Lebanon facing the Arab uprisings. Constraints and adaptation

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Introduction

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At the start of the Arab uprisings, Lebanon was facing a critical political situation: In January 2011, the Lebanese government collapsed after Hizbullah and its allied ministers had made the decision to resign. This act was the result of tension between the Shi'a Islamic party Hizbullah and the March 8 coalition on the one hand and the rival March 14 coalition, led by *al-mustaqbal*, the Saad Hariri-led Sunni party, on the other. One of the bones of contention between the two coalitions was the United Nations' Special Tribunal for Lebanon charged with investigating the 2005 assassination of then–Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The subsequent indictment of four Hizbullah militants required approval by the state, but the Shi'i party was ready to do everything in order to preserve its image, including overturning the government led by the late Hariri's son Saad. In June 2011, when the Arab uprisings spread across the Middle East and North Africa, Lebanon formed a new cabinet headed by Sunni politician Najib Mikati and dominated by Hizbullah. This small country in the Middle East was facing internal power struggles and seemed oblivious to the development of regional events.

In early 2011, however, simultaneously with the country's turbulent political events, several protests broke out in numerous cities in Lebanon. The protesters adopted the slogan of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, "the people want to topple the regime", but changed it slightly to "the people want to topple the sectarian regime" (Lebanon Wire 2011). The protests succeeded in bringing out only a small number of participants. They lacked strong coordination and consequently failed to have a major impact, including on the international media (Fakhoury

2011). During the summer of 2015, after a period of relative calm, the eruption of popular protests over the halt in garbage collection and of protesters calling for greater accountability of sectarian leaders echoed the protests in the region at large and gave a glimpse of the internal damage the Syrian crisis had caused. Besides the rift between the two main political coalitions, an even wider crack has opened up within a vivid civil society whose mobilisation spread because of a growing distrust of political leadership and produced a profound crisis in the political system. There are numerous internal and external hazards, but so far both the system and the society has managed to adapt.

In the field of social sciences, the 2011 protests in Lebanon (and Lebanon in general) did not make for "marketable news". Moreover, in the post-uprising period, scholars and analysts have increasingly focused on the regional dimension and attempts to find links and connections between the events of different countries and tried to understand why nobody was able to predict such major political changes. The role and the impact of the domestic dimension and the specific local features were strongly overlooked. The spasmodic need to find common explanations of the paths and trajectories of states in the Middle East has concealed the role of domestic politics, actors, and local decision making. One of the most investigated topics at the regional level has been the sectarian issue by means of a broader culturalist reading of the social and political process in the Middle East under the label of the whole region's "sectarianization" (Abdo 2013; Byman 2014). According to these scholars, a never-ending conflict between Sunnis and Shia was simply a "natural" consequence of this state of affairs. This view has unfortunately become an all-encompassing meta-narrative producing simplistic readings of the regional processes and, at

the same time, considering the role of domestic politics and actors to be irrelevant and giving room to pervasive geopolitical analysis.

This argument is of particular consequence to the case of Lebanon. Most of the analysis of that period, especially after the beginning of the civil war in Syria, has focused on Hizbullah's involvement in the war (Alagha 2012; Alagha 2014; Spyer 2012), the Syrian refugee problem (Knudsen 2014; Dot-Pouillard and Pesquet 2015), Lebanon's broader regional context (Heydemann 2013; Osoegawa 2013), or the role of the movements/parties that could affect the region's geopolitical circumstances – for example, Hizbullah, Salafist movements, Palestinian refugees, etc. (see Omayma 2008; Salloukh 2013; Rabil 2014). The impact of the war in Syria and more generally of the regional turmoil on Lebanon, however, is only a lens through which to observe how the state and society may adapt in order to cope with this situation (Di Peri 2014; Meier 2015b).

At present, the political scene in Lebanon is characterised by many constraints: a political vacuum caused by an inability to find agreement on the election of a new president; social mobilisation for waste management, which calls into question the accountability of decision makers; political bargaining between the two main political coalitions about the problems relating to the influx of Syrian refugees; and any other issue that can be politically divisive. All these constraints have revealed a picture of a country that cannot be reduced to being a mere proxy of Iran or Saudi Arabia. By contrast, the internal debate, the vitality of Lebanese political life, the multiplicity of its actors, and the variety of its topics – from women's rights to election laws – show a country in transition that displays a capacity for continuous adaptation. The actors' "path

of resilience" (their capacity to face the many dangers threatening the country) goes to the heart of the questioning that led to this volume. How do the various sectors of Lebanese society manage external and internal threats, and how did this management – which can sometimes appear chaotic and uncontrolled – result in a form of adaptation and resistance to the local and regional constraints?

Assuming that the domestic dimension is crucial in order to understand the resonance and impact of external issues, this book provides an intimate picture of the country after 2011. The picture is based upon micro-transformations occurring inside Lebanese society (at different levels and from various starting points, including communities, social movements, and the Lebanese Armed Forces) or by reflecting upon issues that, even if they have a regional impact, are analysed from the perspective of their influence on the domestic sphere (Hizbullah, Syrian refugees, consociational system, etc.). Lebanon's "exceptional" capacity to cope with a blurred and dangerous environment raises issues at the levels of identity, order, and the nation state. An examination of these issues forms the basis for the three main research questions in this book: What kind of identifications and identity resources do the actors' practices reveal? How do political actors and social groups re-order interactions and norms in order to cope with recent changes? And how does Lebanon's "nationhoodness" still make sense (or not) for actors with regard to their actions and state symbols?

New lenses for old problems

Thanks to empirically grounded research that delves into recent events, the book explores several dimensions of Lebanon's post-uprising "exceptionalism" from different angles in order to renew

perspectives on classical topics that include mobilisation, army, political movements, and refugees. At the core of those processes is the production of a collective identity that is currently affecting the entire region, which is worthy of exploration with respect to Lebanon as it covers most of the themes investigated in this volume. In so doing, we also acknowledge that Lebanon's socio-political trend can shed new light on developments and dynamics in the region.

The book's chapters focus on the post-2011 era in Lebanon and question history, at many levels, by proposing lenses at different scales through which to read historical facts and sectarianism in order to reshape the boundaries of society. All the chapters' narratives make sense and practices related to them for each case studied. The narratives can differ from the one to the next, they can have parallel discourses, or the practices can diverge. Furthermore, the facts on the ground will raise doubts about old categories, concepts, narratives, and common boundaries. To this aim, three main transversal "identity incubators" will be considered.

First of all, there is what we call "identity in practices". This label refers to personal, sectarian, or multiple belongings. Instead of identity, the notion of identification is more accurate to describe what we mean, as it underlines an ongoing process (Brubaker 2001). Beyond "sectarianism" (a term commonly used to explain the Lebanese context), social classes, regional belonging, and other identity factors play a crucial role, and class community (Picard 1985) may be useful to re-assess the situation that some groups are currently facing.

Secondly, there is a major issue that we identify as the "social order". It links identity with norms and values at the scale of a social community (groups) seeking to (re-)organise socio-political and

mental spaces (of movement to carry out actions). The theoretical frame can be linked with the (b)ordering or re-ordering processes currently going on at different locations and levels of society (Meier 2015a) and regarded as a way for people to fix or re-arrange interactions in order to cope with a changing situation (Syrian refugees, socio-economic constraints, political vacuum, Salafist threats, etc.).

The third "identity incubator" is the issue of nation fabrication – i.e. Lebanon's "nationhood" – and therefore its failure in both Lebanon and the Middle East, as revealed by the Arab uprisings and underscored by many commentators since the rise of the Islamic State organisation (Cheterian 2014; Daguzan 2015). How does "identity in practices" refer or relate to the state? In which narrative or ideology? After 2011, what kind of relationship exists between the state and (communal, class, regional, civil, or military) society? What about the nation today in Lebanon? "Nationhoodness" requires an examination of how people recognise themselves in the nation state: through classical symbols of the state (army, welfare, borders, or other institutions) or through the existence of powerful actors able to provide alternative identity structures (Hizbullah, Islamic or non-sectarian belonging).

