometimes acute rivalry for the souls in Africa. But the communal-confessional spirit, on the contrary, springs from an atavistic attachment to a group, from an almost total lack of interest or suspicion about the possible conversion of the Other. Thus if the religion has an unquestionable missionary zeal, the confessional community turns inward, bound up in its past, proud of its identity and apprehensive about its future. The community is passive to the same extent that the religion is conquering.

Because proselytism seems little in evidence in Lebanon, one can conclude that communal spirit outweighs religious faith. Religious faith drives the believer to spread his identity and to constantly prove its superiority, or at least its truthfulness (true Religion in the medieval sense of the word, as opposed to the false messiahs and self-designated prophets). The confessional spirit is, on the contrary, a sort of parochial “tribal nationalism” to use Hanna Arendt’s expression, and it is particularly this kind of nationalism that now triumphs in Lebanon and nurtures the civil war. This is innately true for the Druzes who, from the beginnings of their sect, closed the doors of their community to new converts. But this has almost *become* true for the other confessional communities. The convert seems to be subjected to bitter condemnation by his community of origin and to contemptuous suspicion by his new coreligionists. The local Catholic clergy has, for example, found the European missionaries’ designs to convert to Catholicism not only oriental Muslims but even oriental Christians separated from Rome, both conceited and without hope. *Today*, everyone seems to be entrenched in his group, plunged in his confession, true to the imaginary nation. The Other is necessarily perceived as different and, since the war still rages on, as a deceitful and unbearable alien.

I have insisted on the word *today* because the situation has not always been so inflexible. One of the most negative aspects of the political system gradually established between 1920 and 1943 is that it inordinately reinforced confessional affiliation as the basis for one’s identity – an identity accepted not only by oneself and by the other but also by the State. Indeed, it was much easier to convert from one religion to another before this extreme politicisation. The politico-communal whole was far more fluid. Today, confessional polarisation has become so pronounced that the Lebanese try to forget that some Druze families converted to Christianity (one of them, the Abillama’, did so as late as

the nineteenth century), that masses of Lebanese Shi'a preferred joining the Maronite community to emigrating to other localities, and that innumerable individuals and groups of Christians have continued, for one reason or another, to embrace the Islamic faith. One of the most famous emirs (Bashir II) who ruled Mount Lebanon for nearly half a century before 1840, died leaving behind him doubts as to his true religion (Muslim Sunni or Christian). The Greek Catholic community was born in the eighteenth century when certain Greek Orthodox bishops recognised the Pope's supremacy. This religious and confessional fluidity has largely disappeared; the system has rigidified and has become exceedingly compartmentalised into nearly non-communicating confessions whose borders were crossed only by a growing number of Lebanese discreetly marrying outside their original sectarian groups. When Lebanon was still under the French mandate, a liberal-minded French High Commissioner introduced a law making it possible for Lebanese citizens to give themselves, if they so desired, a personal status (birth, marriage, inheritance) regulated by the State and not by their respective communities. This law, however, was never implemented. The communal chiefs detected in it – and with good reason – the seed that would eventually pose a fundamental challenge to their power. They naturally preferred to see the Lebanese, "chacun parqué dans sa confession" (Edmond Rabbath) and faithful to its leaders.

Having said all that, ethnic differences in the true sense of the word have no place in Lebanon. It is a tribal confessional system that separates an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous population into distinctive groups. It is very difficult to distinguish a Druze from a Maronite or a Sunni from a Greek Orthodox in the street, and blood differentiation could not be established in laboratory tests along sectarian lines. When true ethnic minorities flocked to Lebanon, they were integrated into the political system as new confessions. That was particularly the case with the Armenians who, nevertheless, had come to Lebanon with a relatively more sophisticated political tradition. Instead of fighting amongst themselves as in 1958, the Armenian political parties chose in 1975 to safeguard the group's *'asabiyya*. They joined together, despite their ideological differences, to "defend" their community. The Kurds living in Lebanon tried to do the same but were less successful.

On top of these religious and sectarian uncertainties, the Lebanese have encountered a severe problem in the very *raison d'être* of their newly created state. Indeed, the self-given function many Lebanese have attributed themselves – that of a "bridge" between East and West, of a "link" between Christianity and Islam, or of a "meeting point" between the desert and the sea, the Arabs and Europe, the Mediterranean and the Continent – did not help much in forging a solid national identity. To view yourself as an organic intermediary was a way of giving third parties a say in shaping your personality

and, actually, in the making of your future. Being a "shelter" for dispossessed minorities was not a greater help: the country stood as some sort of passive actor, of a place, while history was being made elsewhere in the region. The Lebanese could not identify with such a largely mercantilist function, embellished by a cultural Levantine touch, without having first defined their "personality" *in se* and *per se*. This openness to the environment, established as a *raison d'être*, was to become a very serious source of vulnerability in an era of conflicting nationalisms.

II

In many newly-established nation-states, nationalism developed as the most widely accepted political ideology. So too with many Lebanese who genuinely believed that nationalism was the natural vehicle for the transition from traditional parochial loyalties to a more 'modern' form of citizenship. In Europe, in India, or in neighbouring countries such as Mustapha Kemal's Turkey or Sa'ad Zaghloul's Egypt, nationalism was a successful rallying cry for the various components which constituted the 'Nation' to stand together and face the Enemy. Suddenly, one either became a nationalist or nothing at all: the new European religion based on language and on the desire to live together, on history or culture, was quickly adopted as a long-awaited panacea.

But where was this cherished nation? In truth, the answer was not simple, and various nationalisms relating to different, supposedly extant "nations", were interspersed and superimposed, contributing to the already confusing complexity of the religious and confessional chessboard. Even more serious was the tendency of the various communal groups to identify themselves with these parties, overloading the imaginary nations with more or less expressed confessional overtones. In Lebanon at least, to be Lebanonist, pan-Syrianist, pan-Arabist, or pan-Islamist was more often than not, a mere extension of one's confessional identity.

The Lebanese nationalists were the first to appear on the scene. They believed that the Lebanese nation-state in its present boundaries, established by France in 1920, was the modern version of a secular Lebanon that had always existed – since the Phoenicians for the more zealous "Lebanonists" or since the sixteenth century Druze-Maronite emirate for the moderates. Others ignored those historic precedents and based their nationalisms on more immediate considerations: the nation-state was a framework of political

organisation that had become universal and that could best be reinforced by a nationalism tailored to its needs. One could follow that trend from M. Jouplain (Paul Noujaim) writing before the creation of the 'Grand Liban' to Georges Naccache who despaired at his compatriots' reluctance to adhere to state-nationalism. Naccache's views were sternly expressed in *l'Orient* and his sentence "Deux négations ne font pas une nation" soon became famous.

