6-2013

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Recommended Citation

APA Citation
Bortolazzi, O. (2013). The Cedar Revolution, Youth Participation, and Youth Organizations in Lebanon's Post Intifada Civic Engagement Sectarianism and Identity. *Voices on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement-Working Paper,* 1–26.
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/5106

MLA Citation
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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

JOHN D. GERHART CENTER FOR PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Voices on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement

The Cedar Revolution, Youth Participation, and Youth Organizations in Lebanon's Post Intifada
"Civic Engagement Sectarianism and Identity"

By Omar Bortolazzi• Working Paper, June 2013

The Cedar Revolution, Youth Participation, and Youth Organizations in Lebanon's Post Intifada

Civic Engagement Sectarianism and Identity

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Introduction: Civil Society Activism in Lebanon

Civil Society in Lebanon is undoubtedly one of the most vibrant in the Middle East. During the civil war (1975-1990) civil society became more active to compensate for the absence of a strong central government. When the military actions settled down, CSOs started perceiving their role as complementary to that of the government and became even more aware and self-conscious of their capacity, thus rendering NGOs indispensable to the survival of communities. In addition to that, new globalization concepts settled in: sustainable development, participatory democracy, governance, transparency, accountability, health-related issues and environment.

At any rate, an important turning point for civil society in Lebanon was the early 2005 'Cedar Revolution' which provoked enormous global interest and attention. The incidents of social and political mobilization that took place in 2005 were indicative that political and social groups, once regarded as militias and impotent groups preserving the status quo, could in fact mediate between the people and the state; or at least, these were the initial aspirations.

It is also a fact that the withdrawal of Syria, the increase of civil society activism across the region and the post-2006 war all contributed to a significant rise in numbers of civil society organizations. Due to the relatively liberal legal environment, a veritable raise of civil society activism has been witnessed.[1] Civil society activism in Lebanon is mainly divided between the social and the political sectors. A conspicuous number of well-functioning civil society groups working on democratization and human rights related issues are present in the country today. When it comes to this sector, in particular, Cavatorta and Durac have identified two major trends. The first one is directly related to the sectarian nature of Lebanon's political and social structure. Many organizations, including those that work on human rights and democratization issues, "often subscribe to the political agenda of one particular sect, even though not necessarily formally so".[2] However, a second trend that has been growing in these last years, relates more "to the work of associations attempting to build what can be termed a nationalist Lebanese activist sector" that attempts to overcome or weaken sectarian barriers and create a political and legal system that is responsive to ordinary Lebanese citizens, and not necessarily as members of a specific sect.[3]

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[1] Cavatorta Francesco, Durac Vincent (2011), *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World The Dynamics of Activism*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Policies: London & New York, p.122.
[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] Cavarorta F., Durac V. (2001), p. 135.

On one hand, freedom of association is guaranteed in Lebanon. On the other, sectarianism places significant constraints on civil society organizations, because, in order to fulfil their agendas, associations have to rely on the same patronage networks that many of them blame for instability and lack of accountability. Furthermore, sectarianism combined with the deficiencies of the central state render Lebanon extremely vulnerable to external actors and their own strategic interests in the region.[4]

This paper will analyze the developments within civil society from 2005, with a specific focus on youth participation during the uprisings, and the associations and movements created in its aftermath. With an increase in the level of young citizens' participation and engagement, the advocacy and grassroots emancipatory movements, Lebanese youth decisively tried to reshape the collective identity of civil society in the country. Mobilization, space, and identity became the three dimensions of the 'Lebanese Intifada'. Unfortunately, the 2005 Lebanese uprising didn't prove to have a long-term vision beyond the removal of Syrian occupation. Many young participants later reported that they felt like they had been used as puppets in the hands of the same old traditional political feudal houses, who saw it more convenient to go against the Syrian occupation, as they saw the international powers turning against it. Obviously, people responded to this call to go to the streets and demonstrate, as they had been waiting many years for the opportunity to lift the Syrian occupation and get rid of it. Today, Lebanon still has the same problems it had before the 2005 uprisings, the same rulers and the same laws. It was not a fight by and/or for the people: It was an elimination of some power holders by other power holders.

Lebanon is still very much divided along sectarian lines, and Lebanese youth is still entrapped by rigid spatial sectarian divisions: University campuses, Hamra cafés, or Downtown restaurants represent most of the times a no man's land where young people can interact and socialize on a daily basis, regardless of their sectarian or political affiliation. Things change when young people get back to the neighborhood where their families live. Territoriality becomes a means for reproducing sectarianism and group boundaries.[5]

Lebanon's élites have proven unwilling and unable to implement de-confessionalization. The country shows very little possibilities for a self-generated transformation and perhaps popular mass pressure could represent the only viable

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[4] *Ibidem*.
[5] Anderson, James, and Shuttleworth, Ian, "Sectarian Demography, Territoriality and Political Development in Northern Ireland", *Political Geography*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1998, pp.187-208.

formula. These new post-2005 young 'identity entrepreneurs'[6] and the networks they created, are pushing toward the abolition of the present confessional system, in an attempt to construct identities and subjectivities more significant than those determined along sectarian lines alone.

What kind of alternative these youth organizations can represent to faith-based associations in the future? What are the new strategies and mechanisms through which actors garner support for providers? Can their actions lead to a partial mouldering of the sectarian identities or, alternatively, complement and coexist with national identities and institutions? Can these organizations, along with the international programs developed in the region, have a meaningful voice in a country where the decision-making process is paralyzed, the state is dysfunctional and sects have replaced the state to a large extent in the provision of services?

The second part of this work is dedicated to the description of some the most important Lebanese autochthonous youth networks, associations, NGOs, including lobbying and advocacy groups, specifically focusing on those who have developed programs for development policies, bridging sectarian divides, good governance, transparency and accountability.

The Cedar Revolution: The March 8 and March 14 Movements

The period between February and May 2005, known in Lebanon as *intifadat al-istiqlal,* or Independence Intifada, more commonly known in the West as the 'Cedar Revolution' was a time of protest, public uprising and dramatic renegotiation of public space.