The book is divided into two parts totalling seven chapters: "From identification to social (dis)order" and "From ordering to nationhood". Each chapter incorporates the three "identity incubators" mentioned above that are strongly interrelated and ultimately serve to counter the prevailing arguments used to describe Lebanon before and after 2011.

From identification to social (dis)order

The result of the Arab uprisings in Lebanon, especially after the outbreak of the war in Syria, is that they seem to have brought identities to the surface. At the levels of parties, groups, communities, neighbours, coreligionists, and others, the Lebanese have overcome many difficulties to transcend appurtenance and challenge old legacies. On the one hand, because of a sectarian reading of the regional context, the narrative of sectarianism has blocked the "identities in practices" with the skilful use of rhetoric and repertoires. On the other hand, by contrast, it has offered a stimulus to re-think and re-imagine a new social dis(order). The upheaval inside and between the parties and communities, as well as the transformations in some regions and disputed border areas, have effectively brought to the foreground those processes that contrast with the catastrophic reading of the Lebanese context and shown, instead, its flexibility and adaptability: its "path of resilience". This first part of the book, which resonates with the three "identity incubators", mainly discusses these processes of resilience at many different levels.

With a focus on the border regions, Lorenzo Trombetta argues that local actors in Lebanon have been playing a crucial role by ensuring the exceptional flexibility of the Lebanese system. By analysing three different cases, Wadi Khalid, Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh, the chapter presents how communities struggle to maintain social order in the midst of a precarious status, adapt their social interactions, and adjust their physical, cultural, and political spaces. It also emphasises that the concept of class community, beyond pure sectarianism, is able to describe the process of an elaboration of (local or supranational) identities by Syrians and host communities that goes beyond physical and mental borders.

Daniel Meier and Rosita Di Peri look at the Sunni community's paths of transformation and adaptability and focus on the post-2011 era in particular. The identity-building process, which led to the consolidation of Lebanon's Sunni community, especially after the end of the Civil War, and gave birth to the phenomenon of "Harirism", was challenged by the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005. From this moment on, Sunni "identities in practice" have emerged and underscored the crisis of "Harirism" – an entirely unexpected development in Lebanon. This shift paved the way for the rise of radical Sunni movements, such as that of Sheikh al-'Asîr between 2011 and 2013. These movements display a clearly antisystemic stance capable of altering the social order, challenging the Sunni community itself.

Another case of "identity in practice" is analysed by looking at Hizbullah, which is at the core of Francesco Mazzuccotelli's chapter. Here, the focus on possible dissent inside the Shi'i movement, especially after its involvement in the Syrian war, shows how Hizbullah's inability to listen to its internal disagreements can offer a fresh perspective to look at the party's political dynamics. Hizbullah is not a monolithic bloc but composed of multiple identities that can challenge the internal and the external social order and simultaneously have an impact on the nationhood consciousness.

From (re)-ordering to nationhood

The second part deals with the process of (re-)ordering that is affecting Lebanon as it faces new challenges and problems and how this process relates to nationhood via narrative or ideology. Ways of belonging can sometimes be identified through social mobilisation at the start of and during the Arab uprisings.

Myriam Catusse, Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, and Mariam Younes call attention to the concept of "sectarian shadow" as part of their reflection on identities during mobilisation. As a means to take distance with "identity in practices", the "sectarian shadow" underlines the nonconscious categories of thoughts strongly marked by sectarianism that continue to shape the social order, even among antisectarian groups of Lebanese citizens. It highlights the difficulties of going beyond those norms that bind together and rule actors' social lives in Lebanon.

One of the ways that the citizens of Lebanon have found to express their collective belonging and their concern for nationhood lies in the popular empowerment of the national army. This institution, as Vincent Geisser clearly shows, functions as a symbol during times of trouble and deep uncertainty and a means to discredit political and sectarian actors. This return to the state is also shaped by a professional communication sector in the army that plays a role in identifying it as a guarantor of civility, situated far above the corrupt political scene and able to come to the defence of citizens and state borders.

Another means to establish a link between social order and nationhood can be found in Estella Carpi's chapter, which explores the effect of humanitarian technocracy on the welfare state system. She explains how welfare regimes have been experienced across Lebanon in the wake of internal and regional displacements. Thanks to the example of Beirut's southern suburb in the aftermath of the Israeli bombing campaign in 2006 and the issue of Syrian refugees since 2011, she shows how the postwar internationalisation of local welfare has created a management crisis because of the cycle of prioritising new emergencies. But welfare and aid appear to pursue

differing social orders and curb cohesion and feelings of seamlessness, which generally define nationhood.

Finally, Are Knudsen's study of Lebanon's sectarianism in the face of the Syrian refugee crisis highlights the process of re-ordering national politics from another point of view. The lens of the state's non-camp policy with respect to the more than 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon reveals the chaotic political scene. The polarisation regarding the war in Syria provides an original tool to assess the contradictory visions of nationhood in Lebanon.

Towards new challenges

Between 2011 and 2015, Lebanon experienced a severe political crisis, one of the longer and more delicate ones since the end of the Civil War. Instead of falling into a new cycle of violence, this small country in the Middle East showed a rare, somewhat "unexpected" flexibility and capacity to adapt, especially considering the turbulent regional environment. This flexibility, however, is not without consequences: As the analysis developed by this book's various contributions points out, Lebanon, its institutions, and population have been directly affected by the transformations that occurred during this critical period. New protests erupted and new actors emerged to challenge the state and its institutions, while old confessional legacies have remained and become stronger. All these factors shape the boundaries of the identity fabrication process and their connections between the nationhood legacies, questioning the (re)production of the social order. This tendency is not something new in Lebanon, a country capable of reinventing itself even after violent and dramatic events.

However, despite the many ways that social actors have found to adapt to the challenging (local and regional) environment, Lebanon appears to be walking a tightrope. Its capacity to cope with several types of danger, which some describe as the power of the weak, can also be a trap, a sort of self-confident illusion. Playing with fire, as the sectarian leaderships seem to be used to doing by threatening and weakening state institutions as well as state legitimacy, may provoke unpredictable and unintentional results. While there is no doubt about the renewed or reproduced powers of the *zu'ama* (Kingston 2013; Cammett 2014; Salloukh 2015), the sprawling presence of sectarianism is something discussed by all of the authors in this book – whether in relation to garbage protests, the army, Syrian refugees, or humanitarianism – from the variable perspective of "identity incubators". This lens has been adopted to shed new light on actors' capacities at the scale of their daily life, in such changing times, as well as on the dynamic aspect of identity-building processes.

This volume has sought to illuminate a few visible (and some less visible) social processes at stake in Lebanon but concludes with the paradoxical result of mixed feelings: On the one hand, the state is constantly downgraded and its capacity to act threatened by powerful actors on the political scene. On the other hand, social actors seem to act as moral guardians of a sinking ship called Lebanon when they build new relationships between each other or with the old and new refugees. Many challenges remain and are immediately visible: electing a new president, setting up a new legislative electoral process, and more broadly re-legitimising politics in the eyes of the country's citizens. But the highest priority may be a return to normality. When abnormal times become "normal", what is taken for granted needs to be reshaped, rethought, and rebuilt together. Contrary to the end of the Civil War in 1990, the next step for Lebanon will be to put opposing

views of the nation and the state around the same table. Thus, there may be an opportunity to reconfigure the Lebanese Republic after the end of the war in Syria. Sadly, in any realistic scenario, this will only happen after a slow return to sectarian "business as usual", like what happened with the "national dialogue" gatherings after the popular protests of 2005 and the Doha Agreement in 2008. Therefore, the question is not whether another social movement will clamour for political leaders to be accountable or for the protesters to be represented in a new deal but when exactly this "second" uprising will take place.

