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RSCAS 2008/13

Lebanon's Versatile Nationalism

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Abstract

The paper tackles the different interpretations of Lebanon's multi-faceted nationalism in a theoretical perspective, then analyses the dynamics of the emergent Lebanese national ethos after the 2005 Independence *Intifada*. After outlining the most important characteristics of post-war Lebanon, it decodes the meaning and implications of cross-cutting links fostered by the 2005 uprising. Then, it draws attention to the fact that despite the presence of inter-communal bonds, the small republic remains prisoner to contradictory concepts of national affiliation, which thwart intercommunal entente and elite coalescence, two prerequisites for a sustainable power-sharing model in an unstable environment. In the conclusion, the paper suggests that an acceptance of Lebanon's contesting identities rather than a forceful homogenisation of various affiliations might pave the way for a balanced nationalism.

Keywords

Introduction

Lebanon has been either considered a "malintegrated" state[1] or an example of a successful power-sharing system[2] which was able to manage the internal rifts that threaten its stability. Described simultaneously as a happy phenomenon and a nation of contrasts, the small Arab Republic represents today a dissonant example in the Middle East,[3] embodying on the one hand irreconcilable loyalties, and on the other hand inter-communal coexistence.

Indeed, the pre-war Lebanese model, which promised to bring about stability in a multicommunal society, temporarily fulfilled the four main requisites for consociational democracy.[4] The power-sharing formula based on the 1943 National Pact has allowed to some extent a divided society composed of various religious subcultures[5] to conciliate its multi-faceted versions of nationalism. This formula, which enabled Lebanon to deviate from the political path of its Arab neighbours, was praised for facilitating the rise of democracy in an authoritarian region. Hence, whereas authoritarian apparatuses suppressed the problem of confessional minorities in the Middle East, Lebanon chose to recognise and institutionalise its pluralism.

Based on the vision of a Lebanese polity built on the grounds of coexistence, the 1943 covenant depended on a state of inter-communal balance[6]: the marginalisation of any community or the monopoly of any other would lead to the breakdown of political order.[7] The pact additionally defined Lebanon's identity as a country with an Arab face, and stated that the Maronite Christians should recognize the Arab character of Lebanon, and the Sunni Muslims should renounce aspirations of unification with greater Syria. The unwritten 1943 agreement envisaged a coalition government between a Maronite president, a Sunni prime minister and a Shiite speaker of the chamber. Different confessions were to be proportionally represented in the Council, and a ratio of six Christians to five Muslims was to be adopted in the legislature. Furthermore, each community had its own educational institutions and courts. This communal autonomy enabled each segment to run its own matters freely. Although mutual veto was informal, it was intrinsic to the Lebanese system. For example, the two major Maronite and Sunni communities enjoyed a concurrent majority in the executive coalition.[8]

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* This article is largely inspired by the findings of Fakhoury's dissertation: *Power-Sharing and Democratisation in a Stormy Regional Weather: The Case of Lebanon,* Albert-Ludwigs University of Freiburg, 2007. It has been presented and discussed at the Eighth Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, 21–25 March 2007, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

1 N. Kliot, "The Collapse of the Lebanese State," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23 (1987): 54-74, 54.

2 See for example Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Andrew Rigby, "Lebanon: Patterns of Confessional Politics," *Parliamentary Affairs* 53 (2000): 169-180; Brenda Seaver, "The Regional Sources of Power-Sharing Failure: The Case of Lebanon," *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (2000): 247-271. Consociational democracy is defined as a democratic model of governance which entails sharing and dividing power among communities.

3 Daniel Brumberg, "Islamists and the Politics of Consensus," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002):109-115, 112.

4 For more information on the consociational model and its characteristics, see Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 25-52.

5 Lebanon's Muslims consist of the Sunni, Shiite and Druze communities while the Christians are Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics…

6 Michel Chiha, *Politique intérieure* (Beirut: Fondation Michel Chiha, 1964), 54-55.

7 Ibid.

8 See Theodor Hanf, *The Political Secularization Isssue in Lebanon* (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 1981).

Despite the embeddedness of these power-sharing mechanisms in the Lebanese political system, consociational democracy remained unsteady,[9] and depended largely on an unpredictable configuration of external and internal elements. Ever since the collapse of Lebanon's consociationalism in 1975, scholars remain divided as to whether the static nature of the political system, which accentuates confessional cleavages and prevents communal groups from altering the political rules of the game, or the concomitance of regional and internal factors – related to the exacerbation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1970s – brought about the power-sharing breakdown.[10] One thing remains however certain: the lack of elite and communal consensus on Lebanon's role and policy track in the Middle East – more particularly the scope of its involvement in its regional environment or the extent of its disentanglement from the Arab landscape – has left the republic prisoner to a shaky nationalism.

After the breakout of a 15-year war in 1975, it became common in academic circles to depict Lebanon as a fragile state which lacks a national identity or common mentality tying religious subcultures together.[11] This problem, which can traced back to the inter-segmental hostilities that accompanied the creation of the Lebanese state,[12] has revealed its destructive aspect in the dissimilar Lebanese loyalties vacillating between pro-Western and pro-Arab allegiances.[13] Doubt hovers whether these affiliations are "competing or compatible,"[14] and whether their intermingling could enhance inter-confessional cooperation or tear the porous nation asunder.

In many works, Lebanon is portrayed as an artificial nation-state whose location in the Arab world is at odds with its particularism, or as a polity constructed upon conflicting tendencies which prevent the Lebanese state from developing a public sphere of citizenship.[15]

It is usually argued that Lebanon's frail nationalistic bond has been overshadowed by easily politicised confessional identities which undermined the cohesiveness of the state. Instead of identifying with their nation, Lebanese identified, particularly in crisis situations, with their confessional stronghold, and have sought throughout history for external allies to reinforce their internal status. The *confessionalisation* and *politicisation* of identities undermined national sentiments, and have led with time to the empowerment of fragmented identity enclaves which superseded the belief in, and attachment to the nation.

Lebanon's ill-defined national identity has taken its most negative expression in divergent modes of political consciousness which "did not conceive of the state of Lebanon as their point of reference."[16] During the 1975-1990 war, for instance, the lack of internal consensus on Lebanon's

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9   See Michael Hudson, *The Precarious Republic* (New York: Random House, 1968).

10 For a detailed account of the factors that led to the breakout of the 1975 war, see Farid El Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

11 See Nisan Mordechai, "Maronites: Sophistication and Missed Opportunities," in *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (McFarland: North Carolina, 2002), 195-222, 210.