Following the death of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, killed by a bomb in February 2005 in Beirut, approximately 1 million people from all parts of Lebanon gathered in the Lebanese capital waving flags and carrying signs to demonstrate for a free and independent Lebanon.[7] Hariri's death catalyzed an unexpected popular uprising in Lebanon, in which protestors insisted to know the truth behind his assassination and, blaming Syria as the culprit, demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.[8] It also resulted in the formation of a coalition of Muslim and Christian factions, who declared themselves the 'opposition' to the government.

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[6] Gabre Christian, "Youth Networks, Space, and Mobilization. Lebanon's Independence Intifada", in Samir Khalaf Samir and Khalaf Saad Roseanne (eds.), *Arab Youth. Social Mobilization in Times of Risk*. London: Saqi Books, 2011, p. 277.
[7] Jaafar Rudy and Stephan Maria J., "Lebanon's Independence Intifada: How an Unarmed Insurrection Expelled Syrian Forces", in Stephan Maria J. (ed.), *Civilian Jihad. Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization and Governance in the Middle East*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 169.
[8] Khatib Lina, "Television and Public Action in the Beirut Spring", in Sakr Naomi (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 28 43.

The mass mobilization following Hariri's assassination was unprecedented in Lebanon's history and the groundswell of grief, disbelief and anger directed at Syria was simply unstoppable. In the hours following the Prime Minister's murder, thousands of people gathered in the Martyrs' Square in Downtown Beirut demanding the ending of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon with the consequent withdrawal of all Syrian troops and the establishment of an international investigation into the murder of Hariri. This latest request turned out to be possibly the most politically controversial as the Lebanese population split over the question of whether Syria and its allies were responsible for Hariri's assassination. The controversy was evident shortly before the Cedar Revolution, when a mass demonstration was organized on March 8, by Hezbollah, in support of the Syrian regime, to denounce UN Resolution 1559—called upon Lebanon to establish its sovereignty and upon "foreign forces"—Israel and Syria—to withdraw from Lebanon and to cease intervening in Lebanon's internal politics—and to show that the party of God could not be ignored. Lebanon's March 8 Alliance coalition included Amal and the Free Patriotic Movement, a party that draws much of its constituents from Maronite Christians and is led by former Lebanese Army commander Michel Aoun.

The size and magnitude of the March 8 mostly Shiite non-violent demonstration, which was to date the largest in Lebanese history, led to an even larger counter-demonstration on March 14 which ultimately went to show the inherent difficulties in maintaining a consociational system in such an unstable region.[9] On March 14, an estimated 1.2 million protesters thronged Beirut in order to demand Syria's withdrawal, the uncovering of the full truth behind Hariri's assassination, the resignation or sacking of senior state-security officials, and the holding of legislative elections on time and without interference of the sort that Syria or its compliant Lebanese regime had committed in earlier years.[10] The opposition groups included members of the Socialist Party (mostly Druze), the Qornet Shahwan Gathering (Christian), the student movement of the outlawed Christian

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[9] When Lebanon received independence in 1943, a system was set up to ensure that power would remain first in the hands of the Christians and second in the hands of the Sunnis. The object was formalized by the 1943 National Pact, which was based on the 1932 census that recognized the Christian population as the majority (54% at the time). The National Pact became Lebanon's "unwritten Constitution" and remained the way power was allocated until the Taif Accord of 1989.This newer accord better apportioned the ratio of seats allocated to Christian and Muslim representatives. Among the key points of the agreement are for the Muslim abandon their aspirations to unite with Syria; the President of the Republic always to be Maronite; the Prime Minister of the Republic always to be Sunni; the President of the National Assembly always to be Shi'a. This resulted in the creation of a political structure referred to as political sectarianism according to which the supposedly largest religious sect controls the most important position in the state. The arrangement reached by the 1943 National Pact was a disaster for Lebanon and heavily contributed to the country being dragged into a long and bloody civil war.

[10] Safa Oussama, "Lebanon Spring Forward", *Journal of Democracy,* Volume 17, Number 1, January 2006.

Lebanese Forces party, the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, the Christian Phalangist Party, and Hariri's own predominantly Sunni Future Movement. Also, present in opposition ranks were a few of Shi'ite Muslims who belonged to neither of the two big Shi'ite groups, Amal and Hezbollah. In addition to political parties, the opposition also featured a number of civil society groups that saw Syrian domination of Lebanon as a denial of freedom and basic rights.

Overall, the creation of these two major blocks was quite indicative of a few internal shifts in Lebanon's political scheme. One side represented by the unlikely alliance between Hariri, Gemayel, Geagea, Jumblat, and for a brief period of time Michel Aoun (i.e. the representatives of the major Sunni, Christian and Druze parties); the other by the presence of the Free Patriotic Movement in the mostly Shiite Hezbollah-Amal front. Christian representation in both camps meant that the divide was no longer between Christians and Muslims as clearly as it had been in the case of the civil war; the tension was more visible in intra-sectarian (Shi'a-Sunni) relations.[11]

However, this is not to say that the uprisings did not spur old threat perceptions. The dividing lines were merely redrawn between two divergent political paths: those of March 14th and March 8th. That being said, the concerns, representation and the mobilization remained largely sectarian.[12]

A *Think-Tent* for Lebanese Youth: Organizers, Mobilizers and Communicators during the 2005 Uprisings

The 2005 sit-in was the start of what became a movement of more than four million people[13], involving smaller groups primarily consisting of students and women;[14] syndicates of writers, journalists, artists, and workers; the Lebanese Bar Association; industry groups; and a host of chambers of commerce.[15] Youth leaders from the nine opposition parties joined forces to organize a peaceful march, from the site of the assassination of Rafiq Hariri to Downtown Beirut. What characterized most the 2005 uprisings scenario in Lebanon was the staggering change in the civic environment and in the technologies that have played crucial roles in a number of 'people power' movements, enabling thousands of Lebanese to mobilize quickly.[16]

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[11] Smayra Dima (2013) "Lebanon's Arab Spring': exploring identity, security, and change",
Discussion Paper. Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, Durham.
[12] *Ibidem.*
[13] Rallies on 8 and 14 March gathered together an impressive percentage of the Lebanese population, which was estimated at a little less than four million in 2005. The Population Reference Bureau, "2005 World Population Data Sheet", www.prb.org/pdf05/05WorldDataSheet_Eng.pdf.
[14] Jaafar R. and Stephan M. J. (2009), p. 171.
[15] Safa O., (2006).
[16] "Mobiles, Protests, and Pundits", *Economist,* October 26, 2006.

