

THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR AND THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON UNTILL 1990, AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A GUERRA CIVIL LIBANESA E A INTERVENÇÃO SÍRIA NO LÍBANO ATÉ 1990, UMA PERSPECTIVA ALTERNATIVA
LA GUERRA CIVIL LIBANESA Y LA INTERVENCIÓN DE SIRIA EN EL LÍBANO HASTA 1990, UNA PERSPECTIVA ALTERNATIVA

Jamal Wakim¹

ABSTRACT

This article argues that, contrary to mainstream liberal school claim, Syria did not act as a destabilizer of the Lebanese confessional system which led to the breakdown of the system and to civil war between 1975 and 1990. Rather, the Syrian regime, driven by the interests of the Damascene bourgeois class closely associated with the transit trade between Beirut and the Gulf region via Damascus, chose to contain the crisis and rehabilitate the confessional system which is a system of hegemony that hinders class struggle to the benefit of the Lebanese mercantile bourgeoisie.

KEY-WORDS: Hegemony. Mercantile Class. Maronites. Druzes. Shiites. Sunnis.

RESUMO

Este artigo argumenta que, ao contrário da alegação da escola liberal dominante, a Síria não agiu como um desestabilizador do sistema confessional libanês, o que levou ao colapso do sistema e à guerra civil entre 1975 e 1990. Em vez disso, o regime sírio, impulsionado pelo interesses da classe burguesa damascena intimamente associada ao fluxo comercial entre Beirute e a região do Golfo via Damasco, escolheu conter a crise e reabilitar o sistema confessional que é um sistema de hegemonia que impede a luta de classes em benefício da burguesia mercantil libanesa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hegemonia. Classe Mercantil. Maronitas. Druzos. Shiitas. Sunitas.

RESUMEN

Este artículo sostiene que, contrariamente a lo que afirma la escuela liberal dominante, Siria no actuó como un desestabilizador del sistema confesional libanés, lo que llevó al colapso del sistema y a la guerra civil entre 1975 y 1990. En cambio, el régimen sirio, impulsado por los intereses de la clase burguesa de Damasco estrechamente asociados con el flujo comercial entre Beirut y la región del Golfo vía Damasco, optó por contener la crisis y rehabilitar el sistema confesional, que es un sistema de hegemonía que impide la lucha de clases en beneficio de los libaneses burguesía mercantil.

PALAVRAS CLAVE: Hegemonía. Clase Mercantil. Maronitas. Drusos. Shiitas. Sunitas.

On April 13, 1975, a group of the Christian Phalange party ambushed a bus loaded with Palestinians in the narrow streets of Ayn Al Rimmaneh, triggering the Civil war in Lebanon between the predominantly Christian parties, members of the Lebanese Front, and the Leftist parties under the banner of the Lebanese National Movement. This war lasted for fifteen years, only to end in 1990. It proved to be one of the longest wars in the twentieth century, and involved many parties, whether Lebanese, Arab or international including Lebanese Christian, Muslim, secular nationalist, and leftist parties, The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and other Palestinian groups, Syria, Israel, the

United States, the ex Soviet Union, Iran, and many other regional and international powers. This served as a pretext for many Western, Arab, and Lebanese scholars and politicians belonging to the mainstream liberal school to claim that the civil war was "the war of others on the soil of Lebanon, triggered by foreign intervention which affected the precarious political system based on many confessions.

LIBERALS BLAMING SYRIA FOR THE COLLAPSE OF LEBANON!

This trend presumed that Lebanon was the refuge of the Levantine minorities from the oppression of the Muslim state which dominated the region, whether this state was the Umayyad, Abbasid, Ayyubid, Ottoman, etc. A major argument for the mainstream trend was that Lebanon was a magnet for the persecuted sects like the Druze, the Maronites, Shiites, Syrians, Assyrians, Greek Orthodox, etc.¹ Confessions were part of the Levantine tradition.² Some scholars considered that sectarianism was due to the diversification in the geographical area of Lebanon consisting of regions isolated one from the other.³ Hence the social structure consisted of small communities that were centered on villages, each having its own norms and traditions. This promoted kinship, family ties and sectarian bonds.⁴ The argument goes on as to say they that for centuries, the sects were isolated in their villages and towns and were hostile to any form of change as they felt endangered by such change.⁵ That is why they considered that this prohibited the emergence of a unified history of Lebanon and promoted the emergence of separate communities' cultures.⁶

This geographical diversity that was translated into a multiconfessional society made Lebanon a conflict prone country typical of the Middle East. This fact generated conflict that lasted for centuries among groups that lived next to each other. For thousands of years, no indigenous power was able to politically organize the region,⁷ that was why the Lebanese society was exposed to deep divisions and was fragmented by its tribal structure.⁸ As being a society fragmented along religious lines, and to a lesser extent along ethnic, regional and socioeconomic lines,⁹ the Lebanese republic was "artificial and archaic, built on shaky demographic and political foundations", and as a result was doomed to be destroyed by the domestic and external pressures on the political system.¹⁰

The mainstream school considered that Lebanon was first founded by the Maronites on Christian ethos which made the country live "in harmony and equality regardless of their religious faith."¹¹ In 1920, when Akkar, Tripoli, Beirut, Saida, the South and the Bekaa were added to Lebanon, a huge Muslim population was added to the predominantly Christian region of Mount Lebanon. A side effect is that it resulted in the discord between the Maronite culture and the culture of the heterogeneous population that was integrated into greater Lebanon.¹² Hence, it was difficult to name a political culture more divided along traditional lines as Michael Hudson argued.¹³ The scholars of the