12 Before Lebanon's emancipation from French rule, inter-communal antagonisms have significantly affected the shaping of the Lebanese nation-state. It is commonly argued that conflicts between Lebanese nationalists and Arab nationalists until the mid-thirties undermined the formation of a Lebanese polity based on common social and cultural linkages. While Lebanese nationalists notably the Maronites regarded Lebanon as a Christian heartland separated from the Arab environment, Arab nationalists especially the Sunnis objected to these particularist tendencies and advocated various discourses of unity with the Arab world. For more information, see Raghid el Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National identity and State Formation*, (London: Tauris, 2004), 1-9.

13 For an analysis of the multiple faces of Lebanese nationalism, see Maurus Reinkowski, "National Identity in Lebanon since 1990," *Orient* 38 (1997): 493-515.

14 Raghid el Solh, "Religious Identity and Citizenship: An Overview of Perspectives," in *Peace for Lebanon: From War to Reconstruction*, ed. Deidre Collings (Boulder: Lynne Rienner publishers, 1994), 231-240, 231.

15 Hilal Khashan, *Inside the Confessional Mind* (Lanham: Maryland, 1992), 1-4.

16 Reinkowski, "National Identity," 503.

strategic mission in the Arab world and on other political basics, such as Lebanon's external policy and the degree of involvement in the Palestinian crisis, has left the republic in a state of oscillation between regional and 'particularist' tendencies, unable to integrate fully into the Middle Eastern orbit, or disengage from the Arab-Israeli conflict.[17]

Notwithstanding these reservations, Lebanon's nationalism has been perceived from a constructivist perspective. It is argued that the lack of nationalistic affinities is not necessarily a weakness, but a reflection and indicator of diversity, and that the Lebanese example of communalism is in itself a symbolic mission deconstructing stereotypes of an authoritarian Arabism in the Middle East. Lebanon's democratic history and power-sharing system, in which communities share a common political destiny, are thought to confer upon the Lebanese entity its very distinct nationalism.[18]

Hence, although national sentiments remain embryonic, this does not detract from Lebanon's historical value as a final nation-state for its citizens. In spite of societal and political divisiveness, Lebanon's nationalism is dictated by its pluralism and its vocation as a bridge between the East and the West.[19]

Analysts also argue that Lebanon's identity lies in the interconnectedness of shared conflicts and experiences. Thus, Lebanese remain paradoxically connected by their strife and their differences.[20]

To state the matter differently, Lebanon's Janus face constitutes the very essence of its nationalism. Despite the disunity of communal allegiances, contradictory versions of nationalism make up the country's distinctiveness, since these inconsistent structures of nationalism are finally absorbed in a constitutive pact of communal coexistence. Moreover, the fact that antagonistic versions of nationalism have always needed external stimuli to clash prompts one to inquire whether the acuity of Lebanon's confessional fault lines is concomitant to external variables and more specifically to the instability of the Middle Eastern landscape[21] or to excessive international interference in the Lebanese realm.[22]

An interesting question worthy of deeper scholarly investigation is whether Lebanon's confessionalised variants of nationalism are unaffected givens or acquired constructs shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external circumstances.

Against the background of these different interpretations, this paper aims at analysing the dynamics of the emergent Lebanese national ethos in the wake of the 2005 Independence *Intifada*. After briefly outlining the most important characteristics of post-war Lebanon, it decodes the meaning and implications of cross-cutting links fostered by the 2005 uprising in the wake of Premier Rafik Hariri's slaying. Then, it draws attention to the fact that despite the presence of inter-communal bonds, the

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17 An illustrative case is the national division at the eve of the 1975 Lebanese war between the Rightists (generally the Christian-led bloc) and the Leftists (generally the Muslim-led bloc). While the Rightists opposed the presence of Palestinian armed groups in Lebanon and argued that Palestinian operations against Israel from Lebanese soil constitute a violation of Lebanese sovereignty, the Leftists defended the Palestinian cause, and considered it a national duty stemming from their attachment to Arab nationalism. Of course, this bipolarity does not exclude the fact that internal rifts prevailed within each bloc. For more details, see Kamal Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958-1976* (New York: Caravan Books, 1976).

18 See Kamal S. Abu Jaber, "The Democratic Process in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan," in *Democratization in the Middle East: Experiences, Struggles, Challenges*, eds Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel, (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2003): 127-141, 136; Latif Abul Husn, *The Lebanese Conflict: Looking Inward* (Boulder, Rienner, 1998), 119-123.

19 For an account of Lebanon's role as "a laboratory" between the West and the Arab world, see Simon Karam, "Lebanon, Collapse and Revival: Society and the Nation-State in the Arab World." *Middle East Policy* 2 (1993): 15-24, 24.

20 See Carole Dagher, *Bring Down the Walls*; *Lebanon's Postwar Challenge*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 50.

21 Many analysts argue that the highly troubled regional environment was one of the main reasons which strained communalism in Lebanon and led to the collapse of the power-sharing formula. See El Khazen, *Breakdown of the State*; Seaver "Regional Crisis."

22 See Nadim Shehadi, "Whose Country is it anyway?" *The World Today* 61 (April 2005): 7-9.

small republic remains prisoner to contradictory concepts of national affiliation which threaten to destabilise communal balance[23] and elite coalescence, two prerequisites for a sustainable power-sharing democracy in a restless environment.

Although the 2005 Beirut Spring has been detected as a landmark signaling national reconciliation, the emergence of a centrifugal political model after Syrian withdrawal shows that the tormented polity is still unable to rise above dividing lines in order to construct a clearly definable identity. The paper argues that the emergence of a solid nationalistic construct has been thwarted by a fragile elite consensus on national fundaments, contentious perceptions of external threat, and the republic's heavy involvement in the external sphere.

It also argues that Lebanon's splintered nationalism is not the direct result of its confessional structure, but rather the complex outcome of the communities' inability to agree on common political understandings of what 'Lebanonism' means and implies both in the domestic and regional realms.

While this finding indicates that Lebanon's national consciousness is still rudimentary, it hints at the 'voluntaristic' aspect of national crafting. In the conclusion, the paper suggests that an acceptance of Lebanon's collective, albeit contesting, identities rather than a forceful fashioning of a well-delineated nationalism might allow a divided society to harmonise its dissonances. In the end, Lebanon's challenge does not lie in constructing a monolithic nationalism but in pacifying lingering communal antagonisms. A pacification of contesting identities primarily necessitates the nurturing of a political culture based on concordance and compromise as well as a careful alignment in external controversies.