Fully aware of the role that international pressure can play in civic disputes of such magnitude, the demonstrators made sure to play to both local and international audiences by making signs in both English and Arabic, giving them a more accessible brand image.[17] At the height of the protests in Beirut, similar demonstrations were being led by Lebanese expatriates all over the world, in cities such as Paris, London and Sydney, where over 10,000 people came out in support of the Cedar Revolution.[18]

The Organizers

Young people were prominent among the individuals referred to as 'identity entrepreneurs'[19] who produced much of the color, shape, and content of the Independence Intifada. These key players were a collection of informally networked organizers, mobilizers, and communicators.[20] They included young organizers, image-builders, artists, fundraisers and socialites.[21]

The Lebanese political opposition presented a united front and developed a strategy to channel popular discontent into concrete action[22]. From political factions and civil society groups erecting "dialogue tents" in what became known as the Freedom Camp in Martyrs' Square (the opposition's hub during the popular uprising) to *la chambre noir*[23], a dynamic, small working group that included political leaders, strategists, and public relations specialists established in 1998, involving the Bristol gathering leaders[24] and Lebanese civil society groups—these operational corps played a major role in the non-violent struggle and found a logistical way on how to support the youths in the tents and to pursue their own goal to get Syria out of Lebanon. The Freedom Camp on Martyrs' Square became the symbol of popular resistance in Lebanon. In addition to the financial and logistical support from the working group, the tent city was sustained thanks to the contributions of thousands of ordinary Lebanese who deposited money into an account set up in the Lebanese Audi Saradar Private Bank.[25] Saleh Farroukh, Director-General of the Beirut Association for Social Development[26], said that la *chambre noir* "began initiating the general plan of the

[17] Humeid Ahmad, "Branding the Cedar Revolution." *360°East*. 9 March, 2005.
[18] "Beirut Protestors Denounce Syria." BBC News. 21 Feb 2005.
[19] Gabre C. (2001), p. 277.
[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] *Idem*, p. 278.
[22] Jaafar and Stephan M. J. (2009), p. 172.
[23] Asma Andraos, who until Hariri's murder was an event planner wholly unconnected to politics, sprang to action and drafted a petition demanding Syrian withdrawal at the Freedom Camp. She helped organize *la chambre noire* or "the darkroom".
[24] Political leaders from the opposition met at the Bristol Hotel in Beirut on 18 February to announce the demand of the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops, the resignation of the government led by Prime Minister Omar Karame, and the holding of free parliamentary elections.
[25] Jaafar and Stephan M. J. (2009), p. 173.
[26] A group established in 1998 by R. Hariri.

movement", exploring "how to ensure the continuity of this intifada to reach the objective of getting Syria out."[27] Samir Abdelmalek, a lawyer who helped organize the activities of the tent city with a 'dialogue tent', where youth from different parties, clans, and religious backgrounds could gather together,[28] considered the intra-communal dialogue among young people to be one of the most important developments of the popular uprising.[29]

The Mobilizers

One of the *chambre noir* group's first decisions was to support the youth in the tent city. Two weeks after the first tent was settled, Asma Andraos took up the camp logistics responsibility.

Asma Andraos was a successful events organizer living in Beirut when a car bomb exploded on February 14th, 2005, killing the well-known political figure Rafiq Hariri. Until this point, Asma had never been involved in politics or activism, but Hariri's murder angered her so much that she joined the movement against Syrian involvement in Lebanon. The day before Hariri's funeral, Asma gathered with her friends at his gravesite. They discussed how they could make Lebanese history instead of just watching it take place. Recognizing that Hariri's funeral would attract international media coverage, Asma and her friends prepared posters to distribute their message. After participating in the demonstration at Hariri's funeral, Asma and her friends wrote a petition demanding a United Nations resolution calling for the withdrawal of Syrian military forces from Lebanon. She placed the petition at Hariri's gravesite, and within four days, it had collected thousands of signatures. Next, Asma organized a sit-in at Martyrs' Square in Beirut.

Hundreds of protestors pledged not to move until the Syrian-controlled government resigned and Syrian forces withdrew. In order to provide the protestors with everything they needed to keep the sit-in going, Asma co-founded a new group called 05Amam[30]. She raised $200,000 for supplies such as food and water through word-of-mouth requests.[31]

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[27] Jaafar and Stephan M. J. (2009), p. 172.

[28] *Ibidem.*

[29] *Ibidem.*

[30] Amam objective is to actively support the development of a modern, sovereign state built on non feudalism, non-confessionalism and non-clientelism, encouraging transparent processes and institutions in order to reform the current system to implement the Rule of Law for all citizens. Amam works by mobilizing existing strengths and resources of the civil society at large, and acting as an effective link between citizens and governmental institutions through dialogue, lobbying, monitoring and the spread of civic education [http://www.05amam.org/].

[31] http://www.activisminstitute.org/joo/index.php/en/meet-the-activists/asma-andraos-bio [accessed March 2013].