© Rev. Práxis e Heg Popular	Marília, SP	v.5	n.7	p. 141-157	Dez./2020	eISSN 2526-1843
-----------------------------	-------------	-----	-----	------------	-----------	-----------------

dominant paradigm based their analysis on this fact to explain the pluralistic nature of the Lebanese state. Sects were politically important because they were traditionally the primary social organizations through which political security had been maintained against the oppression of the central government.¹⁴

Then for the liberal school, the Lebanese confessional system was the ideal political system in the Middle East. So, why did it collapse in 1975? The blame was laid on the Arab-Islamic culture represented by the intervention in Lebanese Affairs by Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser (ruled 1952 – 1970), the PLO, Syria under Hafez Assad (ruled 1970 – 2000), or Iran under the Islamic Revolution (1979 – present time).¹⁵ Few of them would lay the blame also on intervention by the United States and Israel.¹⁶

Syria would also have its share of accusations of being responsible for the Civil War in Lebanon and for Lebanon's instability, economic stagnation, and military occupation. Naomi Weinberger considered that the consolidation of power in Syria under Hafez Assad in the early 1970s was bound to “regard Lebanon as central to its sphere of influence”.¹⁷ She saw that there was no other state than Lebanon that was more critical to Syria’s regional ambitions. The presence of the PLO on Lebanese soil increased the importance of Lebanon for Syria.¹⁸ Same applied for Dilip Hiro who considered that the suppression of the Palestinians in Jordan and the coming of the Baath party to power in Syria had a deep impact on Lebanon.¹⁹ This was coupled with the effects of the Arab Israeli struggle and the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war, which had a deep impact on stability in Lebanon.²⁰

Marius Deeb also blamed Syria for the civil war in Lebanon. He saw that “the Alawi regime in Syria never had any intention to make peace with Israel, because perpetuating the conflict in the name of Arab Nationalism gave it legitimacy and kept it in power.”²¹ As Syria was unable to wage a major war against Israel, it had to conduct a low intensity conflict with it through proxies in Lebanon. That was why Syria kept Lebanon in “an artificial domestic conflict” and at war with Israel. Deeb claimed that since 1980 there was consent among Lebanese Christians and Muslims to end the Civil War, to call for the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon, and to put an end to the cross-border fighting with Israel. However, it was Syria, the PLO, and later on Iran through the “terrorist” Hezbollah, which prevented the reconciliation among the Lebanese. Failing to mention any socioeconomic reasons for the civil war in both his books he said that since 1974, Syria was waging a war against all attempts at ending the Arab-Israeli conflict.²²

COUNTER-ARGUMENT

Very few people tried to challenge the mainstream Liberal school by emphasizing the role of socio-economic factors in the break-up of the Lebanese confessional system.

Mahdi Amel, a sociologist and member of the Communist party assassinated in 1987, challenged the idea that confessions were stagnant and unchanging social organizations. He considered that the confessions of the 18th and 19th century were different from that of the twentieth century,²³ noting that the Ottoman state was a religious state based on the Sharia law and the Millet system which was totally different from the confessional system in Lebanon in the 20th century.²⁴ Amel saw the confession as the political relationship of dependence of the lower classes on the upper classes, and the confessionalist system as the political system based on confessions as political institutions.²⁵ It was only during the period of independence that the confessional structure, set during the days of the mandate, was reinforced, and it was during this time that the confessions became institutionalized and got its own rules and regulations, and even became integrated into the state itself.²⁶

As for the reasons of the civil war Amel said that Lebanon was given the role of financial intermediate between the imperialist powers and the region of the middle East. This led to the development of the service sector and the collapse of the productive sectors.²⁷ The Lebanese system was manipulated by two elites, a bourgeoisie that had the upper hand and feudal landlords who ranked second in the system.²⁸ The confessional structure was based on the survival of the pre-capitalist production relations. This explained why vast lower and middle classes would join the Lebanese right in its struggle against the leftists. On the other hand, the feudal landlords acted as an upper bourgeoisie which diverted the struggle from being a class struggle to being a confessional one.²⁹ Another dimension of the war was that it made part of the imperialistic attack on the region which targeted the Lebanese national movement and the Palestinian revolution.³⁰

Salim Nasr considered that the Civil War resulted from the crisis of the Lebanese financial capitalism.³¹ Najib Hourani considered that the Civil War arose from “the tensions and conflicts within the Lebanese financial sector with the onset of petrodollar-driven financial globalization.”³² He pointed out that the dynamics of the war were determined by the competition between two financial networks, One associated with the Kata’eb Party and President Amin Gemayel (r 1982 – 1988), and the other associated with the Lebanese-Saudi billionaire Rafiq Hariri. This competition ended in a financial collapse in 1989, leading to the collapse of the Kataeb network and the ascendancy of the Hariri dominated one.³³

The Civil war in Lebanon is best explained by the fact that Lebanon is one of the tribal ethnic states where the elite or elites, in collusion with foreign powers, set a set a political hegemony based on tribal ethnic conflict in order to hinder class conflict, which in turn, hinders the primary conflict which is based on gender contradiction.³⁴ Communalism establishes a set of bonds between members of the upper class and lower classes that marginalizes the social inequities.³⁵ Gender represents a fundamental form of hegemony in the world, yet it is only in tribal ethnic states that gender discrimination represents the primary basis of rule.³⁶ In such states, a paramount chief and his kin and

associates establish their hegemony over society. Lower classes belong to other tribes, ethnic communities, or confessions. As a result, tribal ideologies are used to disguise class conflict, which would in turn disguise the conflict between men and women, who occupy the lowest strata in the society. Oppressed men in this case yield support to the system as they are given a higher status than women. Even oppressed women yield support to the system as they try to enjoy higher influence through their kinship with men that may be influential in the system. In a tribal ethnic hegemony, in order for the state to survive, it tries to include the elite of all ethnicities or communities in a super grouping and link them to the ruling elite or party. On the international level, the elite of these states try to get the protection of a foreign super power, and the openness to more than one superpower or regional power transforms the country into area of international or regional conflict.³⁷