The post-war period: Lebanon's politicised nationalism

In 1989, shortly before the end of a 15-year war of both internal and regional dimensions, an updated Lebanese formula of power-sharing was adopted. The new consociational pact or the Ta'if covenant affirms in the preamble the durability of the Lebanese state, and rejects any attempt of division. Unlike the 1943 National pact which failed to establish an unambiguous Lebanese identity by conceiving the latter as a mixture of "Arabist and Lebanist ideas,"[24] the Ta'if pact solves on paper the dilemma hovering around Lebanon's nationalism by declaring Lebanon as an Arab country in belonging and identity. Hence, the covenant destroys the legend of a nation built on a twofold abdication of the Western and the Arab worlds. The pact also affirms that no entity violating inter-communal concordance is considered legitimate, and revives the Lebanese consensual democracy after its breakdown.[25] Whilst communalism remains the primary regulating vector in politics, the agreement introduces some political reforms in the legislative and executive branches. In the parliament, for instance, parity replaces the former superiority of six to five between Christians and Muslims. Whereas the Maronite president's privileges decrease, the cabinet as a consensual council acquires more prerogatives. In a nutshell, the pact outlines a theoretical basis for a Lebanese nationalism derived from the dual acceptance of Lebanon's Arabism and the necessity of inter-confessional solidarity.

Still, the pact's application was largely modelled by an invasive Lebanese-Syrian model of governance. Indeed, after the ratification of Ta'if in 1991, and in line with the Middle Eastern and

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23 In this context, communal balance is defined as the communities' identification and satisfaction with the political power-sharing formula.

24 Kais M. Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 209.

25 See Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Joseph Maila, "The Ta'if Accord: An Evaluation," in *Peace for Lebanon?: from War to Reconstruction*, ed. Deirdre Collings (Boulder: Rienner, 1994), 31-44.

national security politics, Syria was entrusted the guardianship of post-war Lebanon,[26] and the implementation of a treaty "supposedly" endorsed by international and regional players. [27]

Even though the Ta'if agreement stated that Syrian troops would redeploy in two years after helping the Lebanese government establish its control over the Lebanese territory, this clause was not implemented. During the 1990s, Syrian and Lebanese incumbents have evoked various pretexts to postpone the departure of Syrian troops. These pretexts hinged on the precarious security order in Lebanon and on the lingering Middle Eastern crisis. With time, various post-Ta'if treaties concluded between the Lebanese and Syrian governments conferred upon the Syrian role in Lebanon some character of legitimacy.

In academic circles, it is usually argued that Syria's influence was one of the most important parameters that shaped the nature of the post-war political system, which was thought to be closer to a mild authoritarian construct than to a democratic system.[28] Syrian influence also considerably impacted the elite and communal landscapes in the post-Ta'if period. For example, Lebanese political factions who accepted the Syrian-brokered peace were able to participate without difficulty in post-war governments, while those who challenged it could not easily join the political process.[29]

It is worth mentioning in this context that Syrian interference in Lebanese politics has strongly politicised the meaning and implications of Lebanon's post-war nationalism: the conceptualisation of Lebanon's Arab identity has been affected by the degree of the republic's subordination to its Syrian neighbour and by pragmatic politics.[30] Thus, Lebanon's Arabism was defined in terms of the Republic's willingness to stick to a Syrian-led track in the Middle East Process.[31] In a general manner, groupings who opposed Syrian hegemony in the country or who advocated Lebanon's disengagement from the Arab-Israeli conflict or a unilateral course of foreign politics were taxed as anti-Syrian or pro-Western.

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26 Syria was granted a green light by the US to spread its influence in Lebanon after Damascus had supported the US-led anti-Iraqi coalition in the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991). For more information, see Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, (London: Center for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris & Co, 1993).

27 Fida Nasrallah, "The Treaty of Brotherhood, Co-operation and Co-Ordination," in *State and Society in Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1993), 103-111, 103.

28 Paul Salem, "Skirting Democracy: Lebanon's Parliamentary Elections of 1996 and Beyond," *Middle East Report* 203 (1997): 26-29. See also Volker Perthes, "Wege zum zivilen Frieden: Nachbürgerkriegssituationen im Vergleich," *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik* 4 (2000): 445-449.

29 See Farid el Khazen, *Lebanon's First Postwar Parliamentary Election: an Imposed Choice*. (Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies), 1998.

30 el Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism,* 351-353.

31 Lebanese and Syrian pathways remain interconnected in the Middle East peace process for various reasons. In 1997, former Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu tried to apply the plan of "Lebanon first." This attempt was immediately turned down by late Syrian President Hafiz el Assad who affirmed that Lebanon and Syria shared a common position on the matter. This discourse has been defended by various Lebanese incumbents who perceive Lebanon's Arab status as connected to its duties as Syria's subordinate ally in the Arab-Israeli process, and who argue that Lebanon's precarious situation in the Middle East prevents it from adopting a unilateral course of foreign politics. Moreover, despite Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000, Lebanese incumbents endorsed by the Syrian government have pleaded against Hezbollah's disarmament. The formal argument is that Israel has not totally withdrawn its troops from Lebanon as the Shebaa farms are still occupied. Still, doubt hovers on the identity of this piece of land. While the international community argues that it is Syrian territory, Lebanese and Syrian incumbents affirm that it is Lebanese. Irrespective of this controversy, various additional factors have to be taken into account. On the one hand, Syria considers Lebanon and Hezbollah as important leverages in its attempt to recover the Golan Heights lost to Israel in 1967. On the other hand, Hezbollah argues that its military wing acts as a deterrent force awaiting a global Middle Eastern settlement. After the 2006 July War, Hezbollah is even more insistent on preserving its military arsenal, which it considers as the only shield from potential Israeli incursions.

In spite of the seemingly stabilising influence of Syrian tutelage during the 1990s, the latter contributed to aggravating internal rifts which came to the forefront by the end of 2004. The Syrian-brokered extension of President Emile Lahoud's mandate and the intervention of the international community followed by the adoption of UN Resolution 1559 divided Lebanon's communities and political elites into two camps: The loyalists (commonly called the 8 March grouping) and the opposition (commonly called the 14 March grouping). Whereas the loyalist establishment supported the re-election[32] and wanted by and large to maintain Syrian hegemony in the country, the opposition camp denounced the anti-constitutional move and rejected Syrian predominance. Unlike the loyalist camp which decried the interference of the Western community, the opposition generally considered the international community's involvement as a chance which should be seized upon to recover Lebanon's political independence. The polarisation of political blocs at such a turning point denoted that the post-war Lebanese setting had only been apparently stable.