The Communicators

Asma Andraos and her colleagues understood from a very early stage that they could have an impact. Most of these young people came from communication fields, such as media, advertising, printing and publishing. Together, they could pool tremendous experience in event management, branding, fundraising, and public relations.[32] Along with a range of communication tools such as red and white scarves, arm bands, pins, stickers, t-shirts, caps; text-messages, print media, posters, flyers, websites[33] – the great breakthrough was to see how Lebanese young protestors participated in framing the events by communicating directly with the audience through the television cameras. The public/audience acted as a creator of media messages. Direct audience participation in the media events meant the audience was not just 'active', but also 'acting'.[34] The earliest attempt by the public to send messages intended for television (and press) cameras took place on the day following Hariri's funeral. Television stations showed a young man carrying a sign in English saying 'Enough' at Saint George, the site of Hariri's assassination. Soon, similar textual messages would spread across the demonstrations and the public spaces in Downtown Beirut. Large black and white posters were stuck around the statue in Martyrs' Square, spelling out 'The Truth' in Arabic and English.[35]

'Beirut Spring' resulted also in a battlefield between the different Lebanese television stations: although the channels remained faithful to the ideologies they represent, the events were something they could not ignore and media coverage of the events was almost unanimous. These young protestors and communicators claimed back the Martyrs' Square and Downtown Beirut as a 'place of citizenship', as a 'truth camp'.[36]

On a different note, Michael Young recalls the March 2005 events quite differently. According to Young, Samir Abdelmalek thought there should be only three voice people: someone chosen by the Hariri camp; someone representing the tent city; and a third person to be agreed upon. Instead, there was a mad rush to the rostrum, with between twenty and thirty speaking and nobody from the tent city invited. [37] As Ziad Majed, a Lebanese political researcher, later recalled about those in the tent city: "They did not form a strong movement to pressure their leaders. Maybe they did not have time to do so, or they were not capable of doing so. But I believe there was and there is a certain degree of romance about the camp. This is

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[32] Gabre C. (2011), p. 287.
[33] Gabre C. (2011), p. 287.
[34] Khatib L. (2007).
[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] Hartley John, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of the Popular Media.* New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 35.
[37] Young Michael, *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, p. 54.

understandable. But the political impact of the camp was more symbolic than effective, and it is clear that the 'leaders' are popular, have legitimacy, and that many of their acts are justified even by the youths".[38] Similarly, other young human rights activists who organized and participated to the sit-in, recount of how they could not possibly reach a plan with their demonstrations, as they were literally controlled by their 'leaders'.

Nonetheless, the civic landscape had changed visibly, and the tent city had managed to keep alive Martyrs' Square as a space of protest. Maybe the idealists descending Martyrs' Square had misdiagnosed the nature of their protest, seeing them as a lever for change when they ended up being mainly a mechanism for balance, but youths seemed to have a deeper, maybe involuntary, understanding of Lebanon's reality.[39] Youths understood rather quickly that freedom would not spring from overturning the political or religious leadership, which was secure for reflecting the country's sectarian interactions, but it would emerge from those spaces created by the inability of any one leader, party or coalition of parties, to impose a single will on all.[40]

Lebanese Youth Bridging Sectarian Divides

'Governmental belonging' is a term used by Ghassan Hage to describe a person's sense of ownership of the nation[41]. Lebanese youth showed a very strong sense of ownership to the Lebanese nation, in a country where spatial city planning, social and symbolic boundaries, are strictly organized along sectarian divides. They tried to re-shape the concept of collective identity in a territory where sectarian groups engage in a process of constructing the boundaries of one's territory vis-à-vis the others, through the alteration, transformation and control of spaces. Finally, these young generations showed a capability to manage collective fear in an environment where conflicting groups seek safety and security by living in homogeneous spaces with co-sectarians, co-nationals and co-religious group members.[42] Inward socializing and communal networks between members of a specific group/sect results in a form of intra-group or intra-communal capital[43], or 'bounded solidarity'[44].

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[38] *Idem*, p. 55.
[39] Young Michael (2010), p. 56.
[40] *Ibidem*
[41] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of the White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 2000.
[42] Boal Frederick W., "Belfast Falls Within", *Political Geography*, Vol.21, No.5, 2002, pp. 687-94.
[43] Hardwick Susan, "Migration, Embedded Networks and Social Capital: Towards Theorizing North American Ethnic Geography", *International Journal of Population Geography*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2003, p. 163-79.
[44] Portes Alejandro and Sensenbrenner Julia, "Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.98, No. 6, 1993, p. 1324.

Young people in Beirut socialize and interact with members of other sectarian groups. However, to a large extent, inter-sectarian relations between the youth appear to be rather *compartmentalised*[45], influencing the ways in which young men and women perceive and use the spaces of their city, and making a clear distinction between different types of spaces, depending on their utilization.[46] Certain public spaces such as shopping malls, cafés, pubs, campuses, or working places do not have a political or sectarian connotation and consequently do not seem to be particularly threatening to Lebanese youth (even though some level of inter-sectarian, and sometimes intra-sectarian, stereotyping remains). On the contrary, the places of residence should be ideally homogeneous, with a shared basis of norms and beliefs.

Attempting to move away from traditional structures and perceptions (*asabiya*), these young 'identity entrepreneurs'[47] and the networks they created, are trying to push toward the abolition of the present confessional system, in an attempt to construct identities and subjectivities more significant than those determined along sectarian lines alone. They aim to enter the dialogue in far more complex ways, to transcend the stagnation of confessional politics and replace it with pluralism, tolerance, and responsible citizenship.

Lebanese youth seek justice. Without accountability, Lebanon's future remains grim. In the aftermath of the Cedar Revolution, Lebanese youth started developing a progressive plan of action to try to move away from sectarianism, seen as a debilitating social force.

On Resolution 1559[48], Lebanese youth started stating simple facts that remain largely ignored by the international community. With one and a half million Shiites in Lebanon, mostly loyal to Hassan Nasrallah, and bearing into consideration that Hezbollah has won 12 seats in the government, it does not make that much of a sense to sell the party of God as a terrorist organization in Lebanon. It is not the weapons of Hezbollah that makes them an influential party; rather it is the massive welfare assistance that the party assures to the population.

Today, young Lebanese who were born after the civil war ended are about to enter the working world. Given the political and economic instability fed by underlying tensions and sporadic episodes of violence, it is tempting to suggest

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[45] Nasser Yassin, "Sects and the City. Socio-spatial Perceptions and Practices of Youth in Beirut", in Are Knudsen and Michael Kerr (eds.), *Lebanon After the Cedar Revolution*, London, Hurst & Co., 2012, pp. 203-17.