HISTORY OF LEBANON UNTIL THE CIVIL WAR

The formation of Lebanon as a political entity as Mahdi Amel says was deeply related to the penetration of what he calls world capitalism into the region. Mount Lebanon and the city of Beirut were integrated into the world market since the 17th century through commercial exchange as it started to export cocoons, silk olive oil and other agrarian products and import manufactured wares. This led to the formation of an indigenous Bourgeois class concentrated in Beirut and dependent of Western French capital. Then, Lebanese capitalist class was “characterized by extraversion which means external orientation, dependence and underdevelopment.”³⁸ The agricultural sector was reoriented to agro-export production destined for export. Local crafts were devastated and industry was placed on path of weak development. In addition, an economic commercial-financial, and communication-transport infrastructure was created by European-Lebanese capital to service the European economies rather than promote economic development in the country.³⁹

The economic penetration of Europe into the region brought an improvement in the socioeconomic and political situation of the Maronites and other Catholic- Christian capitalists at the expense of Druze feudal landlords who had ruled southern Mount Lebanon for centuries. The idea of a greater Lebanon was promoted by French interest groups.⁴⁰ The French heavily invested in the Port of Beirut to be their gateway to the Levant, as Saida and Tripoli were dominated by a Sunni bourgeoisie deeply attached to the Ottomans.⁴¹ The mercantile elite in Beirut, had no interest in developing the economy of the countryside. Yet, it needed to keep this countryside away from the metropole. Hence, Communal culture was promoted to hinder class struggle, and Confessionalism was institutionalized to serve the interests of the mercantile class. No wonder that one of the figures theorizing for Lebanon as being a haven for interaction between various

confessions representing many cultures, was no other than Michel Chiha who was himself a prominent figure of the mercantile class.⁴² This led to the uneven development in agriculture, a weak industrialization process, and an extended and dependent tertiary sector. This led to Lebanon's chronic crises including unemployment, increasing socio-economic inequalities, large-scale emigrations, and vulnerability towards foreign influences.⁴³

Under the auspices of the French Mandate, and based on the precedence set under the Mutasarriyah regime established in Mount Lebanon (1861 – 1915), confessionalism was institutionalized with the formation of the new Lebanese republic in 1920. Since 1922 elections, the mandate authorities set a confessional distribution of the seats in the newly formed parliament according to the size of each community. At the same time the French authorities aborted the formation of lists based on non-sectarian alliances or political parties.⁴⁴ In 1936, the treaty of between the Lebanese president Emile Edde and the French authorities institutionalized the confessional formula by stating the 6 x 5 formula which gave 6 parliamentary seats to the Christians to every 5 parliamentary seats to the Muslims. by that time the Sunni mercantile bourgeoisie accepted to get integrated to Lebanon after 2 decades of resilience. Decree 60/lr stated for the first time the appointment of the Lebanese mufti organizing the Sunnis along confessional lines similar to the Maronites. This was followed by the formation of the Muslim National Council (Majlis Qawmi Islami) in 1936.⁴⁵

After independence in 1943, the role of Lebanon as a mercantile state was reinforced especially in the 1950s when president Camille Chamoun (ruled 1952 – 1958) tried to weaken the grip of the Feudal landlords in rural areas and strengthen the international service economy. Arab oil money flowed into Lebanon during this period and instigated the investment in the tertiary sector whose share rose from 62 percent in 1950 to 70 percent in 1970. The same applies for the investment coming from western countries, especially from France. While the tertiary sector was booming, agriculture was suffering and was never able to meet the needs of the Lebanese population, despite the fact that two thirds of the Lebanese population lived on agriculture. Industry was underdeveloped and limited to food industry and textiles, and the economy as a whole was controlled by nearly one hundred families of financial bourgeoisie and quasi-feudal or political bureaucratic elite.⁴⁶

The brief Civil war of 1958 was mainly caused by internal tensions generating from the attempt of Chamoun to limit the grip of the feudal landlords on the rural areas, increase the margin of action of mercantile capital, and extend his presidency to another term. To divert the conflict from being class-based, the state reverted to confessional polarization. This happened at a time of major regional reshuffles generating from the rise of Egypt's influence under Nasser, and the retreat of the influence of Great Britain and the Hashemites of Iraq who were ousted from power by a revolution in July 1958,

which led to US military intervention in Lebanon and Jordan to ensure that no similar thing happened in these pro-WEST Arab countries. The conflict ended with the election of the commander of the Lebanese Army Fouad Chehab as president (ruled 1958 – 1964) under the auspices of United States on one Hand and Egypt on the other hand. A new understanding was established between the mercantile bourgeoisie and the feudal landlords, while endorsing limited policies to accommodate the rural population.