A fleeting Beirut Spring

In spring 2005, after premier Rafik Hariri's slaying, a multi-communal 'Independence *Intifada*' contributed under heavy international pressure to the rapid pullout of Syrian troops. In an unparalleled manner, various groupings united in an attempt to bridge conflicting political visions and cleavages. In May 2005, parliamentary elections devoid of blatant Syrian influence took place leading to the formation of a coalition government led by Premier Fuad Saniora.

For some, the electoral victory of the anti-Syrian coalition which orchestrated the 2005 *Intifada* Uprising – commonly called the March 14 Alliance[33] – and the participation of the Shiite Party Hezbollah in the subsequent coalition government marked a significant watershed. Some even referred to the emergence of a new Lebanese national ethos, and praised the resilience of the Lebanese power-sharing system.[34]

Nonetheless, this episode turned out to be temporary as national bonds fostered by the 2005 *Intifada* quickly lost significance. Lingering internal contention after the 2006 July War[35] prove that the Lebanese polity is on the one hand unable to disengage itself from regional crises, and that political groupings have failed to harmonise their visions of state- and nation-building in post-Syria Lebanon. In the following paragraphs, I will describe more thoroughly the dynamics of the Beirut Spring, and the deepening national crisis.

By the end of August 2004, shortly before the Lebanese parliament amended the constitution so as to extend the president's term, the US and France had already submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council. Adopted one day before the presidential re-election, the draft resolution denounced the anti-democratic move, and called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops, and for the dismantlement of Hezbollah's military wing.

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32 The loyalist establishment claimed that Lahoud's re-election was a guarantee for political continuity in Lebanon at a time of regional insecurity.

33 Organised on a multi-communal basis, the alliance comprised the Future Current led by Saad Hariri, son of late Premier Hariri, the Progressive Socialist Party led by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt as well as various anti-Syrian Christian factions such as the Lebanese Forces and the Qornet Shehwan Grouping.

34 See for example Farès Louis, "Un Liban uni, pont entre l'Orient et l'Occident," *Le Figaro*, April 27, 2005, http://www.lefigaro.fr/cgi/edition/genimprim,e?cle=20050427.FIG0256.

35 On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah's abduction of two Israeli soldiers along the Lebanese-Israeli border was followed by the outbreak of a 34 day-war in Southern Lebanon. This episode has been portrayed as a micro-phenomenon reflecting a much broader confrontation between the US close allies and Hezbollah backed by Iran and Syria.

Encouraged by mounting international interference, a broad transcommunal opposition took shape.[36] Called at first the Bristol Alliance[37] and led by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, the new coalition assembled anti-Syrian Christian groupings, the Druze community loyal to the Jumblatt clan, multi-confessional movements,[38] a small fraction of the Shiite community,[39] and several independent Sunni and Christian politicians.

This opposition was first described as an unexampled phenomenon that had not seen the light for decades in Lebanon. Its main impetus was the belief that Lebanese communities were able to manage their own affairs.[40]

Despite its transcommunal character, the coalition failed to reach out for other political groupings. For instance, the Shiite party Hezbollah declared its unconditional support for Lahoud's security politics and to the Lebanese-Syrian unity of tracks.

On October 20, after the UN Security Council had approved the implementation of Resolution 1559,[41] the Hariri cabinet resigned, and a new pro-Syrian cabinet headed by Premier Omar Karami was appointed.

Opposition actors hurried to denounce the newly appointed cabinet as a pro-Syrian puppet, and chose not to participate. Before the year came to a close, they had even succeeded in elaborating a common political program. In a text entitled the "Bristol Declaration," the coalition highlighted the necessity of redefining Lebanese-Syrian relations and restoring national reconciliation. In the domain of foreign politics, the document emphasized the need to recover Lebanon's role as an independent partner in the Arab-Israeli peace process and to depart from a political line that could drag the nation into further conflicts.[42]

After the publication of the Bristol Declaration, the opposition's enthusiasm started spreading to more reserved factions. Moderate Sunni actors, who rarely decried the Syrian role in the post-war period, joined the fray.[43] In February 2005, the Bristol Alliance went as far as calling for a total Syrian withdrawal, and rejected a mere redeployment of the troops to the borders.[44] After the February meeting, it became known that late Premier Hariri was on the opposition's side.[45] Still, the internal political configuration did not change much: the pro-Syrian Karami government refused to step down, and the Syrian troops were slowly redeploying. Moreover, the rift between the opposition, keen on altering the rules of the game, and the pro-Syrian loyalists, determined to preserve the Lebanese-Syrian

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36 This opposition had its roots in the Druze-Christian rapprochement in 2000, which denounced Syrian excessive interventions in Lebanese politics.

37 Bristol is the name of the hotel where the plural opposition held its regular meetings.

38 I cite for instance the Democratic Left Party and the Democratic Renewal Movement.

39 For instance the Democratic Forum led by some Shiite political actors.

40 Boutros Harb, minister in the Saniora-led government, interview with the author, Beirut, December 1, 2004.

41 Whereas the draft resolution clearly called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops, Resolution 1559 summoned the pullout of foreign troops without alluding directly to Syrian presence.

42 See "Le document fondateur de l'opposition nationale plurielle," *L'Orient Le Jour*, December 8, 2004, 4.

43 For instance, Sunni leader Salim el Huss asked for the ceasing of the Syrian intelligence services' interferences in Lebanese politics, and for the Syrian army's redeployment. Moreover, former Premier Najib Mikati, questioned the establishment of a Lebanese state after the Syrian-brokered extension of Lahoud's term.

44 Nada Raad, "Opposition demands total Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon," *The Daily Star,* February 3, 2005, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=1&article_ID=12347&categ_id=2.

45 Pro-Hariri politicians, such as Ahmad Fatfat, Ghattas Khoury, and Bassel Fleyhane, attented the meeting. Their presence was interpreted as a proof that Hariri was on the opposition's side.

path, was getting deeper. It was after the so-called "Saint Valentine's Day Assassination"[46] – the day a car bomb killed Hariri in Beirut after he had left parliament – that the landscape significantly changed.

Right after Hariri's assassination, a communiqué endorsed by the Bristol Opposition and Hariri's parliamentary bloc, accused the mandatory Lebanese and Syrian regimes of being responsible for the crime,[47] summoned the resignation of the Lebanese government, and urged the international community to shed light on the assassination. Without directly pointing the finger, France and the US referred right after the murder to a possible involvement of the Syrian security apparatus. However, the Syrian regime rejected all accusations at once. At this point, speculation was widespread that Hariri's implicit role in preparing Resolution 1559 and his decision to distance himself from the Syrian regime were the main motives that precipitated the crime.[48] Yet all these conjectures have never been confirmed by the reports delivered by the UN fact-finding mission. Many observers stress that that Damascus had not much to gain by provoking the international community's wrath and by uniting the Lebanese against it.[49]

By mid-February, emboldened by international pressure on the Syrian regime,[50] the Lebanese opposition declared the beginning of the 'Independence *Intifada*' against Syrian tutelage. Insisting on a peaceful revolution that resembled a freedom march, the opposition additionally called for the establishment of a transitional and neutral government which could ensure the pullout of Syrian forces and supervise the upcoming 2005 summer parliamentary elections.