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FIRST PART

From identification to social (dis)order

CHAPTER 1   'Willy-nilly we have to live side by side': Relationships between locals and newcomers at the Syria–Lebanon border

Lorenzo Trombetta

Introduction

Lebanon's social, economic, and political landscape is often described as one of the most unstable and fragile in the Middle East. However, since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in the spring of 2011, this system has unexpectedly shown a remarkable capacity to absorb the effects of the crisis. The massive influx of Syrian refugees and the prolonged status of war in Syria have indeed exacerbated the pre-existent domestic political and sectarian tensions in various regions in Lebanon, but the country still appears to be far from the brink of a new nationwide "civil war" (Thränert & Zapfe 2015).[i]

In contrast to the current narrative, I argue in this chapter that local actors in Lebanon – in particular those living in territories affected by the presence of Syrian refugees and physically close to war-torn Syrian areas – have been playing a crucial role to ensure the Lebanese system is exceptionally flexible (Trombetta 2014). There is a scant body of literature addressing the role of local factors in providing flexibility and longevity to the Lebanese system, especially at times of political and sectarian polarisation and the escalation of economic tensions.

Some of the more recent texts focus on humanitarian faults – particularly related to health care – that the Lebanese system has discovered in the reception of refugees (Khatib & Scales 2013; Parkinson & Behrouzan 2015). Naufal's work (2012–13) addresses the humanitarian issue while

it confronts the complexity of Lebanese political dynamics (Berneis & Bartl 2013). In particular, it analyses the official position regarding the conditions of refugees, the repercussions of the refugees' arrival on the sensitive balance of the Lebanese political system, and the mobilisation of national institutions and the wider international community. Van Vliet and Hourani (2015) stress that the living conditions of refugees inside Lebanon, as well as host–refugee relations, also point to continuities between the geographical areas of resettlement and their socio-demographic compositions. Other works analyse the feelings of the Syrians and the Lebanese towards the territory in which they live, as well as Syrians' perceptions of themselves as refugees in relation to citizens (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes 2013; Harb & Saab 2014; Saghiye & Shaykh 2015).

This study intends to contribute to the debate on the exceptionality of the situation in Lebanon, in contrast to the general tendencies currently at play in the region, which is afflicted by open conflicts that are fostered not only by regional and international rivalries but also by the outbreak of ancient rivalries at the local level. I intend to present here how communities struggle to maintain social order in the midst of a precarious status as they adapt their social interactions and adjust their physical, cultural, and political spaces.

In order to assess the role of a vast array of local dynamics, I have questioned primary and secondary sources on the relationships between Syrians and their host communities in the light of the increasing tensions that have emerged from socio-economic, political, and sectarian rivalries. The sectarian factor seems to strain some communities even more, even though, in other cases, sectarian homogeneity – in the sense of a collective belonging to the same confessional group –

appears to help mend the wounds caused by economic difficulties through nepotistic/client systems of labour.

The research reveals how, in many cases, the divisions among communities are recomposed in order for them to safeguard their common interests, which mainly relate to land resources and the maintenance of social peace (*silm al ahli*). Furthermore, local political and religious elites have been playing a crucial role in easing the tensions that have evolved over time as a result of socio-economic disparities, diverse community belonging, and conflicting political and ideological affiliations.[ii]

The exceptional Lebanese dynamics are also part of a wider framework of collective identity formation in the Middle East. The various communities in the region are now increasingly ready for action to compete for natural resources. Yet, their contrasts are portrayed as conflicts among disparate communities, allegedly with different identities that contradict each other. The juxtaposition of identities also occurs within Lebanese territories and is represented, on the one hand, by people who, like the Syrians, claim their belonging to "other" territories across the border, and on the other hand, by those Lebanese who rediscover their "Lebanesity" on this side of the border (Carpi 2015).

Nevertheless, as I will try to show in this study, Syrian and Lebanese communities living side by side develop local (often supranational) identities that go beyond the border. I argue that the shaping of these identities is essential in order for these communities to adapt to the new order, seek elements of continuity with the past, and throw symbolic bridges towards the future.

Methodology

This chapter is part of ongoing research that I started in Wadi Khalid between 2011 and 2012. In May and November 2011, and again in July and October 2012, I conducted several field assessments in the area, both as a reporter and as an INGO consultant. I was able to gather various kinds of information and perceptions from Syrian refugees, Lebanese residents, local and foreign humanitarian staff members, bus and taxi drivers, journalists, commoners, lawyers, representatives from local institutions (mainly *makhatir*[iii]), Lebanese military and police officers, and school principals. Most of the time, I collected information through informal conversations and a few semi-structured interviews. As for the secondary sources, I have turned primarily to monographs and articles focusing on local histories.

From the outset, the question at the core of my investigation concerned the relationship between local Lebanese residents and newcomers originating on the Homs plain on the other side of the border. Owing to the extremely tight geographical and historical connections between communities spread along the porous border, Wadi Khalid can be considered a special case if compared with other Lebanese areas affected by the overwhelming presence of Syrian refugees. The outcomes of my preliminary inquiries regarding the relations between local residents and newcomers likely would not have been representative enough to be extrapolated into a trend on the broader Lebanese scale. I have therefore widened the geographical scope of my research and chosen Tall 'Abbas in northern Lebanon and Marj al Khawkh in southern Lebanon as the other two key places to enrich my understanding of the main issue.

The fieldwork in Wadi Khalid was mainly conducted between 2012 and 2014, and I visited Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh over the course of 2015. Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh provide similarities with as well as variations to the situation in Wadi Khalid. In all three I had the chance to carry out my fieldwork through local contacts established beforehand. Both Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh are located quite close to the Syrian border but have a material relationship with the border that is very distinct from Wadi Khalid. The Syrian area just across the border from Tall 'Abbas is different from the area that is on the other side of the border next to Marj Khawkh. The demographic pressure in these two areas also has different characteristics than in Wadi Khalid. The political and sectarian geography differs between the areas of Wadi Khalid, Tall 'Abbas, and Marj al Khawkh, as do the geographical origins of Syrians who have sought refuge in the three villages.

Tall 'Abbas, where history is back

Tall 'Abbas (literally: the Hill of 'Abbas) is divided into two different areas: eastern (*sharqi*) and western (*gharbi*) Tall 'Abbas. The two sides are split along the Ustuwan River. Around 3,000 people (Feghali 2010, 91), mainly Orthodox Christians (91%), live in the town's western part, whilst the eastern side is inhabited by fewer than 1,000 people (Feghali 2010, 3:89), most of them Alawis (65%) and Sunnis (27%). One-third of the population of Tall 'Abbas – from both the eastern and the western sides – left the country during and after the civil war and now mainly resides in North and South America and in Australia. Like other villages on the 'Akkar plateau, Tall 'Abbas suffers from a lack of basic services for the population and perspectives for the youth. There is no geographical continuity between Tall 'Abbas and the Syrian hinterland on the

other side of the border. Nevertheless, the official 'Abbudiya border crossing is only a few kilometres away from the Hissa–Tall 'Abbas crossroad.