One representative of the same modernistic-conglomeratist and politically moderate ideology was Henri Pharaon. Pharaon, a theoretician and politician, summarised his views in the following sentences:

Le pacte de 1943 a été l'union dans la lutte de la majorité des éléments de la nation pour la liberté du Liban. La maturité politique des différentes communautés qui composent notre structure même les a portées à s'unir dans cette lutte en vue de la réalisation de leurs aspirations nationales.⁴

Pharaon was not unaware of the reality of Lebanon's heterogeneity:

Le Liban est un ensemble de minorités qui se distinguent les unes des autres par leurs rites, leurs religions, leurs tendances sociales et politiques diverses.⁵

But the utopia was equally underlined:

Le Liban perdrait la première de ses conditions de durée le jour où il cesserait d'être un refuge sûr et une assurance contre la discrimination pour tous ceux qui l'habitent.⁶

But Sunni and (to a lesser extent) Shi'i Muslims were more reluctant to identify with the Lebanese state and its sustaining ideology of nationalism. When it appeared that the post-colonial borders were more solid than they had earlier thought, Muslim leaders gradually, though reluctantly, came to adopt the state and to a lesser extent its accompanying ideology. Two incarnations of this Christian-Muslim encounter were the *Destouri* (constitutional) tradition led by Bichara al-Khuri and Riyad al-Sulh, and the *Nahj* – a political trend that stemmed from Shihabi experience. Two personal factors drove General Fuad Shihab, elected President in 1958, to spread this moderate and modernising "Lebanonist" ideology: a family tradition in which religious conversions were common, and a decent military past. The interconfessional troubles of 1958 drove him even further. He sought to marginalise the confessional structures, to strengthen the state apparatus, and to encourage social integration. There were social and economic adjuncts to this Shihabist statist ideology: the creation of a public sector, the establishment of social security, a burgeoning meritocratic system in the civil service, and a new

interest in developing the geographically peripheral areas. Shihab was, however, less eager and less successful in his drive to bring new blood to the political establishment. In the 1970s the uncharismatic Ilyas Sarkis appeared to be his almost unique inheritor.

Theda Skocpol has noted that "one of the most important facts about the power of a state may be its *unevenness* across policy areas. And the most telling result, even of a far-reaching revolution or reform from above, may be the disparate transformations produced across sociopolitical sectors."⁷ With the Shihabist experience, one is struck by the contrast between an indisputable success in institution-building and an evident inability to address the issue of the renewal of the political establishment itself, replacing this venture with a loose coalition of superficially "recycled" members of the old corrupt establishment and new rising forces such as Kamal Junblatt's PSP and the Phalanges.

Created in the 1930s the Phalanges developed as a pillar of and later as an alternative to this statist, greater-Lebanonist trend. The party remained marginal until its active military involvement in the 1958 crisis. After that, it joined in the Shihab political coalition. The Phalangists viewed Shihabism as a long-awaited vehicle to enter politics and the Shihabists used the Phalanges to ensure for themselves a Christian base, a base they lacked because of the very nature of their more egalitarian Lebanonist orientation. This association between the Shihabi *Nahj* and the Phalangist party proved to be to their mutual benefit and produced a decade of institution-building, political stability, and rapid economic growth (1958-68).

For a variety of reasons, both internal (the growing ambition of the Phalangist party and its desire to transform itself from a mere prop to the regime to a party that could assume a more guiding role) and external (the large American-backed, anti-Nasserist regional movement and the growing Palestinian challenge to the Lebanese institutions), this association was broken. The Phalangists by then had become a substantial Christian force while the Shihabi political coalition was crumbling under the combined blows of the newly reunited Christian right, the Palestinians, and a short-sighted urban bourgeoisie fearful of losing its social privileges to a "strong state".

With the election to the presidency of Sulayman Franjeh in 1970, Shihabism was clearly defeated. The Phalangists (with the rest of the Christian right) acquired a sort of monopoly over the Lebanonist ideology that led to a transformation in the very content of this ideology. The egalitarian and integrationist options of the ideology gave way, once again, to a sort of tribal

7. Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research," in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol, (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.17.

4. Henri Pharaon, *Au service du Liban et de son unité* (Beyrouth: 1959), p.9.

5. *Ibid.*, p.12.

6. *Ibid.*, p.24.

nationalism in which it was implicit and later explicitly stated that Lebanon was first and foremost a Christian country and that the Christians were innately Lebanese nationalists, whereas their Muslim compatriots had to constantly prove, each in his turn and by individual choice, that they too had *become* so. From a state ideology, Lebanese nationalism deteriorated into a group ideology, losing, under this confessional grip, a great deal of its credibility. Nothing could better illustrate this slide than the nomenclature adopted: the Christian right called the front that united it the "Lebanese Front" and the militia that defended its interests and options the "Lebanese Forces". Their monopoly over the word "Lebanese" could not be challenged by their opponents' preference for a vaguely defined, though less confessionally loaded *watan* (fatherland).

This "Christian" monopolisation of the Lebanese identity was not without logical and historical foundations. From its very creation, the country was caught in a vicious circle. Broadly speaking, the Christians wanted to maintain their hegemony over the State because they thought they were the only ones who wished, or were able to, defend a fragile and threatened Lebanese entity. The Muslims were now willing to transfer their political allegiance to an independent Lebanon on condition that they too be allowed to participate in governing the country. Shihabism had succeeded in starting a process that would eventually reconcile these two erstwhile contradictory demands, but its premature breakdown highlighted its vulnerability. The Christians held on more than ever to their institutional prerogatives and the Muslims to their sensitivity to regional trends and influences. The war that broke out in 1975, with the Palestinians blatantly playing on these frustrations, has completed this parallel insidious undermining process.

About the same time the Phalangist Party was created, a different national option resulted in the creation of another party: the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). For its founder, Antun Sa'adeh, and his friends, the Lebanese entity was a typical colonialist creation. The true nation, which had existed since the Akkadians and the Babylonians, was the Greater Syrian nation which today comprises the population of Lebanon, the contemporary Syrian state, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, and ... Cyprus. This view, based on selected geographic, ecological, and historical arguments, actually led to a new variation within the already active trend seeking an integration of Lebanon within "Geographic", Emir Faysal's, Syria. The SSNP, founded in a Christian non-Maronite environment, succeeded in attracting followers to its imaginary nation, mainly in Lebanon, with some recruits in Syria and Palestine. The repression of the party's members by the French mandatory authorities and the burgeoning of other Pan-Arab trends in Greater Syria have transformed the party into an almost exclusively Lebanese body, if not in terms of recruitment, then at least in terms of its implantation. In 1958 it participated

alongside the "Lebanonists" in an attempt to check the Egyptian Nasserist tide sweeping the Levant at the time; however, it fought the 1975 war, which still continues, alongside the Islamic-Palestinian alliance and in close collaboration with the Syrian government.

The emergence of the Arab nationalist movement, be it the Ba'th party (founded in Damascus at the end of the 1940s) or Nasserism (on the rise since the Suez crisis in 1956), aggravated the political and cultural uncertainty of the Lebanese, vacillating already between their original confession and the Lebanese entity and between the latter and a potential Greater Syrian entity. Arab nationalism was to be widely represented on the Lebanese scene by numerous factions such as the pro-Syrian Ba'th, the pro-Iraqi Ba'th, the independent Nasserists (Murabitun), the Arab Socialist Union, the Sidonese movement led by Ma'ruf Sa'd, and so on. Despite the subtleties which differentiated them, these groups claimed that the already established Lebanon as well as the potential Greater Syria were both Western colonial projects. Allegiance should go primarily to the Arab nation that extends from the Gulf to the Atlantic and includes Lebanon as well as Tunisia, Egypt, or Iraq.