In the wake of Hariri's assassination, protesters mainly belonging to Christian, Sunni and Druze communities took to the streets in Beirut. Reciting tirelessly anti-Syrian slogans,[51] the demonstrators began a sort of 'permanent uprising' which reached its apogee on March 14. For about two months, the international, Arab, and Lebanese media reported collective sit-ins, candlelight marches, and emotion-laden protests immersed in white and red flags.

By the end of February, after the convening of a parliamentary plenary session to discuss Hariri's assassination, the opposition reaped the first fruits of the *Intifada*. In the middle of a tense session, while mass protesters were calling outside for the demise of the government and for Syrian pullout, premier Karami surprisingly announced the resignation of the pro-Syrian cabinet.[52] It was in fact the first time in Lebanese history that a government resigned in the legislature.

Despite the feverish uprising and the resignation of the Karami cabinet, a genuine inter-elite dialogue had not taken place. First, it was evident that the Shiite community's representatives were keen on remaining aloof from the staged demonstrations. Right after the cabinet's resignation, Hezbollah formally announced that it would not join the fray and that it was not ready to forsake its

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46 Oussama Safa, "Lebanon Springs Forward," *Journal of Democracy* 17 (2006): 22-37, 30.

47 Although no tangible evidence was available, opposition key figures maintained that the Lebanese and Syrian governments were at least legally and morally responsible since they were in charge of the security order.

48 See Christophe Ayad, Christophe Boltanski, José Garçon and Jean-Pierre Perrin, "Quand la Syrie monte au nez de Chirac," *La Libération*, March, 22, 2005, http://www.liberation. fr/page.php?Article=284087.

49 See Patrick Seale, "Who Killed Rafik Hariri?" *Guardian*, February 23, 2005, http://www.guardian.co.uk/ comment/story/0,3604,1423210,00.html; Stephen Zunes, "The Dangerous Implications of the Hariri Assassination and the U.S. Response," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 25, 2005, http://www.fpif.org/ papers/0502hariri.html. According to these articles, the pressured Syrian regime could not have endorsed a decision that harms its rational interests.

50 In February 2005, at the Brussels Summit which marked the US and France's reconciliation after the transatlantic disagreement over the Iraqi offensive, Presidents Bush and Chirac called for a rash Syrian withdrawal before the 2005 elections.

51 See Rym Ghazal, "Anti-Syrian Chorus echoes through Beirut," *The Daily Star*, February 22, 2005, http://www. dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=1&article_ID=12862&categ_id=2.

52 Michael Glackin, Nada Raad and Nayla Assaf, "People Power brings down Karami's Cabinet," *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2005, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=1&article_ID=13066&categ_id=2.

Syrian ally as long as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was not settled. Moreover, other pro-Syrian Lebanese factions, such as the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, the Amal and Baath parties, decried the so-called Western-led mass protests. On March 8, a demonstration orchestrated by Hezbollah and various pro-Syrian groups drew 500,000 people to the streets. This gathering, in which protesters denounced international meddling and praised the Syrian role in Lebanon, reflected the growing the inter-confessional hiatus.

On March 14, soon after the elation of the pro-Syrian protest had waned, a counter-demonstration was organised by the anti-Syrian opposition. Described as the most memorable episode of Lebanon's Independence *Intifada*, the rally united an estimated number of 900,000 protesters.

Sentimental images of the 14 March climax were spread by the media worldwide. Some evoked the likely dawn of a new phase of inter-confessional unity, [53] and a new wave of democratisation[54] which might even pave the way for an Arab Democratic Spring.[55] Other more sceptical reports cast doubt on the genuine character of these demonstrations that were taxed as a bourgeoisie-led event, or an imitation of the Ukrainian and Georgian pastel-coloured revolutions.[56]

The implications of Lebanon's *Intifada*: Grim prospects for nation-building

At such a critical phase of Lebanon's development, the emergence of a multi-confessional opposition, which gradually enclosed almost all segments, suggested that dividing lines could be spanned. The rapprochement of the Christian, Druze, and Sunni communities[57] proved that communal identities were not static. Furthermore, the overarching demonstration that took place on March 14, 2005, and that, according to some, also encompassed Shiite protesters[58] showed that Lebanon's cleavages were not as pervasive as it was commonly portrayed.

Indeed, from a retrospective angle, the 2005 uprising left an aftertaste of a new collective consciousness. Even though it could not wipe out the dividing inter-elite schism, its main accomplishment was the development of a consensus that divisive issues should be solved through dialogue.

Also, whether these outbursts of nationalism and unity are transient or not, collective protests helped in creating ─ at least for some time ─ new national vectors of unity such as the quest for the truth behind recurrent political assassinations, and the refusal to return to war. Striving for the truth behind Hariri's assassination was portrayed by the 14 March Alliance throughout 2005 as a unifying bond. Furthermore, on April 13, 2005, the Commemoration Day of the 1975 war, large-scale events, organised under the slogan "no more war", reflected the Lebanese communities' tiredness of conflict.

This image is nonetheless much brighter than subsequent events have confirmed. In fact, the episode of national cohesiveness was provisional, and mainly incited by emotion-laden outbursts and

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53 See Robert Fisk, "Under the Shadow of Death: In Death, Hariri Unites the Lebanese," *The Independent*, February 17, 2005, available from http://www.counter punch.org/fisk02172005.html.

54 See Helena Cobban, "Lebanon's Fine Example – so Far," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 2005, http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0317/p09s01-coop.htm.

55 See Abbas Beydoun, "Eine Mauer ist gefallen," *Die Zeit*, April 15, 2005, http://www.zeit.de/2005/12/ Libanon_2fSyrien.

56 For a critique of the 2005 Beirut Spring, see Justin Raimondo, "Lebanon's Hollow 'Cedar Revolution'," *Ether Zone*, March 14, 2005, available from http://www.antiwar.com/justin/?articleid=5039.

57 See Paul Salem, "Lebanon at the Crossroads: Rebuilding an Arab Democracy," *Saban Center Middle East Memo #7,* May 31, 2005, http://www.brookings.edu/printme.wbs?page=/fp/saban/salemmemo20050531.htm.