Demographic pressure is very high, as Syrians represent more than half of the current population: around 2,500 refugees out of 4,000 residents. The first Syrian families (Sunnis) arrived from the Homs region between 2011 and 2012. They entered Wadi Khalid and later moved around inside northern Lebanon. In 2013 the refugees who had reached Tall 'Abbas settled in a cultivated area on the edge of western Tall 'Abbas. A small landowner, a Sunni, rents out the land for almost $1,500 dollars per month, and every time the Syrian families struggle to bring in the agreed amount of money. The local communities, predominantly Alawite and Orthodox, seem to look at the Syrians with suspicion more for socio-economic reasons than for political and sectarian differences. Until 2014, although there were potential reasons for tensions because of the different political stances towards the Syrian crisis, the residents of Tall 'Abbas were mostly afraid that newcomers would get work in the fields and increase the crime rate and security problems. "We are a small community here. We all know each other. We don't know these Syrians. They say they are poor, but in their country they have houses and land. Do they want to expand here, too?" (Interview, Tall 'Abbas, May 2015), asks a small landowner in western Tall 'Abbas. He tells of robberies attributed to the Syrians and brawls among refugees in the nearby camp. "The [Lebanese Army] is now deployed near the village. I feel safer now", he adds.

Since the beginning of 2015, the presence of the army in areas close to the refugee camps has increased the pressure on Syrians refugees. Many of them in Tall 'Abbas have denounced the growing limitations on their daily movements. I saw how Lebanese soldiers at checkpoints often

prevent refugees from leaving the camp to go to work, to get to hospitals, to reach the nearest UN office, or to get to the Syrian embassy in Beirut when they need to renew their papers. In many cases, Syrians in Tall 'Abbas have been arrested at checkpoints or during army patrols. They have stayed at the army barracks for days without any formal accusation. They recount stories of violence and of physical and psychological torture[iv].

For their part, a few of the residents in Tall 'Abbas are complaining that the army came too late as they had been feeling under threat for a long time, "since the events (*al ahdath*) of [Nahr] al Barid [in 2007], when the terrorists took refuge here".[v] In fact, the story here has a much longer thread than the one rolled out from the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2012. "I remember well when, at the beginning of the [civil] war, the Palestinians came here… here where we are now, at our place!" recalls the small landowner. "They entered the house; they killed my uncle with rifle butts and beat my mother. We escaped. Until 2005 we could not go back because the entire area was occupied by the Syrians".[vi] Someone notes that Syrian people in the camp fled a military crackdown too, and that their houses were raided and in most cases destroyed. Many interlocutors in western Tall 'Abbas reply: "So what? The Syrians must go to Beirut. They shouldn't stay here! Why does our government always leave us to pay the bills? Where are our politicians? Why has the state forgotten us? Here we are in the trenches… we are now besieged and alone!".[vii]

In other cases, Christian residents in Tall 'Abbas admit they "don't want more Muslims here". A relative of the owner of the land where the refugee camp is situated confirms that the sectarian factor could play a role in shaping perceptions. "We have no problem with our Syrian friends. For us, there are no Syrians and Lebanese; we are all brothers. We understand each other because

we have the same rules of life… and sometimes we pray together." In nearby Tripoli, violent armed clashes have resumed between the Alawi-dominated Jabal Muhsin and the Sunni extremist Bab Tebbaneh neighbourhoods, echoing the war in Syria.

Despite this polarised context, in the area around the refugee camp in Tall 'Abbas there has not been any noteworthy episode of sectarian tension between Sunni refugees and the local Alawites and Christians. "As long as they do not go away, what can we do?" asks the small landowner in western Tall 'Abbas. "We cannot go to them and force them to leave…" The Lebanese Army's discriminatory attitude towards refugees has already played a significant role in urging Syrians to leave. However, many Syrian interlocutors have repeatedly emphasised that "there are no problems with the Alawites" (as such) in the area. For instance, an Alawite doctor from the nearby town of Hissa is well-known inside the Tall 'Abbas camp for seeing as many Syrian patients as he can. "We even make jokes with the doctor about the fact that we are Sunnis and he's Alawite", says one of the patients. Local political actors, representatives of the various Lebanese factions, expressed their intention to support reconciliation efforts in the area between Syrians and host communities. In the same vein, religious figures in Tall 'Abbas – both Christians and Muslims – have continuously been in favour of the mutual understanding of needs and perceptions of the newcomers and the Lebanese residents.[viii]

Wadi Khalid and its peculiar local identity

Wadi Khalid (literally: the Valley of Khalid) is an area located at the northeastern edge of Lebanon, and it looks like a hand whose fingers are caught in the plain of Homs. Geologically its hilly and flat territory is more similar to the adjacent land in Syria than to the mountainous

landscape of the 'Akkar plateau. This represents an important element both of continuity between the Wadi and the Syrian lands and of discontinuity between the valley and the Lebanese territories. Even if the only formal access road to Wadi Khalid at present is from 'Akkar, a traveller standing in Wadi Khalid can easily spot Homs's suburbs and the Krak des Chevaliers in Syria, while his view over Lebanon is completely blocked by the mountains behind him. For centuries, this area has been almost entirely neglected by the various authorities that have ruled the region. The beginning of the 20th century was the first time that Wadi Khalid was mentioned as an area "in the north of Lebanon" (Sulayman 2013, 1:10-19; Raunier 2011).[ix]

In June 2012 – after the arrival of the first massive waves of Syrian refugees in the area – eight places in the Valley were elevated to the status of municipalities (*baladiyyat*). Together, they subsequently formed the Union of the Wadi Khalid municipalities. At the same time, Wadi Khalid was granted the status of a Lebanese administrative autonomous entity inside 'Akkar. Until the last decades of the 20th century, the Wadi was *de facto* left outside communication routes linking Tripoli to Homs through the 'Abbudiya pass. For a long time, residents of the Wadi have been deprived of basic health services, too. Even the power grid and water are among the least efficient in all of Lebanon. During the first French attempt to draw a line separating the newly created Greater Lebanon and the rest of former Ottoman Syrian provinces from each other, there was no consensus among the Syrian and the Lebanese parts regarding the exact demarcation of the border in the Wadi Khalid area because of territorial continuity and the homogeneity of the two sides. In some cases, it was also difficult to say which local communities should be considered Syrian and which Lebanese (Khalife 2006, 31–36).

Traditionally in the Wadi there have been thousands of mixed families comprising both Syrian and Lebanese members. Only in 1994 did around 20,000 residents – mainly Sunnis – of the Wadi become naturalised as "Lebanese". They were allowed to retain their Syrian nationality. In 2011, the first waves of Syrian refugees fleeing violence in the adjacent Syrian Talkalakh district reached the Wadi. At the end of that year there were around 3,500 new Syrians in the area. By 2013 the number of newcomers would exceed 35,000. Most of them came from the entire Homs region, the northern Damascus countryside, and western Qalamun. Today, around 40,000 locals and almost 30,000 scattered Syrians populate the Wadi. From a political and sectarian perspective, there is no theoretical fracture between the two communities. Nonetheless and despite their common rural background, tensions rose as they competed in the same labour market sectors.