Whereas being Lebanese was naturally taken up by the Maronites and other Christians, and whereas the SSNP primarily recruited outside the Maronite/Sunni duo, the Arab nationalist movement was popular almost exclusively among the Muslim masses, and particularly among the Sunnis. The Shi'a, when adopting Arab nationalism, identified more easily with the Ba'th. The majority of Lebanese Muslims felt enthusiastic about the Syrian-Egyptian union (at least at its inception in 1958), were outraged by the tripartite attack on Egypt, and angered by the Eisenhower Doctrine. Behind this acute regional awareness lurked an ill-concealed desire to exploit Arab nationalism and relations with its major proponent (Nasser's Egypt) in order to alter the internal balance of power at the expense of the hegemonic Maronites. In 1958 President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, after having substantially helped the (mainly Muslim) Lebanese rebellion against President Sham'un, in a flash of wisdom decided to reactivate the Lebanese formula, all the while advising the Lebanese to adopt a more moderate stance and rally around the reform-minded General Shihab rather than prolonging the civil war and ultimately provoking a massive Western military reaction.

After 1967, however, the PLO found itself, by misadventure or design, caught in the quagmire of Lebanon's domestic political game. It began supporting, arming, and manipulating growing numbers of (mainly Muslim) Lebanese in an effort to implant and subsequently protect itself. On the other hand, many Muslim leaders tried (and largely succeeded) in drawing the PLO into their own struggle for power in Lebanon. The Palestinians found themselves ensnared into the trap which Nasser had so shrewdly managed to

avoid. The rest is common knowledge, from Beirut being besieged by Israel to Tripoli twice being surrounded by the Syrian army. Those who had identified with Arab nationalism and were defeated with it in 1967 were now being crushed by General Sharon with the rest of the Arab world strangely unmoved. Beirut had in fact been the burial ground of a particular type of Arabism.

But Arabism was already in decline for more than a decade while Islam was resurfacing as a major political force. For the born again Muslim activist, if there exists any *umma* (nation) at all, it is the Prophet's great Islamic nation, a concept as old as Islam itself. It was revitalised in the last century by Jamal al-din al-Afghani, Rashid Rida, and other pan-Islamists (Rida was Lebanese born). After witnessing an ebb following the modern states' independence, the trend was revived at the end of the 1970s, propelled if not actually directed by the victory of the Iranian Revolution.

Today Lebanon is teeming with Islamic movements. But these movements are, on the whole, trapped in the confessional structure of Lebanese society – witness their exclusively Sunni composition in Tripoli and their generally Shi'i membership elsewhere. Efforts are being made to co-ordinate these movements, but the country's fragmented social structure appears to have, until now, prevailed over the proclaimed unitary ideology. With these religious movements, the Other (Christian) is considered an alien in an even more radical sense. Certain militants would have no hesitation in asserting that their solidarity lies more with an Indonesian or Senegalese Muslim than with their Christian Lebanese compatriots. Lebanonism, Syrianism, and Arabism are condemned as suspect formulae and a legacy of imperialism. In any case, Iranian mullahs call "Aflaqists" (after Michel 'Aflaq, the Damascene Christian and founder of the party) their Ba'thi enemies. Muslim activists in Lebanon, especially the pro-Iranian hezbollahis, have shown a real determination both on the battlefield and in the form of suicide missions. In their struggle for a "pure" Islamic regime they are in pursuit of a vision, deeply embedded in their memory of history and embellished by the great frustrations of the present. As one of their leaders once stated: "Our interpretation of Islam could not be reconciled with geographic considerations. We follow the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and this leadership is as compelling in Lebanon as it is in Iran, or in any other Muslim land. All boundaries dividing up *Dar al-Islam* are artificial and will soon disappear."⁸

8. Shaykh 'Abbas al-Musawi, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan*, n.d., n.p.

III

The emergence of these various nationalisms (Lebanese, pan-Syrian, pan-Arab, or pan-Islamic) has hardly been of any help in the search for Lebanon's identity, suffering already from extraordinary religious and confessional heterogeneity. Traditional-confessional and modern nationalistic ideologised identities were superimposed and interspersed, producing with every collision, or any major regional event, a new political grouping and hence a new armed militia. But is the struggle merely tribal, religious, confessional, or nationalist?

No. Lebanon suffers also from a class struggle so difficult to discern in this unbelievable entanglement of interests and identities. There are some political groups (one of which is the Communist Party which celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 1984) that claim the conflict is basically a struggle between opposing, antagonistic classes. This, however, does not explain why the Lebanese Communist Party found itself fighting Nasir's socialism in 1958, and how since 1975 it has found itself allied with Ba'thist Arab socialism and the PLO.

A simple shortcut would be to identify classes and communities. The class struggle is shrouded by a communal struggle pitting poor Muslims against rich Christians. But try explaining why a rich Muslim is considered an ally whereas a rich Christian is an enemy! And especially try to ascertain whether the basic hypothesis which equates classes with sectarian groups (sometimes called ethno-classes) can actually be sustained.

This theory is in fact a product of the war. Lebanese Marxists used to argue in terms of developed civil societies, denying even the very existence of confessionalism. To them, there were the bourgeois on one hand, the proletarians on the other. This classical premiss, absurd even in a traditional society, found arguments to back it as soon as Lebanese capitalism entrenched itself in the cities and began invading the countryside. Running parallel to this capitalist boom was an acute development of the socio-professional identity, supported by the banking sector, the remittances of Lebanese emigrants, the increased value of agricultural land, the projects launched after 1958 for improving the state's infrastructure, and tourism. As a result of this, the Marxist groups attracted thousands of new recruits who had recovered, more often than not, from their nationalist dreams. Unions spread in industry, in banking, in the private and public educational system, in the tobacco plantations of the south, and amongst the fishermen. What facilitated this movement was the frenzied and chaotic increase in urbanisation: from 1958 to

1975 the population of greater Beirut tripled. Despite a late start, industrialisation thrived, particularly in textiles, cement works, foodstuffs, and construction materials. In 1975 Lebanon was the fifth largest exporter to Saudi Arabia.

It was hardly coincidental that the grass-roots movement clamouring for its rights in the prewar years took on distinctly Shi'i overtones. The Shi'a of the northern Beqa' or of southern Lebanon formed the overwhelming majority of the suburban proletariat of Beirut's southern areas and a major part of the eastern suburbs of the capital. In the factories of Kfarshima and Shweifat, the Shi'a easily constituted 80 to 90 per cent of the workers and about 50 to 60 per cent of the work force of the factories situated in the Christian areas (Tal al-Za'tar, al-Naba'a).

But the unity of the working class was too recent and vulnerable to be able to stand up to the civil war. In a 1976 postscript to a study conducted in the immediate prewar period of Lebanon's social classes, Claude Dubar and Salim Nasr came up with the following disillusioned report: "The very large and recent working-class suburbs of Beirut (the southern and eastern suburbs) have exploded into antagonistic quarters and zones which encircle, and bitterly oppose one another."⁹ Feeling ill at heart, the leaders of the Lebanese Left could not but agree with this report. It is in this context that they were made to hold on to a theoretical expedient that could only be sustained with great difficulty: that of the community-class – of a social and economic cleavage which runs parallel to the sectarian one. But this expedient overlooked an indisputable fact: that the Christian fighters on the other side of the barricade also come, in large part, from the most disadvantaged segments of the population.