Chehab wanted to gain a certain autonomy for the state of the grip of the traditional leadership by adopting limited state interventionism in the economy. Yet his plans were hindered by the feudal landlords, and by the mercantile bourgeoisie.⁴⁷ During his presidency the banking sector grew from 7 banks in 1943 to 93 in 1964. This did not benefit the country as a whole as Beirut did not become a true financial center where short term capital was invested in other sectors as to become long term capital. The capital flow and its concentration in a tiny group led to the rise of monopolies throughout the country. The modest attempts of reform were reversed during the days of Charles Hilou (ruled 1964 – 1970). Due to the chronic crisis of the agricultural sector, 18 percent of the population of the south moved in the 1960s to the suburbs of Beirut where they lived in urban slums. As industry was also given little attention by the elite, it was too weak to absorb the growth of the working power.⁴⁸ This led to a decline of 54 percent in food production per capita between 1950 -1952 and 1973-1977. By 1970, the share of the service sector in the NNP was of 73 percent, while the agriculture share fell to 9 percent of the NNP. The share of industry remained at 18 percent. 30 percent of the population totally depended on agriculture, 26 percent depended on industry, while 45 percent depended on the service sector. By 1975 40 percent of the rural population had migrated to the cities to live in dire economic situation, while the economic growth fell down to zero percent.⁴⁹ The same period saw the rise of the Sunni and Shiite bourgeoisie, especially with the flow of the oil money, and the accumulation of wealth by Lebanese diaspora in Africa.⁵⁰ All these factors had put the Lebanese economy, and as a result the political system in the country, on the verge of collapse. Regional and international pressures served as a catalyzer rather than being the main reason for the collapse of the system represented with the break up of the Civil War in 1975.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYRIA UNTIL 1970

The theory of tribal ethnic state also applied to the case of Syria. While Lebanon was witnessing a good level of political stability during the 1950s and the 1960s, Syria was witnessing a high level of political instability that was best expressed in the successive coup d'Etats that hit the country from 1949 to 1970, year of the coming of Assad to power. This political instability, was the result of external interference in the affairs of Syria, best revealed by the book of Patrick Seale "the struggle over Syria", but

© Rev. Práxis e Heg Popular	Marília, SP	v.5	n.7	p. 141-157	Dez./2020	eISSN 2526-1843
-----------------------------	-------------	-----	-----	------------	-----------	-----------------

were also motivated by a high level of social mobilization since the days of French mandate. The French who imposed their mandate in 1920 after the collapse of the ottoman empire, tried to instigate conflict among various sects in order to justify their presence.⁵¹ Considering that the rural areas were passive and indifferent to politics, the French authorities tried to control Syria by controlling the cities, and by isolating the rural areas from the urban ones. They did not imagine that the resistance to their rule would start in the countryside. As Michael Province argued the great Syrian revolt between 1925 and 1927 against the French mandate started in the Druze area of Hauran in south Syria, and spread to Damascus and other parts of the country. As Province says, this revolt was a mass movement that was based on the axis of the grain trade between Hauran that produced wheat, and the damascene merchants that used to buy this grain. The rebellion led to the elaboration of a pan-Arab Syrian national identity.⁵² To confront this revolution, the French not only reverted to harsh military measures, but also relied on the upper damascene class.⁵³ If the alliance between the middle ranking Druze notables of Hauran and the merchants of Damascus led to the elaboration of a Syrian national identity deeply linked to Arab nationalism, it was the upper damascene bourgeoisie that was able to negotiate a withdrawal of the French from Syria in 1946, based on the relationship that gathered the two sides during the Syrian revolt. This explains the reason for the bitterness that dominated the relationship between the leaders of Hauran and the Syrian successive government since the independence of Syria.

During that time, the Alawites started to mobilize and to enter into the political scene in Syria. The French mandate tried to gain the support of the minorities based on its policy of playing on sectarianism to justify its presence in Syria. This led the French authorities to favor the Alawites, Christians, Armenians, Circassians, and other minorities. This explained why a high proportion of the army soldiers and officers belonged to minority groups.⁵⁴ As Batatu argues: “The rise of the alawis was due to the policies pursued under the French mandate which saw the creation of rurally based entities, infiltration of army and bureaucracy of members of the rural groups belonging to the heterodox confessions.”⁵⁵ The coup d'etat of 1966 saw the rise of the officers from rural areas, mainly Alawites to power. The 1966-1970 was a transitory period that saw a re-alliance between the army controlled by officers of rural areas with the Damascene bourgeoisie. Actually, the Assad regime led economic policies that favored the interests of the Damascene merchants. This explains why the regime permitted these merchants to raise the size of the imports from 1.72 billion pound in 1975 to 3.63 billion in 1976, and to 4.17 billion in 1980, a fact that resulted in the merchants withdrawing their support to the Muslim brotherhood that was fighting the regime.⁵⁶

INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF THE CIVIL WAR

Despite the fact that the Civil War had a regional and international dimension, however its primary dynamics driven by socio-economic upheavals. As previously

mentioned, the Lebanese confessional system had been heavily polarized due to economic recession that hit the country since the mid-1960s. In addition, petrodollar and immigrants' capital had started to claim its share in Lebanese economy and confessional system. The war was mainly a systematic terror waged by confessional parties financed by Lebanese capitalists to subdue the middle and lower classes (working class). This is what explains violence directed mainly against the slums that evolved around the Palestinian camps and around the cities. The aim was to redraw the borders of each sect as to rehabilitate the confessional system to the favor of the capitalist mercantile class.