Smuggling activity, the only one that in the pre-2011 context was able to offer shared opportunities of income, was blocked following the border closure. In fact, Lebanese authorities agreed to seal the border during the 2012–13 joint military offensive between the Syrian government forces and Hizbullah in the Talkalakh–Homs–Qusayr triangle. For the first time in decades, the police and the Lebanese Army began to appear *en masse* in the Wadi, and the old Muqaybla fort that the French had built during the time of the mandate was renovated and turned into a military command post. Against this background, locals in Wadi Khalid have complained about the chronic absence of the state and its institutions. "It is no secret that for decades we have used the services offered by the Syrian state, just a few steps away, because we were not assisted by Lebanon", the mayor of Muqaybla said in May 2012. "We have never been considered Lebanese citizens in all respects, unlike those who live in Beirut or in Tripoli. We have been

forgotten and neglected." This is the most common refrain expressed by local residents in the Wadi.[x]

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the arrival of Syrian refugees and their stay in an underdeveloped area have caused tension between communities. The rivalries between Wadi Khalid and Talkalakh are not sectarian but rather economic. Syrian workers offer a cheaper labour force for construction sites and agricultural fields; they receive support from UN agencies and international organisations; they drive up prices of domestic heating fuel (*mazut*); and their children reduce the available space in the few schools of the Wadi and slow down school programmes because they are accustomed to different curricula.[xi] Despite these difficulties, representatives for *al-mustaqbal*, which enjoys its most extensive base of support in Wadi Khalid, have repeatedly called on the local elites to keep tensions low and smooth out the differences with the refugee community. Some key *makhatir* expressed the same feelings when asked about the call from the national political leadership to defuse tensions.[xii] Lebanese and Syrians in the Wadi have not yielded to the temptation of resorting to violence, even when the Lebanese Sunni extremist Sheikh Ahmad al-ʿAsîr arrived in Wadi Khalid accompanied by dozens of his supporters to address the crowd against the Syrian regime using explicitly sectarian arguments (Zuʿaytir 2012). It is a context in which both communities feel they have no choice but to stay together, and everyone tries to cope with the situation and improve their conditions. Some Lebanese have taken advantage of the presence of the refugees, while others complain that they are being penalised. Meanwhile, precisely because of the Syrian crisis, the Wadi seems to be receiving unprecedented attention from Beirut. In 2012, besides the arrival of the army, there was official administrative recognition with the creation of the municipalities of Wadi Khalid, and

local schools received symbolic support from the Ministry of Education (UNHCR 2014).

Marj al Khawkh, where continuity guarantees local peace

Marj al Khawkh (literally: Peach Meadow) is a fertile plain on the eastern side of Marjʿayun. The city is the capital of a district (*qada'*) that forms part of the Nabatiya governorate. The entire Marjʿayun area is geographically connected to the Hula plain in Israel, and it is surrounded by Mount Lebanon in the north, Mount Shaykh/Hermon in the east, and Mount Amil, which lies to the west. Orthodox Christians represent a majority (42%) of 10,000 inhabitants registered in Marjʿayun. Other relevant communities are Christian Catholics (19%) and Sunnis (17%), whilst the Shia are predominant in the area's western and southern countryside (Feghali 2010). During the Ottoman reformist period in the second half of the 19th century, Marjʿayun was elevated to capital of the district (*qada'*), but it remained cut off from the emerging axis of communication and commerce that increasingly had Beirut as its benchmark (Vulin 2000–01).

As it happened for other many areas in the Ottoman provinces of the Levant, Marjʿayun was *de facto* downgraded from centre to periphery during the territorial partition operated by France and Great Britain, a process started in 1916 and completed in the mid-1940s with the formation of the three national states of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. In this context, the city lost its geographical and socio-economic depth that for centuries had contributed to developing the region and giving prosperity to its elite. Since then, smuggling has been a routine activity for local traders to move goods and people across the mountain passes in the Hermon/Shaykh area 20 kilometres east of Marjʿayun. The Arab–Israeli wars and the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon (1978–2000) doomed Marjʿayun to be at the centre of an increasingly militarised territory, dominated by

Israeli, Syrian, and later Iranian proxies. Fifteen years after the Israeli withdrawal, the Marj'ayun area is still an incredible basin of human and water resources, as the Hasbani and Litani Rivers flow in its vicinity. Agriculture continues to be the sector that offers more job opportunities. There is a high rate of unemployment, and many young people have emigrated. At present, local development is entrusted to a few foreign INGOs and to *Jihad al Bina'*, Hizbullah's development wing. They have close relationships with local and national institutions through the Marj'ayun local council and the Ministry of Agriculture in Beirut (Vulin 2000–01).

Since the early 2000s, dozens of Syrian workers coming mostly from the region around Idlib have been living in prefabricated houses and shacks on the edge of the city in the plain of Marj al Khawkh. Between 2012 and 2013, with the escalation of violence in Syria, particularly in the region of Idlib, many families joined the workers who had remained in southern Lebanon, and hundreds of other families, mostly from the area of Abu Dhuhur, east of Idlib, moved to Marj Khawkh. (IRIN 2013). At the end of 2013, this informal camp expanded and had about 90 tents in addition to the existing barracks. Later, dozens of other families joined the camp: Most of them came from the Idlib governorate, mainly from Sunni conservative urban and suburban contexts. Other refugees are originally from Aleppo and Homs, and from Mosul in Iraq. Many of them were previously hosted in camps in the Bekaa Valley. Overall, the demographic pressure in the Marj'ayun area is not as high as in other places in Lebanon, and the informal tent settlement is located outside the inhabited area of Marj'ayun. Even before the arrival of Syrian refugees from Idlib, local residents had complained about scarce attention to their local situation from the central authorities in Beirut. At the time of this writing, there have not been any registered episodes of heightened tension between the refugees and the host communities. Hizbullah's

political influence is increasing in the area, and the party has sent clear orders to its local cadres to spend time and effort to defuse the tensions and preserve social peace (*as silm al ahli*).

In general, both the elite and the lower classes express an old feeling of being downgraded to the periphery. There is also a widespread feeling of being held hostage to external (armed) actors who have imposed their political and economic agendas on Marjʿayun and its surroundings. The memory of the Palestinian militias passing through, the subsequent Israeli occupation, and the "liberation", perceived as a gradual descent into Hizbullah's arms, is still fresh.[xiii] Although this view is not often made explicit, the city of Marjʿayun is feeling increasingly cornered by an overwhelming countryside. Inter-community rivalries existed in the area before the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, mainly between urban Christian elites and the rural Shia-dominated environment.[xiv] In this context, the growing presence of Syrians families from Idlib has raised the concern among some locals that – as it happened in the past – an alien community can settle and gradually grab slices of local political and economic power.[xv] Hizbullah is well aware of this dynamic and, as mentioned before, is doing everything possible to avoid creating tensions between host communities and refugees. The Shia movement intends to be perceived as the arbiter of local disputes and the protector of the interests of both locals and newcomers. For their part, Syrians workers in Marj al Khawkh just want to live in peace with their families and be able to work. "Politics does not interest us", they keep repeating.[xvi]

Mounting tensions, managing conflicts

In order to analyse similarities and differences among the three cases under scrutiny and relate them to the hypothesis of my research, I designed a grid that makes visible the data collected in

Wadi Khalid, Tall 'Abbas, and Marj al Khawkh (rows) in an analytical framework based on different variables and quantitative data (columns).

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Quantitative data refer to the demographic pressure mentioned above, while the variables are: a) the geographical continuity or discontinuity (historical ties between communities); whether the border is open or closed; b) the socio-economic homogeneity or heterogeneity; the sectarian enmity or affinity (sectarian Lebanese patchwork, sectarian belonging of Syrians); c) the political-ideological rivalry or friendship (political posture of host communities/political stances of Syrians). Each column shows levels of greys that indicate both of the level of animosity between Lebanese and Syrians and the ability of the communities to defuse and absorb local tensions.