58 Informal interviews conducted by the author in September 2005.

external factors: the Syrian threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and the external commitment to 'democracy promotion' in Lebanon and in the Arab world.[59]

Following Syrian military withdrawal in April 2005 and the summer polls which led to a parliament dominated by the anti-Syrian majority, overarching loyalties have considerably weakened. First, the parliamentary elections asserted that sectarian deal-making was still a primordial factor conditioning Lebanese political life, and that confessionalism has even become more incursive at the societal level. Second, as soon as the national divide deepened, the anti-Syrian opposition lost some ground. As a consequence of its internal splintering[60] and the overall state of contention, the alliance could neither implement its ambitious political program of national reform nor force about President Lahoud's resignation.

The deepening fracture

Since the 2005 parliamentary polls, all communities are in the process of remodelling their unsteady alignments within the '8-14 March' spectrum, which in fact has multiple connotations bypassing mere pro- or anti-Syrian loyalties. The groupings' satisfaction with national dynamics of power-sharing is contingent on the sharing of confessional spoils rather than on self-enlightened national interest.

Areas of concern are on the one hand the Shiite major representatives' aloofness from the majoritarian Christian-Sunni-Druze coalition, and the deepening of the political fracture which has rendered Lebanon's consociational apparatus almost inoperable.

Launched in March 2006,[61] the national dialogue conference whose objective was to defuse tensions was interrupted in July with the outbreak of the Hezbollah-Israel War. After the 34-day confrontations,[62] a pervasive standoff between the new opposition led by Hezbollah and the anti-Syrian government has dealt a heavy blow to Lebanon's politics of consensus. Since September 2006, Hezbollah has been openly calling for the establishment of a more solid national unity government whose strings, according to the party, are manipulated by the Western community. On the other side, the ruling alliance has revoked all the while the party's call for government change, and has accused the new opposition of striving to re-establish Syrian dominance in Lebanon.

Points of dissension are many. Whereas the ruling alliance aims in the short run at liberating Lebanon's politics from Syrian meddling, and establishing an international tribunal to try the

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59 According to some analysts, a deceptive Arab Spring of democracy was stimulated by the US new Middle Eastern agenda following the invasion of Iraq. Events signaling the rise of a more liberal era in the Arab world, such as elections in post-Saddam Iraq, liberalisation measures in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and the Beirut Spring in Lebanon, were taxed as precarious and externally-induced. See for example Gilbert Achkar, "Arab Spring: late and cold," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2005, http://mondediplo.com/2005/07/06arabworld; Ran Halevi, "Fragile printemps arabe," *Le Figaro*, April 18, 2005, http://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/20050418.FIG0305.html.

60 Maronite leader Michel Aoun who returned from exile in May 2005 could not agree with the anti-Syrian opposition on common electoral lists. As a result, the Bristol Coalition was downsized, and the Maronite community was divided during the parliamentary elections between those who supported the Lebanese Forces Party led by Samir Gegaa and those who supported the Free Patriotic Movement led by Aoun.

61 This national dialogue conference, in which 14 communal leaders participated, started in March 2006. Its objectives were to tackle, on a consensual basis, political points of dissension such as Hezbollah's arsenal, the extension of president Lahoud's mandate, and Lebanese-Syrian deteriorating relations since Syrian troops' pullout. No consensus was however reached on these matters.

62 Resolution 1701 approved on August 11, 2006, called for an immediate cease-fire, Hezbollah's disarmament, the Israeli forces' withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, the deployment of the Lebanese army to the South, and the formation of a large United Nations Interim Force.

perpetrators of political crimes,[63] the Party of God and its allies pass unfavourable judgment on this political course.

In addition, disagreement hinges on Hezbollah's military wing and its objectives. Whereas the Party of God considers its military wing as a shield from external threats in an uncertain setting, the anti-Syrian coalition perceives the party's military wing as a source of discord undermining the state's sovereignty.[64]

Pressured in many ways by the international community, the Shiite Party is wary of a western-led constellation in Lebanon while Christian and Sunni segments are distrustful of the Shiite groupings' regional alliances. [65] On the one hand, Hezbollah and its allies argue that the Saniora government has been striving to drag Lebanon into the Western orbit of custody. On the other hand, the anti-Syrian alliance criticizes the contending bloc's attempt to transform Lebanon into a trump card in the Middle East process and a battleground for the US-Iranian present clash.

Amid political uncertainty, Lebanon's institutions have become almost dysfunctional. In November 2006, the Shiite ministers withdrew decisively from the Saniora Cabinet leaving an important power vacuum.[66] Following their walkout, massive sit-in rallies orchestrated by the Hezbollah-led opposition[67] have raised doubt on the representativeness of Lebanon's power-sharing institutions. Moreover, because of the long-standing stalemate and despite regional and international mediations, Lebanon has been without a president since November 2007.[68]

Lebanon's 14 March/8 March fracture has become by now so anchored to the extent that a prompt solution seems almost unimaginable. Ongoing power struggles raise once again the usual reservations about the efficiency of the country's political system in times of crisis. In fact, the country's political institutions, despite their resiliency since 1943, seem to perform solely a minimal function of crisis containment, and are unable to provide the necessary mechanisms for national building.

Against this background, internal and external dynamics of contention on Lebanese ground have led some commentators to qualify Beirut as the capital for a "new cold war"[69] opposing regional and international players. Observers warn against the emergence of two conflicting political nationalisms which ground their existence on two irreconcilable orientations: more inclined to negotiate with the West, one Lebanon demands total independence from Syrian tutelage, and strives to liberate the

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63 After Hariri's slaying, other prominent anti-Syrian political actors were killed in Lebanon. Although there are some hints that all crimes are interrelated, no convergent evidence has been reached so far. Inter-Lebanese disputes on the character of the international tribunal supposed to judge the perpetrators of the political assassinations, and the fear that the UN probe could deepen domestic rifts threaten to delay results. Also, speculation is rife that if Syrian authorities are officially convicted, Lebanon would indirectly pay the price.

64 The 14 March Alliance has on various occasions alluded to Hezbollah's arsenal as an instrument used by other regional actors for strategic and security grounds.

65 Oxford Business Group, "Politics: Overview," in *Emerging Lebanon 2006* (London: Oxford Business Group, 2006), 13-36, 17. See also Paul Salem, "Lebanon at the Crossroads."