[46] *Ibidem*.

[47] Gabre C. (2011), p. 277.

[48] The resolution demands withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, cooperation in the investigation of the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and the disarming of Hezbollah.

that persistent expectations of conflicts have resulted in a level of apathy among youth who see little purpose in engaging with the economy of setting long-term goals. Change will not take place until youth are actively encouraged to take part in the reconstruction of their country.[49]

A primary concern regarding Lebanese youth who feel excluded and alienated from society, especially since the 2006 war, is their vulnerability to recruitment by ethnic, political, and religious extremists who are pursuing their own ends. In a country so clearly divided along sectarian lines rising political polarization among Lebanese youth should be of concern to policy makers and provide an incentive to engage youth constructively, to secure a stable and prosperous future for coming generations.[50]

Youth: The Only Actor Against Polarization?

Post-intifada Lebanese youth has proved to be focused on the idea of changing the country's outdated and deficient system of government, whereas the elites of both sides of internal political factions have resigned to stagnation and failure to reach a political resolution, with a consequent outbreak of episodes of violence.[51] Such conflicts are characterized by a lack of authority of the state, the weakness of representation, the loss of confidence that the state is able or willing to respond to public concerns, the inability and/or unwillingness to regulate the privatization and informalization of violence"; and these characteristics legitimize the recourse to violence.[52]

Lebanon's powerful families have somehow survived a civil war, foreign interventions, and the ballot box. It is a great irony: In the one Arab country where citizens could legally and peacefully rid themselves of second and third-generation leaders who rose on little but their last name, they choose not to do so. There are many reasons for that, related to Lebanon's peculiar political system and its precarious domestic peace—but one key reason is that the families themselves have proven incredibly politically flexible.[53]

In retrospect, the Cedar Revolution can be seen as a precursor to the wave of popular uprising sweeping Middle East from late 2010. However, rather than

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[49] Jad Chaaban, "The Impact of Instability and Migration on Lebanon's Human Capital", in Navtej Dhillon and Tarek Yousef (eds.), *Generation in Waiting. The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East,* Washington DC, The Brookings Institution, 2009, p. 122.

[50] *Ibidem.*

[51] E.g., in May 2008 the opposition forces stormed the capital and neutralized pro-government armed group. During the same month, Beirut was the theatre of intra-sectarian violence between Sunni and Shiites.

[52] Kaldor Mary, "Cosmopolitanism and Organized Violence", Paper presented at the "Conceiving Cosmopolitanism" conference, Warwick, United Kingdom, April 27–29, 2000.

[53] Kenner David, "How Lebanon Dodged the Arab Spring*", Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2013.

unifying the country against its powerful neighbor, Hariri's assassination polarized it more starkly.

Since 2005 the cards have been reshuffled; as Lebanon is 'in the middle of a showdown' between Iran and Syria on the one hand, and most of the international community on the other hand[54], these unlikely alliances changed the face of the power composition—giving way to a more complex and diverse one.[55]

Sectarianism is far from being in decline. Karim Knio speaks of neo-sectarianism where "it is clear that 'old/new' cleavages that characterize Lebanese politics is omnipresent". He points out that "behind the simplistic and short-term distinction between an anti- and a pro-Syrian camp lies a clash of a multitude of different Lebanese national projects tailored around the interest of every sect respectively".[56] Fawaz Gerges, however, disagrees with the one-layered depiction of Lebanese politics.[57] He notes that "far from being sectarian-based or driven, the power struggle in Lebanon is multi-layered and complex. Sectarianism is used and abused to mask vested interests and differences".[58]

At any rate, Lebanese, like Arab youths have abandoned traditional ramblings for legitimate demands: economic opportunities, political freedom, and an end to corruption and regime exclusivity.[59] Sadly, the time is not ripe yet for Lebanese youth to put these 'legitimate demands' ahead of their sectarian and political affiliations.

While noting that the masses remarkably and unprecedentedly rallied around a common cause, their identification remained sectarian, and when leaders diverged, so did the youth.[60] This divergence can be attributed to the construction that the different groups are a threat to each other's existence, which in turn is hampering progress toward a common goal and identity.[61]

However, that may be, Lebanese youth is dynamic, and there is hope for continued effort at the individual, societal, and state levels. Grass-roots level's initiatives are contributing to a positive transformation of society and the social infrastructure seems much more receptive and capable of supporting some patterns of change.

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[54] Corm Georges, *Le Liban Contemporain, Histoire et Société*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005, p. 21.
[55] Smayra D. (2013)
[56] Knio Karim, "Lebanon: Cedar revolution or Neo-Sectarian Partition? ", *Mediterranean Politics*, 10 (2), 2005, p. 226.
[57] Smayra D. (2013).
[58] Gerges Fawaz, "Lebanon is Staring into the Abyss. Whatever the Tribunal into the Death of Rafik Hariri Decides, It Will Pour Petrol on Lebanon's Raging Fire", *The Guardian*, 31 December 2012.
[59] Smayra D. (2013).
[60] *Ibidem.*
[61] *Ibidem.*

The most difficult task, however, is for the youth of Lebanon to liberate themselves from the grips of traditional sectarian and feudal leaders, and to recognize that their interests are intertwined.[62] Participation and empowering are two of the main key-points that eventually will help Lebanese youth achieve that.

Empowering Youth

The importance of empowering youth lies within the intrinsic impossibility to empower the whole "community". Since the community is not free from conflicts and disparities, empowering some members would mean relatively dis-empowering some others. As a consequence, the main problem is the identification of the less powerful groups within the community, and of the best strategy to reach them and bring them forward, considering the fact that they sometimes may not have the skills to participate spontaneously.[63] Even more important in the establishment of a youth network is the creation of a *new* vision and the removal of the old *wasta.* This way, Lebanese youth will have the possibility to choose a long-term vision that is shared, mutually reinforcing and interdependent.