Geographical factors

All three cases presented here are from peripheral districts that have been historically marginalised. Tall 'Abbas and Wadi Khalid are in the newly formed 'Akkar governorate.[xvii] They both have been left in a "state of deprivation" for a long time and have suffered from a lack of services of all kinds. The 'Akkar plain is considered the second-largest fertile Lebanese land after the Bekaa Valley (Mouchref 2008, 4). Traditionally, agriculture is by far the leading sector in the province, and for centuries feudal landowners had connected to central authorities in Istanbul and, later, in Beirut, exploited local farmers. 'Akkar was once again socially, politically, and economically marginalised in modern Lebanon, especially during the Syrian military and

political hegemony in the north of the country (1976–2005). Today, its remoteness from the capital continues to have an effect on its development. By contrast, the Marj'ayun district enjoyed great fortune during the Ottoman era: It was a strategic hub between the coast and the hinterland, linking the main ports of Haifa, Tyre, and Sidon to Damascus (Vulin 2000–1). However, in modern times it has suffered the same fate as 'Akkar and the Bekaa Valley, as national authorities mainly promoted Beirut as the major economic centre. Later on, Marj'ayun's potential growth prospects were undermined by the effects of the Lebanese civil war and the policies implemented by both the Israeli authorities (1978–2000) and local armed groups who have been the *de facto* rulers of the area since the end of the foreign occupation (Vulin 2000–1). After the July War of 2006, southern Lebanon benefitted from an increase in domestic and foreign investments for development projects, whilst 'Akkar was almost forgotten.

As shown by the data in the grid, geography plays a crucial role in stemming rivalries in the region of Wadi Khalid: territorial continuity, long-standing shared practices and traditions between cross-border communities, and – at least until 2012 – the porosity of the border between Syria and Lebanon all ensure that the territory and its inhabitants have an outstanding capacity to absorb the tensions. The same cannot be said for Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh. In the former, up until 2011, the passage of people and goods through the border ensured constant contacts between Syrian and Lebanese nationals. Since the closure of the border in 2012, however, exchanges have decreased, which has deprived the local elites of an important tool to manage conflicts between refugees and host communities. On the other hand, in Marj al Khawkh, although there is no territorial continuity and the border has been historically perceived as an obstacle and not a corridor, there are very few difficulties in the relationships between the Syrian

and Lebanese communities, primarily because of the low demographic pressure, which is much stronger in the Tall 'Abbas area.

Socio-economic factors

Despite the increasing exasperation expressed by Syrian refugees in Tall 'Abbas and Wadi Khalid, inter-communal tensions in the area have partially been mitigated by a relatively homogenous socio-economical background. As the grid shows, the Lebanese and Syrians of Wadi Khalid share a common belonging to a rural environment, and for decades they have mostly lived off cross-border trades. Less homogeneous but not in conflict with each other are the socio-economic characteristics of Syrian refugees in Tall 'Abbas, an area dominated by local communities comprising peasants, army soldiers, and low-income employees. Conflicts that are possible in the area of Marj al Khawkh, precisely due to different socio-economic backgrounds (rural vs. urban), are reduced by a moderate demographic pressure and by the fact that many Syrian families are headed by workers who have been living on the plain of Marj'ayun since well before 2011.

Political and sectarian factors

In all three of the cases that I have investigated, local communities show little capacity to organise themselves as a civilian alternative to the domain of local political and confessional elites. In Tall 'Abbas and Wadi Khalid, formal schools were established relatively late, compared with other Lebanese districts like Marj'ayun. The high degree of illiteracy has hampered political awareness and civic empowerment. Moreover, local politicians – descendants of the old feudal

families – have seen no personal benefits in fighting for the development of their poor farmer constituents (Mouchref 2008). For more than a decade, through their nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), Hizbullah and other actors have been providing educational, health, and social services in southern Lebanon, whilst NGOs are almost absent from 'Akkar villages, with the exception of a few small-scale projects limited to certain areas. This situation encourages the emergence of political and sectarian factors that play an important role in determining whether the level of inter-communal tensions increases or decreases. In the case of Wadi Khalid, sectarian and political homogeneity ensures a relative relaxation of relations, whilst in Tall 'Abbas and Marj al Khawkh different religious affiliations and contrasting political and ideological positions regarding the Syrian crisis foster a rise in conflicts and tensions.

Conclusion

For a long time, the three local communities have been exposed to extreme socio-economic difficulties and felt that Lebanon's national institutions had neglected and cut them off from any concrete support. Tensions rose when massive numbers of refugees fleeing Syria reduced the scarce local resources and services available in the areas. Not surprisingly, despite having mostly political and economic motivations, these tensions have also taken on a religious tint and exacerbated the sectarian polarisation. However, such political and sectarian fractures have been partially recomposed on the basis of shared socio-economic common interests. Moreover, local political and religious elites have played a decisive role in defusing these tensions caused by the influx of newcomers. The leadership of the main Lebanese political parties has also endorsed an appeasement attitude, which has been working as a détente.

On the other hand, especially after the new admission restrictions came into force at the beginning of 2015, the Lebanese central government has increasingly demonstrated a discriminatory attitude towards Syrians.[xviii] The latter, who have no real alternative, have thus far expressed a high capacity for endurance. Their cause has also been depoliticised because politics is seen as a threatening element that can only lead to ruin. On a broader level, although foreign and local donors – UN agencies, international and Lebanese NGOs – have intervened in the crisis with conspicuous efforts to reduce the contrasts, they have shown a lack of long-term strategies in response to the Syrian refugee humanitarian emergency. The refugees and the host community surveyed in all three locations have denounced the fact that for a long time most of the international organisations and UN agencies have intervened in the Lebanese areas affected by the massive influx of Syrians as if it was only a humanitarian emergency. Without taking into account that hundreds of thousands of refugees are forced to stay in Lebanon, the host communities and the Syrians must find ways of living together in the long term.

In this sense, it seems crucial that collective local and supranational identities be rediscovered or artificially produced by those communities that are managing an increasingly crowded territory. It is still premature to draw conclusions or find long-term paths. However, it is conceivable that the construction of shared communal stories (whether based on supposed confessional homogeneities, political and ideological proximities, or mutual socio-economic interests) may in the future become a key instrument to consider the other (whether the refugees or the Lebanese host) in a less hostile way and to begin building positive prospects of co-existence.

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[i] Lebanese and international media have often resorted to scaremongering rhetoric depicting Lebanon, as Thränert & Zapfe (2015) write, as being "on the verge of a renewed civil war, with Hizbullah and Sunni actions that are fighting each other in Syria barely keeping a fragile calm within Lebanon's borders based on the tacit agreement of all major Lebanese parties that a further spillover has to be avoided at all costs, making the state in the Levant a tense backwater of the war where fighters from both sides rest to recuperate."

[ii] See Hanf's (1995) work on "ethnurgies", the act of merging ethnicity with religion, of basically sanctifying differences, which served to further fuel domestic conflicts between different social groups.

[iii] A *mukhtar* (pl. *makhatir*) is the chief of a city district.

[iv] Interviews with the author, Tall 'Abbas, July 2015

[v] Between May and September 2000, the Lebanese Army confronted radical militants in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp located a few kilometres north of Tripoli. More than 400 people, among them around 50 civilians, were killed in the fighting. See Ramadan (2009).

[vi] Interviews with the author, Tall 'Abbas, July 2015.

[vii] Interviews with the author, Tall 'Abbas, July 2015.

[viii] Interviews with the author, Tall 'Abbas, July 2015.

[ix] In 15th century, Wadi Khalid was included in the Husn al Akrad [Krak des Chevaliers] district; between the 17th and 18th centuries it was part of the Ottoman *Liwa' Tarabulus* and then the *Wilayat Tarabulus*; in the 19th century *Sanjak Tarabulus* and in 20th in northern Lebanon (Sulayman 2013, 1:10-19; Raunier 2011).

[x] Interviews with the author, Wadi Khalid, 2012–15.

[xi] Interviews with the author, Wadi Khalid, 2012–15.

[xii] Interviews with the aithor, Wadi Khalid, 2012–15.

[xiii] Interviews with the author, Marj al Khawkh, September 2015.

[xiv] Interviews with the author, Marj al Khawkh, September 2015.

[xv] Interviews with the author, Marj al Khawkh, September 2015.

[xvi] Interviews with the author, Marj al Khawkh, September 2015.