In reality, the Civil War did not start on April 13, 1975 when a Palestinian bus was ambushed. It rather started in Saida in February 1975 when the Lebanese army fired on a demonstration of fishermen protesting against giving monopoly for Protein Company whose CEO was the former president of republic Camille Chamoun, leader of the right wing Ahrar party. The incident resulted in the killing of former member of parliament Marouf Saad who was leading the demonstration, and few demonstrators. Battles ensued in the city leading to the withdrawal of the Lebanese army and security agencies.⁵⁷ The incident of Ain Al-Rimmeneh was also driven by class struggle dynamics, pitting the right-wing Phalange Party, its founder being inspired in 1936 by the Italian Fascists, against the Palestinians who were treated as an undercast and source of cheap labor. Then the chain of events was directed in a way to secure a Christian dominated region by directing violence against predominantly Muslim poor slums and Palestinian Camps in Karantina, Nabaa, Jisr Al-Basha, Tel Azaatar, etc. It was also directed against Christian members of the nationalist communist, and leftist parties.⁵⁸ By 1977, the right-wing Christian parties, supported by the Maronite monastic order, were able to establish a predominantly Christian canton stretching from Berbara village, 48 kilometers north of Beirut, to Ashrafyeh in Eastern Beirut, which was between 20 and 30 kilometers wide. This process was directed and ran for the benefit of the Christian bourgeois class as argued by Hourani.⁵⁹

The Druze confessional leadership followed suit and drew the borders of confession between 1982 and 1984. After the Israeli invasion of the country in 1982, the Druze mountain saw rising tension between the population and the Lebanese Forces who had in mind to extend the Christian Canton southward. A massacre was committed in October 1982 against Druze civilians in the village of Kfarmatta, who were actually greeting the newly elected president of republic. The Druzes, supported by the Syrians and Palestinian factions, benefitted from Israeli withdrawal in Summer 1983 to launch an attack against the Lebanese Forces which culminated in their victory and the withdrawal of the Lebanese Forces and Lebanese army from the mountain. Then systematic massacres of Christian civilians occurred in many villages of the mountain, leading to a mass exodus of the survivors to the predominantly Christian dominated canton.⁶⁰ By Spring 1985, Jumblatt was able to delimit the borders of Druze area cleansed of any

Christian presence. Then he turned his attention to subdue the non-abiding Druzes belonging to non-sectarian parties by assassinating hundreds of them.⁶¹ The whole process fitted the interests of Jumblatt, representing the interests of the druze bourgeoisie.

Once the Christians and the Druzes Bourgeoisie drew the borders of their confession, it was time for the Shiite Bourgeoisie led by Nabih Berri, a son of a wealthy Lebanese emigrant to Sierraleone to draw the borders of the Shiite confession. After February 1984, a systematic wave of intimidation and sporadic assassinations against Christian civilians in west Beirut and its southern suburbs forced the majority of the Christian civilians to forsake their properties and seek refuge in the Christian canton. Then it was time to drive a wedge with the Sunnis by attacking the cross-confessional Murabitoun whose membership consisted of 45 percent Sunnis, 45 percent Shiites, and 10 percent Christians. Then the war against the Palestinian camps followed in 1985. Though it was driven by PLO, Syrian competition over influence in Lebanon, however it served to drive a wedge between Shiites and Sunnis, as the attack was led by Shiite Amal against the predominantly Sunni Palestinian camps.⁶² Then it was time to subdue non-abiding Shiites by assassinating many members of leftist and nationalist parties including Mahdi Amel, Hussein Mrouweh and others.

The end result was also drawing by default the borders of the Sunni confession. By 1988, the borders of the Lebanese confessions were drawn and the confessional system was rejuvenated on equal shares between Christians, Shiites, and Sunnis, while the much smaller Druzes served as a balancer of the system. Now it was time to revive the banking and tertiary sector and the role of Lebanon as a financial center. Rafiq Hariri emerged as the representative of the new capital invested in Lebanon merging French Capital and Petrodollar capital.⁶³ This explains how this Saudi sponsored Lebanese businessman became Prime Minister of Lebanon between 1992 and 1998, then between 2000 and 2004 before being assassinated in February 2005.

THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CIVIL WAR

The socio-economic factors in Lebanon were leading to a crisis. The mounting monopolization of wealth in the hands of few, and the worsening conditions of the majority of the Lebanese population was doomed to lead to a crisis. The Lebanese left allied itself to the Palestinians Since the 1973 assad started to look towards Lebanon, during the april 1973 crisis in Lebanon he seiled the border with Lebanon and put a condition to open it to silence the critics to his regime in Lebanese media, and forbid his opponents from acting through Lebanon and a commission was formed to supervise this. Control of Lebanon was necessary in view of the preparations for the October war.⁶⁴ After the October War Sadat to drift away from the policy set during his predecessor's time and laid a policy that would culminate later in a separate peace treaty with Israel. Hence it became instrumental for Syria and the PLO to join forces. By then the plo enjoyed

acknowledgement and received arms from the ussr and subsidies worth 42 million dollar a year from the oil producing countries. By then the socio-economic factors reached a point of no return as the situation became explosive with frequent demonstrations among students, and workers of the middle and lower middle classes. It should be noticed that the war in one dimension was due to the discord between various regional and international powers, with local powers acting as agents to these powers, however in another dimension it was also a war of the elites against the masses or what can be considered as terror of state.