The only way to start this process is through a bottom-up approach, until leaders are convinced that there is no way of turning back or a safer long-term alternative. This includes participation not only as a means of social inclusion[64], but participation as a transformation, a process which modifies and changes the relations of power that objectify and subjugate people, and which leave them without a voice.[65] In certain (rare) cases, micro-level projects somehow succeed in triggering a broader political and social transformation that enables the marginalized population to claim and progressively obtain their full integration in the social and political systems.

These radical, empowerment-based, grassroots, bottom-up participatory approaches once regarded as alternatives to the previous model of 'modernization-as-development'[66] are now considered the new orthodoxy[67]. The 'scaling out and

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[62] Smayra D.(2013).

[63] Piffero Elena, *What happened to participation?*, Bologna, Emil Odoya, 2009, p. 45.

[64] Participatory approaches are considered by their supporters as the solution to link—at least potentially—imminent with immanent development: the dynamics of empowerment at the project level would potentially spread on a broader scale, ultimately leading to a bottom-up socio-political movement which could promote social justice and ultimately democracy in the countries where such participatory programs were initiated (Hickey Samuel and Mohan Gilles, *"Towards Participation as Transformation: Critical Themes and Challenges"*, in Hickey S and Mohan G. (eds.), *Participation: from Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring new Approaches to Participation in Development*. Zed Books: London New York, 2004, pp. 3-24).

[65] Cornwall Andrea, *Making a Difference? Gender and Participatory Development*, IDS discussion paper n. 378, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, 2000, p. 26.

[66] Friedmann John, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*. Blackwell: Cambridge, 1992.

scaling up'[68] of participation, up to spheres such as policy formulation which were previously precluded to any form of popular involvement, clearly suggest, that what was once an alternative approach to development should now be largely accepted as the 'norm'. Once 'empowered' as a consequence of this assumption of responsibility, the re-baptized stakeholders could supposedly initiate a process of political and social transformation which would eventually integrate them in the social and political system, ensuring for them the enjoyment of full citizenship rights and enabling them to take part actively in the national decision-making and in the allocation of governmental resources.[69]

Youth Policies in Lebanon

In Lebanon, three public departments are involved in the field of children and youth: that of National Education, with primary, secondary and post-secondary schools; the Department of Social Affairs in child protection and crime prevention concerning young people under 18; and the Youth and Sports Department, the main public representative for youth since 2000. Therefore, youth policy is defined as being inter-sectoral and centralized within ministries.[70]

About 100 associations work in the field of youth. An association's action is not dependent on the authorities. Nevertheless, the religious community of origin can help the association to develop its activities. Associations, which work within a multi- or non-religious environment, face more difficulties to develop activities (financing, location, recognition of public and religious authorities). The topics dealt by NGOs vary and many of them are based on multi-religious projects. Some of those topics are public health (prevention of addictions and AIDS); prevention in open spaces (street work) and organization of summer camps; education on democracy and human rights; tutoring; environment; youth leaders' training; citizenship education; humanitarian action, etc. There is no national council for youth; however, the Lebanese state has recognized the Youth Shadow Government as having such a role. The funding of Lebanese NGOs' activities often depends on foreign solidarity loans, mostly from the European Commission, world organizations, embassies and private foundations.[71]

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[67] Henkel Heiko, Stirrat Roderick, *"Participation as a Spiritual Duty; Empowerment as Secular Subjection"*, in B. Cooke, U. Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny*. Zed Books: London New York, 2001, pp. 168-184.
[68] Gaventa John, "The Scaling up and Institutionalisation of PRA: Lessons and Challenges"*,* in Blackburn J. and Holland J. (eds.), *Who Changes: Institutionalising Participation in Development*. Intermediate Technology Publications: London, 1998.
[69] Hickey Samuel and Mohan Gilles, "Relocating Participation within a Radical Politics of Development", *Development and Change*, vol. 36 n. 2, 2005, pp. 237–262.
[70] Rarrbo Kamal, "Studies on Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries. Lebanon", *EuroMed Youth III Programme*.
[71] Rarrbo Kamal.

With the lack of a comprehensive national youth service program, youth-related initiatives in Lebanon are primarily implemented by CSOs and international organizations.

The **Youth Shadow Government** (implemented by the Nahar al-Shabab Organization)[72] is a good example of good practices. The Youth Shadow Government is a youth organization that mimics the Government of Lebanon. It is made up of approximately 30 students, each of whom serves as the shadow minister for the corresponding ministry in the actual government. The shadow government conducts studies, makes policy recommendations and meets with the adult ministers[73]. The Government of Lebanon recognizes the institution in place of a Higher Council of Youth and has implemented a lower voting age (18 years old) at the recommendation of the shadow government.

Universities in Lebanon are also engaging students in civic participation opportunities. For example, Université Saint-Joseph's **Opération 7ème Jour** (Operation 7th Day) program engaged university students, faculty and staff in service activities providing immediate assistance to the population of South Lebanon following the 2006 War. Since 2006, Opération 7ème Jour has transformed from an emergency relief effort to a large-scale development program with activities across Lebanon. Working closely with CSOs, government agencies and local authorities, the program has continued and expanded its solidarity activities, managing development and health care initiatives in an even larger geographic area, with contributions from faculty and students from every academic discipline.[74] The program received a second-place award from the Talloires Network MacJannet Prize for Global Citizenship in 2009[75].

Another international project, the **Youth and Municipalities project**[76], funded by USAID and implemented by the Green Hand Organization, provided young people from 10 villages in the Aley region of Lebanon with training in good governance and civic skills such as lobbying, transparency and accountability.[77]

Finally, worth mentioning is a US-led international program, the **Youth Civil Society Leadership** IREX[78] Program (YCSL) which promotes activism among youth leaders to address corruption and promote good governance in Lebanon. Youth aged 18 to 25 identified critical governance issues and worked to increase

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[72] http://naharashabab.wordpress.com [Arabic. Accessed February 2013].
[73] http://www.ndi.org/lebanon [accessed March 2013].
[74] http://www.icicp.org/lebanon [accessed April 2013].
[75] http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork/?pid=308&c=83 [accessed March 2013].
[76] A one time project.
[77] http://www.icicp.org/lebanon[accessed April 2013].
[78] http://www.irex.org/project/youth-civil-society-and-leadership-program-lebanon-ycsl-0 [accessed December 2012].

the transparency and accountability of community leaders. For this project, IREX partnered with the Lebanese Transparency Association.