This complacent attitude towards the confessional system drove these Marxist political groups to participate, without much distinction in their practices, in the butchery of the civil war. That they were aligned on the side of the largest and the more disadvantaged group partially compensated for their debatable choice, but from there to equate the Christian with the bourgeois was a very hastily reached conclusion. This ideologically complacent attitude was not necessarily productive, at least not in the short run. The Leftist groups soon had to fight for their own survival against the Shi'i movement, Amal, as well as against the pro-Iranian religious groups thriving in the same quarters where the Left thought it would base its stronghold. Class consciousness was shrouded or swept away by the politico-confessional consciousness, constantly sustained by the fact that the Other across the green line consistently defined himself as Christian. The game of mirrors continues in stymied situations.

9. Claude Dubar and Salim Nasr, *Les classes sociales au Liban* (Paris: Fondation Nationale Des Sciences Politiques, 1976), p.329.

IV

From its inception the Lebanese political system was based on an ambiguous and vulnerable duality. The Maronite leaders of the Mandate (1920-43) and post-independence era viewed themselves both as the representatives of all the Christians and as the holders of the ideology of Lebanese independence. The Sunnis on the other hand, pre-eminent in the Arab East at the dawn of modern Lebanon, wholeheartedly considered themselves the representatives of all Lebanese Muslims (Sunnis, Shi'a, and Druzes alike) and spokesmen for the integration of Lebanon into the larger framework of Syria and the Arab world. Being "Lebanese" thus took on a strong Maronite and a more generally Christian colouring whereas being "Arab" had definitely a Sunni and a more generally Muslim connotation. There were Muslims who favoured an independent Lebanon as well as Christians who had adopted the Greater Syrian or pan-Arab nationalist ideology. Nevertheless, it was always a question of individuals or small groups who found it difficult to promote their approach within their own community. Moreover, the "Lebanonism" of the national pact granted the Shi'a, the Druzes, and the non-Maronite Christians a lesser status. The political system was tailored to fit this dualism. Thus the Presidency of the Republic, the Presidency of Magistrature, the highest position of the Army (*Qa'id al-Jaysh*), and various important ministries were entrusted to the Maronites. The counterbalance to this predominance was usually Sunni; the high political portfolios (defence, interior, foreign affairs) for example, were rarely entrusted to a Shi'i minister. The war, however, has shaken and perhaps definitely shattered this dualism in a contradictory way on either side of the barricade.

Among Christians during the heyday of the war when they were most threatened, the Maronite leaders called for the unity of all the Christians, irrespective of their confessional affiliation. That was especially the case after the two great battles which the Christians lost to the Druzes and their allies in the spring of 1976 and the summer of 1983. At first, opening up the Lebanese Front (Christian) to the non-Maronite Christian communities was considered but scantily implemented. In the beginning of 1984 the formation of a superior intra-Christian Religious Council administered on a joint basis was contemplated but soon abandoned because of the reluctance of the Greek Orthodox community to ally itself politically to the Maronites and the hesitation of the Maronites themselves to accept the idea of a Christian General Council administered on an equal basis.

The non-Maronite Christian communities turned out to be one of the political victims of the war. The erosion of their political presence was such that the two national reconciliation conferences of Geneva (November 1983) and Lausanne (March 1984) were conducted in their total absence; the Maronite leaders acting as spokesmen for all the Christians, even though they constituted no more than half the Christians of the country. The erosion is due to a number of factors.

Let us first recall that political party life in the Christian areas was greater than in the Muslim sector, drawing Christians of all confessions, and even a certain number of Muslims, to Maronite-dominated parties (Jumayyil's Phalangists, Sham'un's National Liberal Party, Bishara al-Khuri's Constitutional Party, or Edde's National Bloc). A clear difference between Muslims and Christians was reflected long before the war in legislative elections. The number of elected Christian representatives who were members of political parties has always been greater and the gap between them and elected Muslim political party representatives was constantly growing: ten Christians for five Muslims were party members in 1951, twenty three against eight in 1960, twenty five against nine in 1972. It is clear, however, that parties attracted militants from all the Christian communities, all the while being firmly directed by the Maronites. Relatively autonomous non-Maronite Christian notables could only be found in peripheral areas such as Zahlé, the Kura, 'Akkar and the Ba'albeck districts.

Other reasons for the erosion of the position of non-Maronite Christians stem from the Christians' feelings of isolation and solidarity, feelings caused by their minority status in a region dominated by Islam, and their repeated military defeats. In this context the Maronites constitute the only Christian community in the Arab East that has had some geographic base. Indeed, if the majority of the Maronites are Lebanese, many non-Maronite Christians are newcomers to Lebanon, having left behind them in Syria or Iraq – their countries of origin – many of their co-religionists. More recently, non-Maronite Christians by the thousands had to leave areas where coexistence had been the rule even during the war (Tripoli, the South, the Beqa', West Beirut). This displacement was due to the rising Islamic 'militantism' as well as to the facile identification by Muslim and Druze militiamen of Christian civilians and a militia that has the self-appointed duty to 'defend' them. A Christian peasant coming from a small village in the east of Saida or from the Beqa' feels as if he were moving to another country when he reaches the Kisrwan or Jbeil. Joining a militia thus becomes an appealing option, more so to him than to others, for it facilitates his integration in this "alien" region. And sacrificing his life will sometimes come more readily to him than to others, in order to avenge himself against those who have expelled him from his home and village.

The non-Maronite Christian politicians, on the other hand, were unable to conceive of a 'third path' – an alternative to the two camps. Most of them have reluctantly joined the Maronite mainstream while others have remained to the left of the political spectrum. A few have chosen to leave politics altogether. They were unable to find an alternative to radical militantism, their traditional allies, moderate Maronite and Muslim leaders, having been marginalised. Most of them had welcomed the Damascus Agreement of 1985, a formula which they thought could bring back civil peace, reconcile Lebanon with Syria and give them a much greater say in the political system. But with the collapse of this agreement, they soon discovered the great vulnerability of political moderates in wartime.

The war has indeed enhanced the standing of the Maronite leaders in the Christian sector, so much so that many local commentators have dropped the old confessional classification (three Christian communities and three Muslim ones) and adopted another one (Christians, Druzes, Sunnis, Shi'a). This new equation, induced by Maronite commentators, is not unanimously accepted and could very possibly be replaced by another, according to the developments of the war. The new division, however, bears witness to the phenomenon of concentration of power in the Christian potential "canton", and in the hands of those who have established it.

Among Muslims, Sunni economic and political hegemony, far from being strengthened, was instead demolished and finally broken. One important pillar of the 1943 national covenant, and the implicit idea of two "privileged" communities representing the two religious halves of the population, consequently collapsed. The causes for this downfall can be found in the Sunni community itself as well as in the parallel development of the Shi'a and the Druzes.