66 The core issues of dispute which led to the withdrawal of the Shiite ministers from the consensus government are related to the character of the international tribunal set to try the perpetrators of political crimes since 2005, decision-making rules in the Ministers' Council, and the so-called pro-American political line of the Saniora cabinet. Whereas the anti-Syrian alliance has resorted to majoritarian decision-making in the government, the pro-Syrian establishment insists on taking all decisions on the basis of consensus. Both parties claim that their position is justified. The majoritarian coalition argues that decision-making based on majority rule avoids deadlock in crisis situations, and pro-Syrian groupings argue that this mode threaten to paralyse minority blocs' veto powers.

67 Throughout 2007, these rallies have been calling for the convening of new parliamentary elections and for the formation of a new cabinet.

68 Since the end of Lahoud's presidential mandate in November 2007, Lebanon has been without a president, and presidential elections have been reported for 17 times.

69 See Adrien Jaulmes, "Beyrouth, capitale d'une nouvelle guerre froide", *Le Figaro*, March 25, 2008.

Republic from its regional involvement. The other Lebanon emphasizes the necessity of safeguarding the Syrian-Lebanese concomitant tracks in foreign politics, perceives thereby Hezbollah's military wing as indispensable, and defines Lebanon's Arab face in terms of a deep engagement in the region.

This political bipolarity notwithstanding, the picture remains much more complex, given that both contending blocs are multi-confessional, and that all communities suffer from internal rifts which weaken their coherence.[70]

It is important to mention in this context that these political divergences cannot only be assigned sectarian overtones as they revolve around different visions of how a post-Syria Lebanese nation should be governed.

These divergences are also a ramification of lingering struggles in the Middle East and an extension of foreign alliances.[71] On a broader level, they reflect political players' quest to determine a new centre of political gravity in the Middle East against the background of the current political confrontation between the US-led bloc and Iran with its allies.[72]

Recurrent rival confrontations since 2005,[73] both transcommunal, constitute interesting case studies on Lebanon's present national identity. The latter demonstrate that lingering rifts today cannot be explained by merely referring to traditional analyses of Lebanon's 'ill-sourced' confessional patchwork, but do stem from a more complex interrelationship between communal, political and external dynamics. In other words, finding an explanation to Lebanon's bipolarity today does not solely reside in detecting the nature of confessional cleavages, but requires a profound analysis of Lebanon's ever-present antagonisms which goes back to the grounding of the Lebanese state in the forties. This duality[74] takes on many potential forms and expressions, and is mostly exacerbated every time internal political cleavages overlap with regional conflicts or interference.

This suggests on the one hand Lebanon's intense permeability but hints on the other hand at the fact that national cleavages in Lebanon are apt to change.

The prevailing tug of war, commonly described as Lebanon's worst crisis since the 1975-1990 war, implies that in case rival blocs do not revert to prior traditions of bargaining so as to counteract intractable dividing lines, post-Syria Lebanon will be marked with various hardships that would undermine any quest towards national cohesiveness. Evoking the recurrence of civil unrest, inter-elite wrangling has on many occasions degenerated into various sectarian flare-ups.[75] It is however contestable whether political and sectarian clashes could escalate into a full-scale civil war as many suspect. First, religious divides do not presently reinforce political cleavages as cross-cutting links still

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70 In February 2006, Maronite leader, Michel Aoun, stroke an alliance with Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Although this Shiite-Maronite alliance has the merit of fostering cross-communal links, it has reinforced internal rifts within the Christian community. The latter is currently divided between Aoun's supporters and the 14 March Coalition's allies.

71 See for example Post-War Lebanese Politics–The Perils of Breaking the Deadlock," *Strategic Comments* 12, September 26, 2006, http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-12---2006/volume-12--issue-7/post-war-lebanese-politics.

72 See Adrien Jaulmes, "Beyrouth, capitale d"une nouvelle guerre froide."

73 Recurrent rival demonstrations in Beirut since 2005, more divided along political than confessional lines, suggest that current cleavages could no longer be explained by referring to sectarianism as the most decisive factor regulating national politics.

74 In fact, historically Lebanon's conflicts reached unmanageable crisis levels as external conflict dynamics pervaded the internal scene. Interview with Theodor Hanf, July 2007, Freiburg.

75 Armed clashes between rival Shiite and Sunni Muslims have erupted on several occasions in the Beirut suburbs since January 2007. Fear prevails that the state might lose command over the situation if contending blocs do not exercise restraint.

pervade the Lebanese social and political landscapes.[76] Also, large sections of the Lebanese population have expressed on many occasions their disaffection of violence and their keenness on civil solutions.[77]

The immediate resumption of inter-elite dialogue in order to avert a general collapse, and the formation of a new moderate consensus government endorsed by contentious factions seem as first-aid measures that could mitigate political tensions which have already spilled over into the streets.

A new nationalism based on collective identities?

This brief analysis of prevailing schisms shows that a consensual understanding of Lebanon's national, political, and regional role is still beyond reach. Communal loyalties and politicised allegiances seem to take precedence over the necessity of establishing a nation-state with a clearly defined pathway. Incompatible affinities hinge presently on different interpretations of Lebanon's status in the region, and on different interpretations of external alignment. Moreover, it is important to stress that inter-confessional consensus on the components of Lebanon's nationalism is not only modelled by external factors, but by the segments' shaky identification with a static power-sharing formula.[78] There is in fact substantial doubt whether the national identity described in the Ta'if agreement has become ingrained in the Lebanese political culture during the post-war period, or whether it remained a blueprint. Basic differences related to the understanding of Lebanon's power-sharing still divide elites and communities.[79] Besides, it is not sure whether communal blocs and ruling elite cartels have the same perception of what Arabism ─ as mentioned in the Ta'if agreement ─ means, and what Lebanon's obligations and rights as an Arab nation are.

Still, whereas an understanding of nationalism based on the concept of the Western nation-state is incompatible with Lebanon's divided society, it is possible to craft a more resilient Lebanese model of nationalism by shifting the focus from a unitary national identity to a collective identity[80] in the making. Hence, in the Lebanese case, it might be more appropriate to depart from traditional concepts of nationalism and accept Lebanon as a malleable construct in which collective albeit contradictory identities coexist. The concept of a state based on a synthesis of multiple identities might very well contradict traditional views of nationalism founded upon clearly defined affinities that hold the nation and its frontiers together. Nonetheless, it indicates the inapplicability of essentialist views of nationalism in divided societies.

In the final analysis, a national feeling of solidarity based on "a shared and interactive sense of "we-ness""[81] binding communal spaces might be more adequate to the Lebanese polity. This collective identity should be visualised as the outcome of a long social and political learning process which entails the replacement of a fragmented political culture by a culture of transcommunality[82]

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76 It is worth reminding that '8 March' and '14 March' coalitions are multi-confessional as they both draw support from Christian and Muslim denominations.