Together, they identified and supported youth leaders across seven of Lebanon's most violence-affected regions. These young people in turn, implemented focused, community-level projects that inspired youth activism and supported anti-corruption initiatives.

The program has mobilized stakeholders to advocate for increased local government transparency and accountability through specific awareness-raising, information-gathering, and government-monitoring projects. The initiative engaged youth across ethnic and religious boundaries through collaborative projects that brought youth from diverse backgrounds together to learn about effective leadership and good governance[79].

Youth Participation in Lebanon

Youth between 15-24 years old comprise approximately 18% of Lebanon's overall population, and 28% of the workforce[80]. Their participation in the political sphere, however, is limited by the Lebanese Parliament's continued rejection of a bill to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18[81].

Potential candidates for government positions must also wait until they turn 25. Political and confessional divisions dominate both the political and media spectra, which many youth see as detrimental to the Lebanon's long-term social and economic development.[82]

A complete survey of all the NGOs actively working with youth-related programs in Lebanon is beyond the scope of this study. Here are highlighted some of the most visible Lebanese organizations that were founded after 2005 (and not necessarily as a consequence of the Cedar Revolution) by young activists, and who work specifically to promote policy programs to bridge sectarian/ethnic/religious divides.

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[79] Likewise, the World Bank Country Office selected **Youth in Governance** as the theme of the **Lebanon Development Marketplace (LDM)** in 2006. The main themes were: Elections and youth parliament; Accountability and transparency on a national level; Accountability and transparency on a local (municipal) level; Empowerment in political parties; Empowerment in student councils; Anti-corruption network; Publications and media outreach; Youth in civic education; Youth and political participation; Youth and human rights; Youth and economic governance.

[80] http://www.escwa.un.org/popin/members/lebanon.pdf [accessed April 2013].

[81] http://gulfnews.com/news/region/lebanon/lebanon-s-parliament-rejects-lowering-voting-age-1.587272 [accessed March 2013].

[82] http://www.bridging-the-divide.org/countries/lebanon [accessed December 2013].

South-driven initiatives such as the independent newspaper *Hibr*, seek to build public awareness on critical social, economic, environmental and public-interest issues. **Hibr.me** is a large-scale alternative media outlet in Lebanon that is powered by young people from around Lebanon and crossing all class, sect, political, regional, and other divisions. Hibr publishes online and in print (20,000 copies published monthly and distributed around Lebanon), and organizes a variety of events and workshops. *Hibr* regularly conducts trainings in new media tools (open source and social media/Web 2.0 tools), citizen journalism, journalism internships, creative/collaborative problem solving, critical thinking, and information & media literacy (IML). It is powered by young people while engaging all communities in Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora community worldwide, and most content is licensed under a Creative Commons license to facilitate non-profit sharing of whatever information and content it creates.

Hibr works to foster a strong sense of community engagement, critical observation and critical thinking, and independent content creation on critical issues. People at Hibr believe that everybody can be and should be a contributor to the media, and works to empower and support non-professional 'citizen' journalists to contribute stories, information, ideas, and observations.

Other young Lebanese activists have formed youth movements using social media technology to organize and increase their network of followers. **Youth for Tolerance** (Y4T)[83], for example, is a non-religious, non-political NGO that works to promote a culture of tolerance that will result in respect, acceptance and appreciation of religious and political diversity in Lebanon, as well as in a better inclusion of all socially marginalized groups.

Youth for Tolerance works specifically with young people (ages 16 to 22) who are usually in the process of defining their identity. This is a no easy task in a country like Lebanon with a highly complex political, religious and social landscape. The differing opinions of some 17 religious sects and numerous political parties have prevented an agreement on even the most basic cornerstones of society, such as a unified narration of the country's modern history.

The political events from 2005 until 2011 (political assassinations, the Cedar Revolution, inter-sectarian and intra-sectarian armed conflict, international intervention and radical politics) have sent confusing messages to Lebanese youth. The situation started becoming critical after the war between Israel and Lebanon/ Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 and the post-conflict radicalization in Lebanese politics. The violent confrontation in the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr el Bared in

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[83] http://youthfortolerance.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=6 [accessed February 2013].

the summer of 2007 between the Lebanese Army and fighting factions inside the camp complicated the picture even further. The years 2008 until 2011 carried with them a series of internal fights and political paralysis with the cabinet being either dissolved or ineffective for a significant percentage of time.

In such an environment, Lebanese youth are at risk of defining their identity through devaluating others (which leads to intolerance), and/or excluding and dissociating themselves from others (which leads to radicalization and lack of dialogue).

Y4T's trainers visit classrooms with modules that are different from existing curricula and projects in many ways. They do not focus on covering a large amount of information, but are interactive and use role-playing techniques to allow full participation of the youth. They thus create a space to initiate ideas, reflect, interact, and engage in critical discussion. The educational modules are based on well-developed theories about and techniques of conflict resolution, communication and negotiation.

The three main aspects of Y4T projects are:

Training Youth: Through a series of workshops the students learn about types of conflicts, conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation, and dialogue and tolerance. These modules address 16-22 year old students in an interactive way, including role-play and psychological ploys that bring out hidden assumptions.

Promoting Youth Interaction: Y4T carries out projects that bring youth from different social and religious backgrounds together. For example, by organizing a summer camp in which the topics of the educational workshops (conflict and conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation, and dialogue and tolerance) are further explored. The camp program is a mix of entertainment and interactive role-plays that are meant to reveal biased belief-systems and bring out unspoken ideas.