To begin with, the Sunnis lost the demographic balance against the Shi'a. Urbanised to a great extent, the Sunnis were hardly inclined to preside over important families. According to the data of the Ministry of the Interior, the Shi'a by the late 1960s had outnumbered the Sunnis, thanks to a clearly higher birthrate, rapid urbanisation and better registration. Politically, and long before 1975, the Sunnis were often accused of accepting a limited role in the affairs of the State, thereby sacrificing Muslim interests in order to safeguard their position as the privileged partners of the Maronites. Sunni Prime Ministers were reviled by Kamal Junblatt, ever-growing in strength. The Sunnis' attitudes towards the Maronites seemed as complacent as their attitudes vis-à-vis the Palestinians, who they in turn used to reaffirm their position. Their dispersal throughout the country's large cities (Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon) precluded a strong geographic nucleus. The erosion of their confessional 'asabiyya, through centuries of identification and collaboration with the Ottomans, rendered their unification around a populist-confessional lead-

ership difficult. This affected both their capability and their will to form a militia of their very own. After the departure of the Palestinians, they found themselves isolated and weakened.

The Druzes had never really accepted being represented by the Sunnis. After a long struggle that included large projects and small intrigues, Kamal Junblatt managed to assert himself in 1973 as the *de facto* major partner of the Maronite President when the latter decided to break the traditional Sunni leadership. After the assassination of Kamal Junblatt in 1977, the Druze leadership played a reduced role in the political game. The leadership became prominent once again after it recaptured the Shuf in 1983. In 1984 Walid Junblatt's power had risen so high that he thought he could strike the Murabitun, the strongest local militia in Beirut. The price for his influence in Beirut was a high one, but he nevertheless managed to carve out for himself an exclusive domain in the Shuf, enjoying genuine autonomy in relation to all the other communities, Sunnis included.

The Druzes, in view of their limited numbers and of their geographic concentration, could not constitute a real challenge to the Sunnis' traditional role as spokesmen for all Muslims. The Shi'a however, felt that they could. Under Imam Musa al-Sadr, the Shi'a populist-confessional movement first chose institutional objectives. By requesting and obtaining the creation of an autonomous Higher Shi'a Council, the Shi'a clearly marked their independence from Sunni judicial, administrative, and social structures. While dispersed in the south, in the Beqa', and increasingly in the capital's suburbs, the Shi'a were finally developing a unified institutional framework. Later, the movement developed political objectives of its own, which gradually led to greater distance from the Sunni establishment. The objectives included the development of the Shi'i-populated peripheral areas, the preference for Syrian tutelage instead of deep involvement with the Palestinians as was the case with the Druzes and the Sunnis, and an insistence on the State's responsibilities in social and economic fields. This growing autonomy naturally led to the creation of a militia: the Amal movement whose existence was accidentally exposed by a huge explosion in one of its then secret training camps.

But Shi'i populism was seriously crippled by many limitations. Shi'i youth were widely dispersed among a multitude of political parties, ranging from the rightist Phalanges to the Communist Party, and including a Sunni-dominated group such as the Beirut Murabitun. In the south the Palestinian armed guerillas would not let a local movement take the lead in ruling the area. And in Beirut, Musa al-Sadr's moderate and pro-Syrian views could hardly attract followers when Phalangist militias were destroying large Shi'i neighbourhoods (such as al-Naba'a) or when Syria was restraining the Leftist-Palestinian coalition. That is why, while established in institutional and ideological terms, Shi'i confessional populism would resurface years later, after Musa al-Sadr's disappearance and in the wake of Israel's sweeping invasion of the country.

V

A much different period followed the Israeli invasion, particularly in terms of the identity of the local actors and the balance of power in which they found themselves. Broadly speaking, the main project of the Lebanese beneficiaries of this invasion was to reestablish their hegemony over the system by attempting to turn the Israeli victory over the PLO into a parallel Christian victory over the Muslims, into a Maronite victory over their rivals and critics, and into a Phalangist victory over the traditional moderate Maronite establishment. This intention was best illustrated in the election of Bashir Jumayyil, the leader of the Phalangist militia, to the Presidency of the Republic. His assassination before he was sworn into office and his replacement by his older brother, thought to be more "political", changed the style of the operation but hardly its substance. Whether he wanted to or not, Amin Jumayyil would have inevitably clashed with the hardliners once led by his brother, and who, despite the loss of their leader, were obviously more influential among the Christians than the President himself. Driven by his supporters or acting out of conviction in his own policies, Amin Jumayyil adopted the Phalangist programme of reinforcing the Presidency and reestablishing Maronite hegemony over public institutions after years of slow and painful erosion. His intentions soon became evident in various actions such as selecting a Prime Minister who lacked a strong political constituency of his own (Shafiq al-Wazzan), forming a government of technocrats with even weaker political backgrounds who owed him their sudden political elevation, concentrating diplomatic activities in the Presidential Palace, bestowing enviable positions on personal advisors so eager to please the Prince, nominating to sensitive posts "reliable men", such as the commander-in-chief of the Army and the directors of the two major intelligence units, electing a political ally to the presidency of the Banks Association, and creating the equivalent of the Ministry for Foreign Trade by and for a personal friend and business partner.

The reactions of the principal confessional groups in the country to this programme of confessional domination operating under the guise of strengthening state authority, were varied. Sunni leaders first accommodated to it. Sa'eb Salam, the old Sunni leader of Beirut, continued to support the President for an entire year. The more Leftist Sunni movements in Beirut adopted a more ambiguous attitude. Those Sunnis situated outside Beirut – notably in Tripoli – were critical. Having suffered from Palestinian presence,

despite having used the Palestinians as their "substitute militia", the Sunni leaders seemed ready to content themselves with second place against a Maronite guarantee that they remain the Christians' privileged partners. Many Sunni officers were instrumental in the Army's recapture of West Beirut after the western part of the capital had fallen, for the first time, to the Shi'i-Druze militiamen in August 1983.

The Shi'i leaders also missed the mark. The majority of the deputies had voted for the two Jumayyil sons. The south, with its Shi'i majority, was still under Israeli occupation, and it seemed as if the new regime, in view of its close relations with Israel, was the only party who would be able to convince her to leave. The regime seemed able to sustain the rivalry between the feudal leaders (al-Ass'ad, 'Ussayran, and al-Khalil) and the religious inheritors of Imam Musa al-Sadr (particularly Shaykh Shamseddine). Strengthened by this double backing the President thought himself able to ignore Nabih Berri, the weakened leader of Amal, and the then-latent Shi'i Islamic fundamentalist movement.

As to the Druzes, the new regime began shoring up the Arslan clan as a counterweight to the powerful leadership of the Junblatt family. The President did not, or perhaps could not, put pressure on the Phalangist militia that had infiltrated the Shuf mountains with the Israelis and had since been in constant struggle with Junblatt's men.