Assad considered that the civil strife in Lebanon was instigated by the US to cover up for the Sinai agreement between Israel and Egypt. After the meeting between Assad and Murphy, Syria started to distance itself from the Lebanese left. Assad only let the PLA and the Saiqa intervene in Lebanon in order for things not to go out of his control. Some analysts related this to an American approval of a Syrian intervention in Lebanon with Israeli consent.⁶⁵ Assad feared that Israel might attempt to extend its hegemony over Lebanon through its alliances with some Christian factions. In addition, he feared that the confessional conflict might affect stability in Syria itself.⁶⁶ Syria succeeded in containing the situation by early 1977 which encouraged Assad to propose an amendment of the confessional system through the constitutional document, proposing parity and equality between Christians and Muslims. However, the failure of the Geneva peace talks and Sadate opting for a separate peace with Israel led to a first invasion of Lebanon by Israeli troops in 1978. Meanwhile, Israel encouraged its allies, the Phalange party and other Christian groups to launch a war against the Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon. This led to the 100 days war in Summer 1978.⁶⁷

In 1981 Ronald Reagan became president of the United States (ruled 1981 – 1989). He rushed into increasing the tension with the Soviet Union and its allies. This was taken advantage of by Israel which planned to invade Lebanon, oust the PLO, and help elect its ally Bachir Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese Forces Christian militia as president of republic and sign peace with Lebanon.⁶⁸ The Israeli invasion started on June 6, 1982. Within few days Israeli troops had reached the outskirts of Beirut laying siege on it for 3 months. By mid-August, the PLO had withdrawn from Beirut to Tunisia, and few days later Bachir Gemayel was elected president of the republic. However, on September 14 he was assassinated, and the Lebanese Forces, assisted by Israeli troops committed a massacre between September 15 and 18 in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila costing the lives of thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.⁶⁹

This had led the United States to direct involvement in the Lebanese conflict by sending troops alongside France, the United Kingdom, and Italy in support of Amin Gemayel, brother of Bachir, who was elected president after the latter's assassination.⁷⁰ Reagan wanted to promote peace between Lebanon and Israel to isolate Syria and impose a resolution of the Arab-Israeli struggle to Israel's favor.⁷¹ Syria reacted by relying on

Soviet on one hand, and on its alliances in Lebanon, especially with the Druzes under Walid Jumblatt leadership and Shiites under Nabih Berri's leadership, to launch a counter offensive.⁷² In 1983, the Druzes and their allies, with Syrian support, were able to defeat the Lebanese Forces and the Lebanese Army in the battle of the Mountain.⁷³ Meanwhile, Israeli losses were mounting which made them withdraw to the South. This was taken advantage of by the Syrians and their allies to launch a final attack on Beirut in February 6, 1984. This tilted the balance in Lebanon back in Syria's favor, which forced the multinational forces to withdraw from Lebanon, and Amin Gemayel to cancel the peace treaty with Israel and form a government headed by Syria's ally Rachid Karame.⁷⁴

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union initiating a chain of events that eventually led to the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Socialist bloc in 1989, and the Soviet Union itself in 1991. This paved the way for US freedom of action in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. This had made Assad worry for losing the Soviet support which would tilt the balance in favor of Israel.⁷⁵ This made him enter into terms with the Americans, support them in the war against Iraq in 1991 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and accept their terms for a peace conference with Israel in 1991. In return, the Americans accepted to come to terms with him in Lebanon, sharing influence with Syria and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon which culminated in ousting the rebel General Michel Aoun from the republican palace in Baabda in October 1990, and ending the Civil War in Lebanon.⁷⁶

SYRIA SPONSORING THE REHABILITATION OF THE CONFESSIONAL SYSTEM

The Syrian regime was a secular nationalist one, yet the Syrian leadership had favored alliances with confessional parties over non-sectarian nationalist or leftist ones. Despite the fact that there was already a Lebanese Baath Party headed by Assem Kanso and affiliated with Syria, yet the Syrians preferred to rely on Sectarian parties. Between 1975 and 1977, they were allies of the right-wing Christian parties like the Phalange Party, Ahrar, etc. Some analysts argued that this was due to the alliance of leftist parties with the PLO. However, the Syrians did not rely on other parties not affiliated with the PLO like the Baath Party-Syrian faction, the Syrian Social National Party, etc. After 1978, when the Christian parties turned against Syria, many leftist parties started to mend fences with the Syrians. Yet the latter favored a strong relationship with the confessional groups like the Shiite Amal and Druze PSP.

Regarding Syrian attempts to contain the situation and resolve the crisis in Lebanon, all efforts revolved around amending the confessional system rather than replacing it with a secular non-confessional one. In 1976, the Syrian leadership endorsed a "Constitutional Document" initiative (Wathiqah Dusturiyah), which proposed minor amendments to the confessional system in Lebanon with a Maronite President of republic,

a Sunni Prime Minister, and a Shiite Speaker of Parliament, with equality between Muslims and Christians in the Parliament, and equitable distribution of posts in state offices.⁷⁷ This was followed by a Summit between the Lebanese President and the Syrian President in Damascus declaring the dawn of a new Lebanon.⁷⁸ In December 1985, the Syrians sponsored another attempt to resolve the Lebanese Civil War by gathering in Damascus the leaders of various confessional parties, namely Elie Hobeika representing the Christian Lebanese Forces, Nabih Berri, representing the Shiite Amal Movement, and Walid Jumblatt, representing the Druze PSP party. An agreement was signed between the warlords representing the confessional parties, and was known as the Tripartite Agreement (Itifaq Thulathi). This agreement was similar to the constitutional document of 1976 in distributing the posts evenly among sects, while transferring many prerogatives of the President of Republic to the government.⁷⁹

The Third attempt was in September 1989, when Lebanese Lawmakers gathered in Taif in Saudi Arabia with full Syrian and US blessing and signed an amended constitution which would be called the Taif Agreement. The terms of the agreement were but the same as the constitutional document of 1976 and the Tripartite Agreement of 1985.⁸⁰