Increasing Awareness through Media Campaigns: Together with students and new-graduates from the audio-visual field, Y4T runs a continuous campaign to spread the message of tolerance to youths (and others) from all social and religious backgrounds in Lebanon. The campaign includes a series of TV-spots, as well as documentaries on tolerance and a helpful guide for conflict resolution.

Unite Lebanon Youth Project[84] is a non-profit organization that promotes tolerance, respect, and awareness building amongst the youth of Lebanon from varying backgrounds to transform lives and achieve sustainable change. By instilling in children, youth and community members democratic values, free

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[84] http://www.unitelebanonyouth.org/index.php?section=2 [accessed March 2013].

expression and equality, the project aims to reach a specific end: creating one united Lebanon. Its programs aim to bridge the gaps and break down the barriers created by many years of conflict and isolation. Chief among its programs are the BRIDGE and the Frame by Frame for Peace programs.

The BRIDGE program provides underprivileged Palestinian students in Lebanon comprehensive guidance and education scholarships through its extended network of donors, higher education institutions and scholarship funds. In 2012/13, the BRIDGE program was able to provide 60 Palestinian students with full scholarships to universities in Lebanon and abroad. The BRIDGE program includes a growing list of universities and donors to provide even more scholarships for Palestinian students to attain higher education goals.

The Frame by Frame for Peace program is a result of a pilot ULYP successfully launched in 2012. It is designed to address the animosity among the youth living in Lebanon by bringing them together to produce short documentaries. ULYP hopes to instill in the youth the values of compassion, acceptance, respect, responsibility and mutual understanding, in the time required to acquire the skills of documentary film making. An added benefit of this program is teaching the participants tangible skills and exposing them to new means of expression, all while giving them access to technology and media development programs.

Lebanese Active Youth (LAY)[85] is a non-profitable non-governmental entity, founded for the youth of mid-Bekaa in March 2011, headquartered in Barelias. LAY was established with an ambitious agenda to 'develop the world's greatest youth sector'. From humble beginnings the organization has grown from strength to strength, working with hundreds of people within the sector toward their professional development. Our vision is that the people of the society of Mid-Bekaa accept each other without religious and political discrimination.

LAY organization is a youth leadership initiative that trains local teens to be community leaders and community organizers who, in turn, train other local teens to be leaders and organizers in their own neighborhoods. It is committed for the best interest of the community, through emphasis on youth as the main community assets, promotion of human rights, and administering society development, through participatory anti-political anti-religious approaches. LAY works on projects that focus on specific themes, ranging from civic participation and volunteerism to leadership development through activism. LAY also works through multi-programs that are designed in a community organizing framework; it focuses on building youth leaders, building youth relationships and building youth power. Youth will learn leadership and community organizing skills such as meeting facilitation,

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[85] http://lebaneseactiveyouth.wordpress.com/ [accessed April 2013].

engaging in campaign work, relational meetings, and power analysis and research actions. The programs' goal is to build youth power in Lebanon and beyond and to strengthen the local community by tackling specific, winnable issues. For the long run, though primarily designed for youth, some programs will also work to enable high-school teachers, community leaders, and staff of non-governmental organizations to participate as well. The program is designed to integrate civil thinking and work education through daily life by providing knowledge and the mechanisms that push them to be active in such work, as well as imparting the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights which will foster the attitudes and behaviors needed to uphold human rights for all members of society. LAY programs will create an effective model that helps participants to gain a stronger sense of civic responsibility; establish relationships with others of different ethnic, religious, and national groups.

Conclusion

Sectarianism is undoubtedly part of Lebanese politics; as part of identity politics, since 2005, it has been fused with new political labels. Traditional politics in Lebanon have always been focused on sectarian identities, and sectarianism had long been institutionalised—under the Ottoman Empire, the French Mandate and since independence. In Lebanon, authority is not centralized.[86] Authority is distributed amongst precincts defined by sectarian lines.

The Lebanese are divided. There are the Lebanese who follow their communities of sects and who have renewed their pledge of allegiance to the leaders of their sects; and a few others—especially among youth—who are striving for an identity that goes beyond their sectarian affiliation. Nevertheless, despite the initial enthusiasm that characterized the young population during the 2005 uprisings, Lebanese youth did not entirely emulate their Arab neighbors in "standing up against socio-economic development as well as political injustices. Instead, sectarian mobilisation continues as a manifestation of segregation, underdevelopment and manipulation."[87] The popular revolutions taking place in the Arab world demanding democracy cannot be compared to and do not conform to the political and social conditions in Lebanon.[88] The populations rebelling today in the Arab World are homogenous to a great degree, unlike the heterogeneous Lebanese society.[89] A political and an electoral reform (based on proportional representation) are among the first priorities to be implemented in order to partially undermine the problem of sectarianism.

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[86] Smayra D. (2013).

[87] *Ibidem*.

[88] Abbas H., "The Lebanese 'Secularist' Movement in the Shadow of the Arab Democratic Movements", *Perspectives. Political Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East*, No.2, May 2011. Also published in *Dar al Hayat*, March 18, 2011

[89] *Ibidem*.

Some highly optimistic voices suggest that—even though the central government in Lebanon is so paralyzed that sects have taken up the role of the state in the provision of services—at this time promoting and strengthening volunteerism within civil society will result in engaging youth and emerging voices in addition to maintaining a good solidarity spirit in the coming period.[90] In the face of regional changes down to the Syrian conflict (and Hezbollah's open participation in the conflict), perceptions of identity threats are more than ever on the agenda and arise every time one sectarian party sees its interests threatened.

The Cedar Revolution experience is not entirely to be dismissed. The role played by youth during the uprisings, their use of communications technologies and firm conviction in keeping the protest non-violent, showed that strong aspirations for truth, equality, justice, and accountability are still massively present in Lebanon.

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[90] Al-Zubaidi Layla. "In the Wake of Arab Revolts: Women's Rights in the Balance. Interview with Hanan Abdel Rahman-Rabbani", 9 April 2011, *Perspectives. Political Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East*, No.2, May 2011.

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