It is, however, this community which provided the spark. Strengthened by Syrian backing and Israeli indulgence, Walid Junblatt managed by September 1983 to completely overturn the movement by driving out of the Shuf the entire Christian population as well as the Phalangist militia that pretended to defend it. It was not long before Junblatt joined forces with Beirut. Four months later, West Beirut fell in the hands of Junblatt and Berri. It was only a matter of weeks before the identities of the principal confessional actors underwent a complete change: the President's allies in the Muslim ranks found themselves marginalised, their leadership, and indeed their lives, threatened. Sa'eb Salam lost his positions in West Beirut, and with him went Sunni preeminence in the capital. The Shi'i community witnessed the rise of Nabih Berri, the Amal movement, and the religious groups. As to the Druzes, Walid Junblatt swept all his rivals away and established himself as the quasi-exclusive leader of his community.

Many factors have contributed to this radical change. First, there was the regime's extreme self-confidence in its own strength and in the support it would get from the United States. This was coupled with an almost complete insensitivity to growing grievances in Muslim ranks. The President appeared to be determined all too often to choose for himself those leaders who would represent the Muslims. By ignoring Berri or Junblatt, the regime was in fact strengthening their appeal, a phenomenon already noted in 1957 with

President Sham'un's plan to impose his friends in the Muslim communities as the exclusive spokesmen for their communities. A quarter of a century later, Jumayyil was to make the same miscalculation, aggravated now by the fact that a President coming from amongst the Christian radicals was trying to impose moderate traditional Muslim leaders as the regime's privileged interlocutors. There is indeed a clear infringement on the Other's identity, when one chooses his representatives for him.¹⁰

There were other factors behind this failure. One cannot forget the consistent Syrian opposition to the American and Israeli roles in Lebanon or the inconsistency in Washington's reactions to events there. But had the regime adopted more conciliatory domestic policies, it is difficult to think that Syria would have been successful in drawing various Muslim groups into a confrontation with Israel and the West.

After the PLO's resounding defeat in Beirut, these groups were reluctant to be involved in a Syrian-led plan to "liberate Lebanon by all means." Only their frustrations with what they perceived to be an attempt to establish an authoritarian, partisan regime could push them back on the road to Damascus.

The first *modus operandi* to end the war, through the establishment of a "strong unified state" under Amin Jumayyil, reached an impasse. It was replaced by a second formula common to many civil wars in the world: the formation of a national unity government in which all belligerents could be represented and in which decisions could be made by consensus. This was achieved in the spring of 1984 with substantial Syrian help. The government's declaration represented a clear attempt to translate the new domestic balance of power into political goals. While legitimate institutions were to be safeguarded, important constitutional reforms were also proposed in order to ensure better Muslim representation in the state apparatus. In foreign policy, a clear return to non-alignment and a strong reaffirmation of the country's Arab identity were noted.

The fierce wave of shelling which accompanied the government's passage before the Parliament augured its failure. The Cabinet could not even meet while its members were exchanging verbal as well as physical attacks. Many factors could explain this second failure. One could point to the Syrian attempt to have an exclusive hand in Lebanon or to Israel's reluctance to acknowledge the mounting opposition to its presence in the country. But here again, problems of representation were involved: the Phalangist militia was left out of the government, while the more moderate Maronites in the north (under Suleiman Franjeh) refused to participate. But the most important factor was

10. The failure of Kamel al-As'ad to be elected speaker of parliament on October 17, 1984, after an uninterrupted "reign" of fourteen years, confirmed this reversal. His successor was Hussein al-Husseini, one of the first political allies of Imam Musa al-Sadr.

probably the behaviour of those who were involved in the process. On both sides of the political-religious divide, one felt that there was a reluctance to consider the balance of power as final. Probably counting on Syria's neutrality on domestic issues after he had given her satisfaction (or so he thought) by cancelling the May 17, 1983 agreement with Israel, the President and his friends seemed determined to restore Presidential power. Berri, Junblatt and their followers, on the other hand, thought they could improve their positions both militarily and politically in order to extract even more substantial concessions from the regime. An impasse was thus reached by the manoeuvrings of both sides, by their inflated perceptions of their own strength, and by the thought that some major development in Lebanon or in the region could abruptly put an end to this sterile and confused transitional period—that of the so-called national unity government.

The rebellion of the Phalangist militia in early 1985 presented at least one advantage: that of putting an end to this mixture of heavy shelling and 'florentine' manoeuvres. A third *modus operandi* to end the war soon emerged, one that ignored the state institutions as well as the old political establishment and concentrated instead on talks among the three major militias of the country: Berri's Amal, Junblatt's PSP, and the Lebanese Forces, now headed by Elie Hobeika. Damascus played a pivotal role in convincing the parties to negotiate and reach a compromise. By the end of 1985, a full-fledged agreement was signed in Damascus, including very substantial changes in the country's constitutional framework as well as a Chapter IV which was soon to be heavily debated in which Syrian-Lebanese relations were codified in such a way that the two countries would be intimately bound and, in view of Lebanon's weaknesses, seriously endanger the country's sovereignty.

A new rebellion in the Christian ranks torpedoed this agreement. After this third attempt to end the war had passed, the country was again at an impasse, which meant, in Lebanese terms, death and destruction. Many Lebanese felt that their politicians' 'florentinism' had been replaced by their militia leaders' *faits-accomplis*. Neither of the two could easily meet with their expectations. But there is no ideal way to end a civil war, and to hope that a meeting between a newly-elected Maronite patriarch and a moderate Sunni mufti would put an end to the war was mere wishful thinking. Those who hoped in the spring 1986 for a breakthrough from such meetings were probably forgetting that "spiritual summits" (i.e. meetings of the religious heads of the various communities) do not represent a fourth *modus operandi* to put an end to the war. These meetings could ease the tension or increase it. They could not produce a political formula for future Lebanon.

Though there have been many impediments to national reconciliation brought about by foreign powers since the Israeli invasion of 1982, the

Lebanese themselves have not truly and consistently contributed to the solution of their war. At the moment of writing the war still rages on and the papers are full of new nagging questions: How to represent the religious groups (mainly Hizbollah) in a new formula? What to do with the so-called "Christian initiative" (published in *An Nahar* on May 15, 1986), which was meant to replace the December 28, 1985 Hobeika-Berri-Junblatt agreement? Is an inter-Lebanese dialogue possible without foreign mediation? The fact that these questions have no simple answer together with the continuing fighting is a sign that the Lebanese are still unwilling or unable to sort out their future peacefully. Or are they prisoners of their own inflated 'asabiyyas in a way which makes them unable to avoid the manipulation of old politicians and new warlords?

The mixture of war-making and cantonisation adds to the on-and-off vision of Lebanon as a medieval killing ground. Charles Tilly has judiciously compared war-making and state-making in medieval Europe as organised crime. For a long while in Europe, and in Lebanon since 1975, it was very hard to distinguish in the militiaman, the racketeer from the legitimate protector. He is in fact the former because he creates the threat by provoking the other militia and later in charging civilians for its reduction. What are these militias really seeking besides an exercise in violence? One could easily summarise what they are doing: war-making and financial extraction. If they look medieval, it is because of the uncertain elastic line between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" violence.¹¹ In any case as Arthur Stinchcombe has put it, "the person over whom power is exercised is not usually as important (in the acquisition of legitimacy) as other power-holders."¹² The same game of mirrors!

11. Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-191.

12. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Harcourt, Brace and World 1968), p. 150.