The reason why the Syrian leadership opted for rehabilitating the Lebanese confessional system rather than replacing it with a secular one was mainly due to the fact that the Syrian regime under Assad chose to accommodate the interests of the Damascene mercantile bourgeoisie by letting it benefit from the transit trade coming from the Port of Beirut via Damascus in direction of the Gulf region. As aforementioned, the Beiruti mercantile bourgeoisie in majority, came in the 19th century from Damascus or Aleppo and the Lebanese mercantile bourgeoisie was closely associated with transferring western capital into hinterland Syria and the Levant. Hence, common interests were strongly forged between the Lebanese and the Damascene bourgeoisie highly influential within the Assad regime. That was the major factor that made the Syrian leadership choose to accommodate the interests of the Lebanese mercantile bourgeoisie by help protecting its interests as it served as a gateway for Syrian economy through the Damascene mercantile class. That was the reason why Syria chose to help rehabilitate the confessional system meant to protect the interests of the mercantile bourgeois class in Lebanon. Another reason was that the Lebanese leftists did not pause as a plausible alternative to the system as they themselves chose to link themselves to a faction of the mercantile class by allying themselves to Druze confessional leadership which would be a topic for future research. Finally, it is noteworthy that Syria did not have freedom of action in Lebanon, as other regional powers enjoyed alliances and influence in this country, which would also explain why the Syrians did not opt for a radical change of the system in Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

© Rev. Práxis e Heg Popular	Marília, SP	v.5	n.7	p. 141-157	Dez./2020	eISSN 2526-1843
-----------------------------	-------------	-----	-----	------------	-----------	-----------------

In conclusion, this article argued that Syria under Assad was mainly a system of hegemony based on a partnership between the army controlled by officers from rural areas closely associated with the interests of the rural population, with the Damascene bourgeois class whose interests were preserved through a window to Beirut Port. This port prospered since the 19th century as a financial center and gateway of French and western capital to the Levant, with Damascene and Aleppan bourgeois families settling in the city and becoming the core of the Lebanese mercantile bourgeois class in the 20th century.

The latter, wanting to ward off the pressures by Lebanese rural and poor population reverted to adopting confessionalism as a system of hegemony to hinder class struggle and ensure its predominance and protect its interests. The developments during the 1960s and early 1970s led to economic recession and mounting pressures from the working class represented by the middle and poorer classes to claim their economic and political rights. This was politically expressed in the fact that people from middle, poor, and rural classes extensively joined non-confessional nationalist and leftist parties. The Lebanese bourgeois class retaliated by directing violence against the poorer classes via the Christian right-wing parties between 1975 and 1977, the Druze PSP led by Walid Jumblatt between 1982 and 1984, and the Shiite Amal Movement between 1985 and 1988. Once these classes got subdued to the confessional system, the bourgeois class rehabilitated its role through the leadership of the Saudi sponsored Lebanese businessman Rafiq Hariri.

Contrary to the mainstream liberal school argument, Syria played a pivotal role in rehabilitating the Lebanese confessional system. Driven by the interests of the Damascene bourgeoisie, the Assad regime had an interest in rejuvenating a system of hegemony that fitted the interests of the Lebanese bourgeois class which was in partnership with the Damascene bourgeoisie, noting that many Lebanese bourgeois families were originally either Damascene or Aleppan.

¹ Dilip Hiro: *Lebanon Fire and Embers, a History of the Civil War*. (New York: St Martin Press, 1993) p. 1.

And Itamar Rabinovitch: *The War For Lebanon, 1970-1983*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1984). p. 18.

And Marius Deeb: *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). p 1.

And J. Abraham. *The Lebanon War*. (London: Praeger, 1996). p. xi

And Farid El Khazen: *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2000). p. 131.

² Samir Khalaf: *Lebanon's Predicament*. (New York: Columbia University press, 1987). p.115.

- ³ Charles Winslow: *Lebanon, War and politics in a Fragmented Society*. London: Routledge, 1996. p. 6.
- ⁴ Salibi, Kamal: *a house of many Mansions, the history of Lebanon reconsidered*. I.B.Tauris & co ltd, London, 2nd edition 1989. p.29.
- ⁵ Corm, Georges: *Geopolitique du Conflit Libanais*. (Paris: La decouverte, 1986). P. 59.
- ⁶ Ibid, P. 68.
- ⁷ Charles Winslow, Op.Cit, pp. 3- 6.
- ⁸ Fouad Ajami: *The Arab Predicament, Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). p.5
- ⁹ Naomi Weinberger: *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: the 1975-76 Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). p. 5.
- ¹⁰ Itamar Rabinovitch: *The War For Lebanon, 1970-1983*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1984). p. 17.
- ¹¹ Bassem, Khalifah. *The Rise and Fall of Christian Lebanon*. (Toronto: York Press, 2001). pV.
- ¹² Ibid. p. 21.
- ¹³ Michael C. Hudson: *The Precarious Republic, Modernization in Lebanon*. New York: Random House, 1968. p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p 21.
- ¹⁵ Fouad Ajami: *The Arab Predicament, Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 13-19.
And Farid El Khazen: *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2000). 102 – 110.
And Marius Deeb: *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*. (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2003). p 1
And J. Abraham. *The Lebanon War*. (London: Praeger, 1996). p. xi.
- ¹⁶ Corm, Georges: *Geopolitique du Conflit Libanais*. (Paris: La decouverte, 1986). P. 143-144.
- ¹⁷ Naomi Weinberger: *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: the 1975-76 Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). p. 4.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Dilip Hiro: *Lebanon Fire and Embers, a History of the Civil War*. (New York: St Martin Press, 1993). P. 9.
- ²⁰ Ibid, p. 10.
- ²¹ Marius Deeb: *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*. pp.2-3.
- ²² Ibid. p 2-4.
- ²³ Mahdi Amel: *Fi Al Dawla Attaifiyyah*. (Beirut: Dar Al Farabi, 1989). p. 143.
- ²⁴ Ibid. p. 209-210.
- ²⁵ Ibid. p. 205.
- ²⁶ Mahdi Amel: *Fi Al Dawla Attaifiyyah*. (Beirut: Dar Al Farabi, 1989). P.19.
- ²⁷ Ibid. p. 179.
- ²⁸ Ibid. p. 226.
- ²⁹ Ibid. p. 210 - 212.
- ³⁰ Mahdi Amel: "Bahth Fi Asbab Al Harb Al Ahliyya Fi Lubnan". Dar al farabi, Beirut 1979. p. 131.
- ³¹ Nasr as quoted in Hannes Baumann, *The Causes, Nature, and Effect of the Current Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, January 2019, 1 -22. DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2019.15651782019, 2
- ³² Najib Hourani, *Capitalists in Conflict: The Lebanese Civil War Reconsidered*, Middle East Critique, 1 DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2015.1012842, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1012842>
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Peter Gran: *Beyond eurocentrism, A New View Of Modern World History*. New York: Syracuse university press, 1996. p. 11.
- ³⁵ Ibid, p. 140.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 193.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 194- 196.