[xvii] Northern Lebanon, which previously constituted one governorate with seven districts, was effectively split into two governorates in 2014, following an earlier administrative decision. Tripoli and five surrounding districts maintained the denomination of North Governorate, while the district of 'Akkar became a governorate with the same name.

[xviii] See chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2   The Sunni community in Lebanon: from "Harirism" to "sheikhism"?

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Introduction

On August 15, 2015, Sheikh Ahmad al-ʿAsîr was arrested at the Beirut International Airport while trying to flee to Nigeria with a fake passport. Even though all groups of the political class applauded the capture of the man wanted for his role in the bloody events that took place in Abra, near Saida, in June 2013, where 18 soldiers of the Lebanese Armed Forces lost their lives in a confrontation with al-ʿAsîr's partisans, the re-appearance of this icon of radical Sunni mobilisation underscored a deep sectarian divide among the Lebanese population. A family member of one of the soldiers killed expressed his concern about a double standard in the application of laws and security between Sunnis and Shiites. He was referring to the unsuccessful capture of a Hizbullah member accused of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri (Nader 2015). This particular event raises the issue of a major change of perception among the Sunni community in Lebanon; it also highlights a broader mindset according to which Iran and Hizbullah are responsible for the emergence of radical Sunni groups in the country and for the exclusion of a moderate political faction like the Hariri-led Future Movement (*al-mustaqbal*).

This change of perception becomes quite clear when one remembers that Sunnis represented the Muslims of Lebanon in the National Pact (1943), which gave the community a key role in the process of nationhood building. They were at the core of the state apparatus by virtue of them being granted the position of prime minister and several other key functions, including head of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). While their position as a community dwindled during the civil war (Kassir 1994), a major figure emerged during the post-civil war era: Rafic Hariri. As prime minister and a rich businessman with connections to Saudi Arabia, he became a point of reference among the community while promoting a policy based on the exaltation of Sunni belonging and founding *al-mustaqbal* party. This strategy very soon pushed Hariri to become the undisputed leader of the Sunni community[i] and paved the way to the "Harirification" of Lebanese Sunnism. After the unification of the Sunnis in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination in 2005, Sunnism inexorably started faced an erosion regarding its weight in Lebanese politics: The new status of the Sunni community in Lebanon became one of political, social, and economic marginalisation.

In order to examine the recent transformation of Lebanese communities, with a focus especially on the post-2011 period, we will use the trajectory of Sunnism as a case study. Our hypothesis is that Harirism, a moderate socio-political phenomenon born with the political rise of Rafic Hariri in the 1990s, changed after his assassination, influencing the self-perception as well as the perception of 'the other' disseminated among Sunnis in Lebanon. The period between the "Cedar Revolution" (Salti 2005; Safa 2006) and the Arab revolts of 2011 has been crucial for the transformation of the Sunni community. The 2011 revolts in particular, even though they had no direct effects on the resilience of the Lebanese consociative system (Fakhoury 2011), contributed to modifying the positions of some Lebanese political actors from various communities. These actors, taking open stances towards the Syrian crisis, have deepened the polarisation inside the political and

communitarian spectrum (Di Peri 2014). They have also led the way towards the modification of the boundaries of some of the leading (particularly Sunni and Maronite) Lebanese communities that, assaulted by internal and external factors, are gradually questioning the very concept of "community".

After reflecting on the shifting boundaries of the term "community", we delve into the problematisation of such a category by analysing two opposite dynamics: on the one hand, the transformation of "Harirism" after Hariri's assassination; on the other hand, the recent radical upsurge in the Sunni community. We examine the latter by studying the mobilisation activities around Sheikh al-'Asîr that took place in the city of Sidon (Hariri's family stronghold) after 2011.

The changing role of the concept of community in Lebanon

Community is not a "natural" fact in Lebanese society; it is a social structure that embodies history, politics, and social actors' changing interpretations of issues, including external and internal factors that have shaped its definition. In this sense, there is no unique definition of what a community is, although a useful distinction will avoid any confusion. Following Beydoun (1984), a community can be understood as a sectarian belief group, which makes it possible for us to talk about sects or religious communities. "Community" also encompasses a larger spectrum of social life, as it can be understood as a social group of belonging, a rather secular dimension of belonging that is equated with ethnic belonging. In historical terms, this process can be explained through the lens of its social function and its adaptation during times of changing political environments. In the Ottoman Empire, as a powerful force that binds, orders, and identifies people, community was defined as "millet", which became "nation" during the 19th century and thus produced a collective consciousness of belonging. At the same time, they were also granted greater autonomy. Against the backdrop of the decline of

the Ottoman Empire, the *Mutasarrifiyya* system – under the protection of the European powers and following the "Règlement Organique" (1861), a form of communitarian division promoted by the Great Powers to pacify the Mount Lebanon area – brought the communities into politics and transformed civilian and religious institutions into political actors, which politicised collective identities by labelling them as "Maronites", "Druzes" or "Sunnis". During the time of the French Mandate in Lebanon (1920–43), the territory's communities, rejuvenated and empowered within the new political design of a nation state, were shored up as political structures after independence (1943).

It is interesting to note that the meaning of the term "community" has undergone an important shift in Lebanon, especially after the end of the civil war (1989). Before the war, the most common expressions to indicate the framework in which communities acted and lived were "communalism" or "communitarianism".[ii] By contrast, the most used label after the war, particularly after the Hariri assassination in 2005, has been "sectarianism". This semantic shift is not without consequence. If, before the civil war, community was considered to be at the heart of the so-called Lebanese consociative system (Lijparth 1969) that functioned, despite its limits and constraints, until the outbreak of the civil war (Dekmejian 1978; Fakhoury 2009), the term "sectarianism" gradually emerged after the war, also because of the relevance it gained in academic debate. The publication of Vali Nasr's book *The Shia revival* in 2007 opened the way for the subsequent rise of the so-called sectarian rift (Norton 2015): the narrative of permanent clashes between the Sunnis and Shiites. This regional debate also had an important influence on Lebanon (Heydemann 2013; Salloukh 2013). However, interesting enough, Lebanon is not new to the debate around communitarianism, sectarianism, confessionalism, and so on (Makdisi 2000). The novelty of the sectarian narrative is that it has become pervasive, introducing itself not just in academic debates but also in the daily life relations of the Lebanese, especially after the 2011 uprisings (Kingston 2013; Salloukh 2015).

If the term "community" used to have a neutral connotation, its evolution into sectarianism has clearly marked it in a negative way. This "sectarian hegemony" produces negative effects on at least two levels: on the one hand, it imposes itself as an all-encompassing meta-narrative able to explain all the regional phenomena; on the other hand, it reproduces the image of a fragmented region unable to cope with violent phenomena and pervaded by barbarianism (Di Peri 2016). According to this reading of the regional situation, which has important consequences for Lebanon, the domestic situation has been analysed by focusing especially on inter-sectarian tensions and on the effects of regional sectarian threats on Lebanon. However, in order to go beyond the logic of "sectarianism hegemony", the communities, and the processes behind the production and reproduction of their identity, are the actors to examine, even if they have blurred borders and are internally fragmented or somehow marginalised.

The 'Harirification' of Sunnism

The assassination of Rafic Hariri was a shock for the country. From that moment on, the Sunni community, which since the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 (Zamir 1985) has played a vital role in the "country of the Cedars", along with the Maronites, started to perceive itself as both socially and politically marginalised. However, this feeling is not new to the Sunni community: even before the outbreak of the civil war (Picard 2011), it had experienced a period of crisis at the political level with the loss of power of the traditional *zu'ama* and had no prominent figure or political party to reverse the situation (Johnson 1986).