77 On February 14, 2007, for instance, tens of thousands of demonstrators rallied in Beirut to mark the second anniversary of Hariri's slaying and to declare their attachment to national unity.

78 It is important to note that the last population census took place in 1932, and that many Lebanese consider the political formula outdated and rigid.

79 In 1997, as the Catholic Synod under the auspices of Pope John Paul II referred to the Lebanese system as a consensual democracy, Sunni and Shiite clerics hurried to criticise this expression which, according to them, denoted a state of division rather than unity.

80 Collective identity is interpreted as a process in which persons define themselves in a space of togetherness. See David Snow, "Collective Identity and Expressive Forms," paper published at the Center for the Study of Democracy, October 1, 2001, 1-14, http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/01-07, 2.

81 Ibid, 2.

82 Christophe Dubois, La survie libanaise, ou, l'expérience de la différence: un nécessaire élan vers l'harmonie multiconfessionnelle (Bruxelles: P.I.E.-Lang, 2002), 145.

consolidated by "convivialistic" tendencies.[83] The objective of such a collective identity is not the forceful homogenisation of communal differences but the natural development of a shared Lebanese project.

Even though contradictory allegiances have been kept alive and even nurtured by Lebanese institutions – particularly the educational system, the media and sectarian political discourses which reinforced conflicting perceptions of nationalism – the shared Lebanese past could pave the way for a more enduring national ethos. A common belief in Lebanon's particularism as a unifying thread between the West and the Arab world,[84] and a general sense of togetherness in times of external threat could counteract intrinsic drives of dissension.

Lessons of coexistence drawn from Lebanon's heavy heritage[85] remain in fact vague but unequivocal signals of a rising collective construct. While many analysts warn against confessionalism as a major obstacle that could thwart the construction of a stable national identity, the former could potentially evolve into a virtuous circle: after numerous episodes of bitter conflict, the mere awareness of the potential destructiveness of confessionalism could deter violent conflict.

This concluding note has argued that the acceptance of Lebanon's varied and competing identities rather than their forceful fusion might be the only way to conciliate the republic's paradoxical lines. In the very end, Lebanon's version of nationalism might be closer to a form of balanced communalism, in which dividing lines have found less violent means of expression.[86]

In spite of this confident note, the present situation does not seem particularly favourable to such a project. Urgent concerns are how to avoid a political and institutional collapse and avert an impending economic crisis.

Let us also not forget that all citizens might agree today that they are Lebanese, yet consensus lacks on the specific constituents of this floating sense of belonging. Also, in intellectual circles, disagreements pivot on the final political formula for Lebanon's divided society.[87] Besides, Lebanon's nationalism remains ironically determined by a complex interplay of external and internal variables.

This is why any quest to a more coherent Lebanese nationalism should be preceded by a long and serious process of domestic reform. In order to avoid long episodes of deadlock and controversy, a consolidation and institutionalisation of internal conflict-regulating measures is necessary. Ideally, reverting to traditions of negotiation – each time national cleavages threaten to exacerbate – should be the norm rather than the exception. Additional prerequisites to forging a stronger national entente are on the one hand the gradual reshuffle of the Lebanese political system[88] and the consolidation of an educational system which promotes cross-cutting loyalties at the grassroots on the other.

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83 Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 540. The political scientist argues that the political culture of coexistence which survived the hardships of the war shapes a pervasive Lebanese identity.

84 Karam, "Lebanon, Collapse and Revival," 24.

85 i.e. the shared realities of the Lebanese Civil War, the 2005 Intifada, the 2006 July War, and other periods of conflict…

86 Interview with Gerhard Lehmbruch on how political fault lines could lose their acuity and reach a state of pacification over time in divided societies, September 2006, Kirchzarten.

87 Lebanese are divided on the ideal political formula for Lebanon's communalism. Whereas some advocate deconfessionalisation, others argue that the present consociational formula is the only political solution that could manage Lebanon's divisions. Those who do not want to challenge the system fear that a secular Lebanon would resemble its authoritarian neighbours. Although the Ta'if agreement mentions in one of its clauses that phasing out confessionalism should be initiated at one point or another, no consensus on the timing or process exists. For more details on these different visions of Lebanon's political formula, see el Solh, "Religious Identity."

88 Pending the phasing out of confessionalism, many political reforms should be initiated. These reforms include, for example, the reform of the archaic electoral list system in order to guarantee a better representation of communities and individuals, and the empowerment of political parties established on a national rather than on a sectarian basis.

Yet, even if a process of national reform is launched, significant cleavages would not lose their salience unless the republic adopted a policy of careful and preventive alignment in external conflicts so as to avoid the collision of internal and external cleavages in the domestic realm.[89]

Beyond Lebanon: The value of pluralism in an era of globalisation

If Lebanon's identity has been normatively defined as a bridge between the West and the East, its vulnerability to conflicts has been considered as a proof confirming the impossibility of multi-directional belonging in the Arab world. Lebanon's in-between loyalties between Arab and Western peripheries have inspired two schools of thought: one which is apologetic of Lebanon's dual identity and another which considers Lebanon's ambiguous belonging as a source of its internal ills. Indeed, Lebanon remains unable to find a stable political consciousness in counterpoint to fragmentation.

Beyond these serious reservations, Lebanon's communalism offers the perspective of a national identity which goes beyond geographical and/or ideological centres of gravity. In an increasingly globalised world, it could illustrate how communalism or multi-ethnicity could enrich a boringly homogenised globalisation.

The value of pluralism in a globalised world is not only restricted to Lebanon but to many multi-ethnic states – for instance the Balkan states – whose ethnicity has been long regarded as a sign of fragility and disorder. In fact, refocusing on a world plurality in which collective identities demarcate themselves from traditional patterns of nationalism does not necessarily entail fragmentation nor does it exclude nation-building. These identities could help redefine a teleological understanding of an everlastingly globalising world striving towards uniformisation. In other words, empowering plural affiliations in geographical settings may offer in the long run a serious alternative to the painful process of globalised identities.[90]

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89 For an account of the benefits of non-alignment in segmented societies, see Gerhard Lehmbruch, "Consociational Democracy in the International System," *European Journal of Political Research* 3 (1975): 377-391. For another account of the necessity of non-alignment in Lebanon, see for example Farid El Khazen, "Disengage Lebanon from Regional Turmoil," *The Daily* Star, August 14, 2006, http://ww#dailystar.com.lb/ article.asp?edition_ID= 10&article_ID=74710&categ_id=5.

90 See Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*, (Paris : Grasset, 1998).

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