- 38 Gates Carolyn: the historical role of Political Economy in the Development of Modern Lebanon. Center for Lebanese Studies. September, 1989. p. 6-8
- 39 Ibid, p. 8.
- 40 Firoo, Kais M. : inventing Lebanon, nationalism and the state under the mandate, (London: i. b tauris, 2003),. p.16 - 18.
- 41 Gates, Op.Cit, p. 13
- 42 Firoo, Op.Cit, p.33.
- 43 Gates, Op.Cit, p. 5.
- 44 Firoo, Op.Cit, p.127.
- 45 Ibid, pp. 151-154.
- 46 Gates, Op.Cit, pp.27- 32.
- 47 Petran, Tabitha: the struggle over Lebanon. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1987. p. 56.
- 48 Ibid, pp.59- 62.
- 49 Ibid, pp. 126 - 128.
- 50 Ibid, p. 120.
- 51 Michael Province: The Great Syrian Revolt, and the Rise of Arab Nationalism. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). P. 17.
- 52 Ibid, P. 21.
- 53 Ibid, P. 13.
- 54 Batatu, Hanna: Syria's peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables, and their Politics. Princeton University press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999. p. 145.
- 55 Ibid, pp. 155 - 159.
- 56 Ibid, p. 208.
- 57 Al-Nahar, Baadama Wadaahu Wafd Saidawi fil Soura: Al-Solh Yaamuru Bi Sahb Al-Jaysh, February, 27
- 58 Harb Lubnan, Harb Lubnan: Souwar, Watha'iq, Ahdath, (Beirut: Dar Al-Massira, 1980)
- 59 Hourani, Op.Cit.
- 60 Haliyat, Summer 1983, 196 – 200.
- 61 Yammine, George, 2006, Walid Jumblatt, Itizar Kalami La Yakfi, Al-Hiwar Al-Mutamadin, Al-Diyar 1989 at <http://www.addiyar.com/article/656825-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-4-1431989> (retrieved on July 5, 2020)
- 62 Kamal Dib, Umara Al-Harb wa Tujjar Al-Haikal: Khabaya Rijal Al-Aamal wal Sulta fi Lubnan, (Beirut: Al-Farabi, 2017), 485 – 488.
- 63 Hourani, Op.Cit.
- 64 Ibid, p. 292.
- 65 Ibid, p. 293 – 295
- 66 Chalala, Elie; "Syrian Policy in Lebanon, Moderate Goals and Pragmatic Means". Journal of Arab Affairs, vol. 4, no. 1, 1985, p. 70.
- 67 Wathaeq Al-Harb Al-Loubnanyah, 1978, 99 – 100.
- 68 Patrick Seal, Assad: Al-Siraa Ala Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, (Beirut: All-Prints, 1990), 599.
- 69 Jansen, Michael; "The Battle of Beirut, Why Israel invaded Lebanon?" p. 69
- 70 Bulloch, John; "Final Conflict, the War in Lebanon." p. 138
- 71 Drysdale, Alasdair and Hinnebusch Raymond: Syria and the Middle East Peace Process. p. 126.
- 72 Dickey, Christopher; "Assad and His Allies, Irreconcilable Differences". Foreign Affairs, vol. 66 automne 1987, p. 166
- 73 Saliba, Najib; "Syrian Lebanese Relations". P 155
- 74 Laurent Annie et Basbous Antoine: « Guerres Secrètes au Liban. », p.205.
- 75 Karawan, Ibrahim A.: "Arab Dilemas in the 1990's: Breaking taboos and searching for signposts", p.434.

- ⁷⁷ Al-Wathiqah Al-Dusturiyah declared by President Suleiman Frangieh, February 14 1976, Wathaeq Al-Harb Al-Lubnanyah, 1982-1983-1984, p. 253.
- ⁷⁸ Qimmat Frangieh Wal-Assad: Lubnan Jadid, Al-Nahar, February 8, 1976.
- ⁷⁹ The Tripartite Agreement, Haliyat Autumn 1985, Vol. 9, No. 40, pp 290 – 300.
- ⁸⁰ The Taif Agreement text at https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_tauf_agreement_arabic_version_.pdf

Recebido em 4 de abril de 2021

Aceito em 4 de abril de 2021

Editado em abril de 2021