VI

As governments appear and disappear, as militias negotiate, fight and kidnap, and as presidents are elected or replaced, the Lebanese Parliament remains the only "legal", though largely impotent, structure in the state apparatus, the one precisely meant to "represent the nation". Why haven't the different Lebanese actors succeeded in fighting out their conflicts in Parliament, an institution which has survived the war, elected three presidents, given its vote of confidence to a dozen governments, and adopted a number of laws and resolutions? A number of explanations are possible, some pertaining to the legislature itself. This legislature, the thirteenth since the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 and the eighth since independence, was elected according to a well-established system based both on geographic circumscription and on confession. Because of the war, the 1972-76 legislature was renewed several times by a simple parliamentary vote.

While Lebanese society did undergo major transformations (the population of its capital, for example, tripled between 1958 and 1973), parliamentary representation tended to congeal. The rate at which parliamentarians were renewed from one election to another was decreasing: 55 per cent in 1943, 52 per cent in 1960, 40 per cent in 1972; and the confirmation of the seats of notables already elected was hardly a reflection of social and geographic mobility. The expansion of Capitalism at the expense of the traditional rural economy, as well as rampant and chaotic urbanisation, also had contrasting results in terms of national representation: the proportion of large landowners diminished (43 per cent of the deputies in 1951, 24 per cent in 1964, 10 per cent in 1972) in favour of businessmen (10 per cent in 1951, 19 per cent in 1964, 21 per cent in 1972) and members of the liberal professions, particularly lawyers (47 per cent in 1951, 54 per cent in 1964, 67 per cent in 1972). The success of Capitalism thus clearly favoured its "cherished children" namely tradesmen, lawyers, and engineers, and penalised wage earners and workers.

Thus, if the number of elected representatives belonging to the former class has in fact diminished (53 per cent in 1951, 43 per cent in 1964, 36 per cent in 1972), this reduction has benefited the upper-middle class (54 per cent of the representatives elected in 1972) and, to a lesser extent, the middle class (10 per cent of the representatives elected in 1972) but not the lower social strata which continued to lack representatives in Parliament. The family ties of the members of the political establishment could only exacerbate the feelings of exclusion experienced in these areas: 43 per cent of the deputies in the 1968-72 legislature, for example, were either fathers, sons, grandsons, cousins, nephews, brothers, or brothers-in-law of someone who had either been, or still

was, a deputy. Finally, out of the thirteen legislatures since 1920, only once had a woman been accorded a parliamentary post, and for less than two years as a substitute for her father who had disappeared in an accident.¹³

The credibility of Parliament as an organ representing society as a whole was therefore shaken well before the beginning of the war. The massive increase in urbanisation was hardly reflected in an electoral system requiring that a large number of Beirut's residents vote in their village of origin rather than in their place of residence. Geo-confessional districting made it difficult to elect a leftist or even a centrist liberal. The major importance of personal wealth and family ties hardly increased the prestige of the institution.

Parliament's representativeness was undermined even further by the war. Indeed, if Sunni deputies were not carried away by the militarisation of the conflict, that was hardly the case with the three other large communal groups. In the Christian sector, the "independent" deputies had little hold over streets galvanised and controlled by militia leaders. Elsewhere, three of the six Druze deputies died, amongst them the two most influential clan leaders (Kamal Junblatt and Majid Arslan). In the Shi'i community the split between the community and its parliamentary representatives was most acute: the representatives elected in 1972 could only with the greatest difficulty be identified with a street galvanised by the sermons of Imam Musa al-Sadr who disappeared in 1978 and which has, since his disappearance, been divided among his various and competing inheritors.

To this, one must add the gradual disappearance of deputies (by mid-1986 twelve members had already died without having been replaced), and important ones at that (Kamal Junblatt, Pierre Jumayyil, Sabri Hamadéh); the obvious senility of a large number of them; and their acquiescence, at times bordering on the ridiculous, to the orders of the powerful leaders of the moment. Their quasi-unanimous support to the stillborn agreement with Israel on May 17, 1983 which the President did not ratify, as well as the authorisation given to various governments to legislate by decree, hardly increased their standing. For all of these reasons, the Cabinet was able to usurp Parliament's role of national representation. It has gradually become clear that unless new militant deputies appear, and by simple nomination, (which was the principle adopted during the national reconciliation conference in Lausanne), increase the number of parliamentarians, the number of parliamentarians will rapidly decline and the institution will be even more marginal. Lebanon can hardly embark on such a project at a time when legislative elections cannot be organised, when the Presidency is severely battered and when a rupture in the legal institutions could be replaced by chaos rather than by a new revolutionary legitimacy.

13. For more information see Antoine Nasri Messara, *La structure sociale du parlement libanais* (Beirut: Université libanaise, 1977).

VII

"When is religion, language, or ethnicity most likely to prove polarising? When will class take primacy and when will denominational commitments and religious identities prove equally important cleavage bases?"¹⁴ These questions do not have easy answers in Lebanon, where the hierarchy of cleavage bases are extremely complex and tend to undergo permanent change. But while witnessing the proponents of various cleavages trying to "sell" their projects, one is inevitably drawn to observe the substantial amount of manipulation taking place, especially since the outbreak of the civil war and the growing impact of communalism.

Edward Shils has put forward the idea that loyalties are not equal. Some are "primordial" and will last; others are "secondary" and will change according to circumstances. The latter are "taken"; they can be and often are reformulated. The former are "given" and can hardly be changed.¹⁵ In the Lebanese case, many obviously think that the confessional loyalty is *par excellence* given, since national loyalty is, to quote Stanley Hoffmann, "an artichoke and not an onion which can be peeled away into nothing." But the distinction itself has been recently and successfully challenged. David Laitin has observed that in Nigeria, for example, "although religious differentiation among the Yorubas did account for discernible differences in socio-economic opportunities, religious adherence had no bearing whatsoever on political alignments in Yorubaland." Among Yorubas, the major political cleavage is identification with an "ancestral city", although this identification has continued to decline as a source of social cleavage. Loyalty to this city prevails over any attachment to the city of residence, to modern nationalistic policies, or to religious affiliation. A recent study on Yorubas came to almost the same conclusion as that reached by Dubar and Nasr above. The working-class respondents perceived the most important differences among the Yorubas to be not those of social class but of ancestral city. The socio-economic pre-eminence of Christians, prompted by missionary schools and employment in the colonial state apparatus, did not lead to a civil war, even when the differences were conspicuous.¹⁶

14. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross National Perspectives* (Free Press, 1947), p.6.

15. Edward Shils "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8 (1957), pp. 130-145.

16. David D. Laitin, "Hegemony and Religious Conflict: British Imperial Control and Political Cleavages in Youroubaland," in Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-316.

Is the confession in Lebanon or the ancestral city in Yorubaland an unchangeable "given" solid identity? In both cases one is struck by the fluidity of the social definition of identity. One typical illustration is the growing confusion of certain Maronite leaders between sectarian and religious identities in order to attract and mobilise all Lebanese Christians in an era of defeats and massacres. Another is the permanent vacillation in the definition of the relationship to Islam within the Druze leadership, underlined at one point but almost completely denied later. Manipulation by political entrepreneurs was obvious both in peacetime as well as during the war. But this instrumentalist explanation, though adequate, cannot exhaustively account for the fact that certain aspects of identity become crucial at certain times and politically irrelevant at others, nor for the persistence of certain social cleavages.

In Yorubaland Laitin has argued the pivotal role of colonial power in shaping Yoruba identities, and Ian Lustick has pointed to a systematic effort by Israel to shape the Israeli Arabs' identity according to what Israel perceives as her national interests.¹⁷ These observations could also apply to Lebanon, where for four centuries the Ottomans dealt, as a hegemonic power, with non-Sunni citizens as members of confessional *millets*. European powers later tried to intrude into the Ottoman political body through these same *millets*. Today many neighbouring countries expect the Lebanese to behave primarily as members of their own confessional groups. It is difficult to avoid the impact of such consistent, systematic, centuries-old treatment by regional and international hegemonic powers. The Lebanese confessional system is also, amongst other things, a cultural product fashioned by a hegemonic state (the Ottoman Empire) and transmitted to its inheritors. Ian Lustick has observed how Israel has reified and sustained socially defunct categories within the Arab social structure in order to segment the population. But the Lebanese have been treated that way for centuries, to the extent that they sometimes tend to view their confessional identity as an unchangeable given.

Today, manipulation is twofold. The warlords tend to manipulate the various cleavages in the Lebanese identity while they themselves are manipulated by regional and international powers. The now fashionable discussion on "state autonomy" vis-à-vis the social forces it pretends to control should consequently be shifted in order to discuss the autonomy of the various large confessional groups vis-à-vis external forces. There are two opposing views on the matter. One considers that the war is primarily a war between Lebanon and the PLO, Syria, or Israel. This school of thought divides the local

17. Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: A Study in the Control of a Minority Population* (University of Texas Press, 1986).

actors into "independentists" and "collaborationists." The Christian Right has repeatedly accused the Left and the Muslim militias of being agents of the PLO, Syria, Libya, or "international communism." By contrast, the Christian militias have often been accused of being mere tools in the hands of Israel and the CIA.

Another view presents itself more frequently since 1983-84: that Lebanon's war is basically a civil war. The local actors are, consequently, autonomous even if they are backed by one foreign country or another. This backing is certainly not without conditions, but even so, it does not transform these confessional groups, welded together by a strong *'asabiyya*, into mere foreign agents. Their rivals and enemies being their fellow Lebanese, the role of these confessional groups in the regional or international game is therefore limited and, in the final analysis, involuntary. Their goal is neither to reinforce Syria nor to aid Israel but to maintain or seize power in Lebanon, and for that purpose, they seem ready to accept help wherever it comes from.

Those who hold the first viewpoint point to money transfers, arms deliveries, political support in favour of various local militias, and underline the countless direct military interventions by foreign powers. Those who hold to the autonomy theory recall that the various local militias have been able to form numerous and contradictory external alliances in view of carrying out their essentially *internal* programme, that the Phalangists have appealed to Syrian or Israeli backing as much as Junblatt has, and that all sorts of alliances are possible and have, indeed, been formed with all sorts of local actors.

In the face of these two contradictory viewpoints, it is perhaps useful to note that:

- (1) The autonomy of local actors varies from one group to another. The great populist movements (Shi'i Amal, Druze PSP, Christian Phalangists) are more autonomous in defining and implementing their strategy than are the smaller groups of the neighbourhood or the tiny parties created and manipulated by foreign powers. It is possible, however, to find small groups (Christian or Muslim) who are very concerned about their independence. This concern limits both their means as well as their influence. They thus become dependent on the protection of a larger local military-political group (Fatah before 1982, Amal or the PSP today, the Phalangists in the Christian sector).
- (2) The war in Lebanon is particularly costly. Various militias have available to them arsenals that would make some sovereign states green with envy. The dependence of these military groups on their financial sources (knowing that with money, it is quite easy to acquire all sorts of arms in the Middle East), is very real. Consequently, autonomy in decision-making

depends in great measure on these groups' ability to be financed by the very communities they claim to represent, alongside the huge amounts of money flowing into Lebanon from different sources.

- (3) Physical military might, however, seems to have been more effective than mere financing. The PLO (before 1982), Syria and Israel have always had more influence on local actors than the faraway politico-financial support from Iraq, Libya, or the United States. Libya has invested heavily without much tangible result, and this example demonstrates how extremely simplistic the theory of agents actually is. It is, however, clear that the quasi-professional military groups are more dependent than the more political groups (since they lack ideological support, and because of the great resources that are required). The example of Lebanon's Arab Army (LAA) and the South Lebanon Army (SLA) are clear: the former sides with Syria and the Palestinians, the latter with Israel.

One should go beyond these remarks of common sense and resort to history. Civil wars in this country have always been accompanied by external interventions. The late Marwan Buheiri had studied eight specific cases, the first in 1773, the last beginning in 1975. On four occasions foreign powers intervened without there having been any internal fighting. In another case, external intervention actually preceded a civil war (1831-41). In the three last and most important cases (1860, 1958, 1975), external intervention followed internal unrest.¹⁸ This classification is useful, though it probably overlooks the fact that the local actors since 1840 and since the intensification of external interventions, have always been able to count on external help once the civil war was set in motion. This does not preclude the fact that it is primarily the Lebanese who fight amongst themselves and appear to be eager to destroy their country with their own hands.

One could conclude that the war raging since 1975 is indeed a mixture of different wars being fought simultaneously. Regional factors have almost always been predominant, with the Arab-Israeli conflict being by far the most important factor in igniting the war and in shaping its evolution. The conflict led to the creation of a Palestinian problem in Lebanon, to Israeli incursions into Lebanese territory, and to Syria's renewed and heavier pressures on its vulnerable neighbour. Other, older regional considerations pertaining to Syria's role in the Arab east, to the legitimacy of colonially-designed borders, as well as new factors such as the East-West conflict have also been reflected in the war.

But the Lebanese war was also a civil war from its inception and more clearly

18. Marwan R. Buheiri, "External Interventions and Internal Wars in Lebanon: 1770-1982", *The International Spectator*, Vol. XIX, No.1, 1984, pp.56-60.

since 1982. The large populist-confessional movements that are tearing each other apart are hardly external creations. They are based on historical precedents as well as on communal ambitions for the future. They also have distinctive social bases, and combatants are prepared to die in order to defend their programmes. But in order to gain the upper hand in this bloody struggle, no Lebanese group has ever been ready to count only on its own forces. The greater its feelings of weakness, the more it counts on external support. In an area of the world where regional forces are powerful and where the superpowers have substantial if not vital interests, the local actors of this war seem to be engaged in a slow process of dependence. The longer the war drags on, the more Lilliputian will they appear to be. The longer the war drags on, the greater their loss of autonomy and the more they deprive their country of its fleeting vestiges of independence. Suffering more than a Hamlet tortured by doubt over his own identity, today's Lebanese is gradually becoming a sort of modern-age hero of a Greek tragedy. Unable to contain his own internal devastating hubris, he leaves it to the gods (regional and international) to decide on his fate. His death or his salvation could equally bring him the peace he has been so unable and unwilling to imagine.