After the civil war, a new founding pact, the Taif Agreement, further legitimised the pivotal role of the Sunni community by putting it on an equal footing with the Maronite community at the expense of the Shiites. However, the defeat of the Sunni militias, the general radicalisation of the Sunni left, and the upsurge in radical Islamism during the 1980s left the

Sunni *zu'ama* in a much weaker position than at the outbreak of the war. By contrast, the heightened communal identity and the retreat of the state gave Sunni religious institutions a central role in Sunni communal and political life, and the Maqâsid Society (a charity organisation) became a focal point for the community (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998).

In the aftermath of the civil war, the pre-eminence of the Sunni community over the Maronites had a controversial and charismatic figure as a witness to the reshaping of its own narrative: Rafic Hariri. A native of Sidon, a Sunni stronghold in southern Lebanon, Hariri was a leading actor in Lebanese politics during the 1990s and helped to strengthen the idea of a "lay" Sunnism with a solidly entrepreneurial mindset. The construction of the narrative of the "new man" gave new visibility to the Sunni community, which found in Hariri a powerful, unifying leader. Hariri created a new socio-political phenomenon: "Harirism". The term succinctly illustrates how Hariri gradually imposed himself on the Lebanese political scene through control of the Sunni community, so much so that, over the years, the identification between 'Harirism' and Sunnism became increasingly stronger. Broadly speaking, a "Harirification" of Sunnism was taking place. However, it should be emphasised that Hariri's political strategy was (at least, initially) trans-confessional. The rhetoric of "newism" that Hariri proposed was rooted in his detachment from the traditional politics marked by the *zu'ama* and their systems of patronage (Naba 1999). Furthermore, in contrast with traditional Lebanese politics, Hariri decided not to insert himself directly into the political scene but tried to seek trans-confessional legitimacy through philanthropic works (Baumann 2012) and mammoth reconstruction projects. This posture allowed him to accumulate vast political capital to spend at the appropriate time (Bonne 1995).[iii]

Very soon, however, Hariri realised that playing by these rules would not help him maintain control over his political career. After his election as prime minister in 1992 and again in

1996, Hariri's popularity grew thanks to strong investments in various public sectors, especially in the stronghold of Sidon but also in downtown Beirut. But the picture rapidly changed. The reconstruction projects included in the "Horizon 2000" programme were strongly criticised for not delivering on earlier promises: Primarily concentrated in Beirut at the expenses of other regions (Volk 2009), the projects were mainly focused on expanding the financial sector instead of the agriculture and industry sectors, and they favoured economic and urban infrastructures at the expense of human capital (Denoeux & Springborg 1998). Moreover, these plans were only partially implemented, and all in all they had a weak impact on the country's real economy: Some of the profits went to the international companies involved in the reconstruction process; others were intended to finance the importation of materials; and still others went to cover the wages paid to non-Lebanese workers involved in these projects (Di Peri 2009). At the same time, the overall economic situation was deteriorating. Hariri's economic policies led to the country becoming heavily indebted: Public debt rose from 20% to 42% between 1992 and 2000 (Nasr 2003). Lastly, in those years, the political climate and the manoeuvers of the so-called *troika* were characterised by strong confessional tensions that strengthened the consociative model instead of abolish it, as foreseen by the Taif Agreement (Kassir 2000).

All these factors pushed Hariri to develop a different strategy than the one that had previously been adopted, namely to adapt to the "Lebanese system" by embracing the communitarian option. This process materialised in controlling the key institutions of Sunnism, such as the charity organisations (the Maqâsid Society being the first), and, through them, the religious leaders who guaranteed control of the election of the mufti, the most prestigious position in Lebanese Sunnism (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998). These manoeuvers included the ousting and weakening of all the Sunni leaders' rivals and gradually pushed Hariri to build a family dynasty (Vloeberghs 2012). As part of this strategy, Hariri exploited to their advantage (often

in contradictory way) the "calls" to identity and tradition: On the one hand, he used the rejection of the past, especially doing *tabula rasa* of Lebanese cultural heritage, to promote his mammoth projects with Solidere for the country's reconstruction (Daily Star 2000); on the other hand, he exploited his ties with the past Sunni tradition, underlining his belonging to this tradition. His philanthropic activities, especially through the Hariri Foundation, soon became an instrument to generate profit but primarily to accumulate political capital for the elections (Becherer 2005). Philanthropy became way to secure old constituencies and constructing ever-larger political bases. This process of the "Harirification" of Sunnism culminated in Hariri becoming the *de facto* leader of the Sunnis with the building of the largest mosque in the centre of Beirut, a symbol of the return to tradition (Vloeberghs 2008).

Hariri's assassination marked a freeze in the process of "Harirification", which had at least two effects: the incapacity of his successor, his son Saad, to preserve the political legacy of his father and the shifting of the ideological boundaries of Sunnism. This latter aspect will be analysed in the following section by looking at the case of the rise of Sheikh al-'Asîr. As for the former aspect, it should be noted that Saad Hariri, because he lacks his father's charisma and political resources, was unable to ride the wave of protests that followed the assassination and gave rise to the birth of the March 14 coalition and his *al-mustaqbal* Party (Choucair 2006; Haugbolle 2006). Only the official establishment of the party, which already took place in 2007 but only materialised in 2009, prompted Saad Hariri to use the party, more than the financial empire of the father or his philanthropic activities, to rally the Sunni community behind him. This party logic, however, was far removed from Sunnism. As a result, Saad Hariri has failed in his attempt to complete a triple identification: the identification of the party with the leader, the identification of the leader with the community, and consequently, the identification of the community with the party.[iv] There were two reasons for this failure: first, the difficulties that Saad had in holding together a community using a party and coalition

logic that were in many ways alien to the Lebanese context,[v] and second, closely related to the first reason, Saad's lack of leadership within this coalition, which was very fragmented and in search of its own identity.[vi]

Looking at the evolution of the March 14 coalition led by *al-mustaqbal*, it is evident that the members of the Party have gradually lost contact with their basis and struggle to act as a credible partner within the Lebanese political system.[vii] At the same time, the coalition showed a willingness to undermine the institutions of the state as soon as they were no longer controllable or acting in its interest.

One of the battles on which Saad Hariri and his party have lost credibility is its position against Hizbullah and its disarmament since Rafic Hariri's assassination in 2005 and especially after the war with Israel in 2006. "Harirism" was based on the division of labour between Rafic Hariri and Hizbullah and concerned with mapping the future of Lebanon, while Hizbullah acted as a guardian of its past and created a mythology aimed at preserving the country's historical identity and Arab dimension (Karl ReMarks 2000). After Hariri's death, the two political coalitions' struggle over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon – created to investigate his assassination – culminated in a corruption scandal when it was revealed that Saad Hariri had manipulated witnesses to finger Hizbullah as being responsible for his father's death. This was one example of the end of pragmatism for Sunnism. Another example is the rise of the controversy between Saad and the Lebanese Army, a legacy of his father Rafic (Aziz 2011), which became evident on the "Day of Wrath" (January 25, 2011), when armed militants of the March 14 coalition were shooting in the streets of Beirut, targeting the Lebanese Army.[viii] One of the more evident consequences of this new form of Harirism is the loss of the aura of moderation and political pragmatism that had always characterised Rafic Hariri's political activity and, in many ways, put distance between Harirism and violent

attitudes.[ix] This change in attitude engendered at least three consequences: First, Sunnism abandoned its moderate posture, which left space for the emergence of radical Sunni fringes that had been latent in Lebanon since 2011; second, the boundaries of the Sunni community, painstakingly held together through the process of "Harirification", were frayed, which highlighted the difficulty of identifying a strong and unified leadership capable of affecting Lebanon at both institutional and confessional levels (Samaha 2013); and finally, the posture of Saad Hariri was a critical factor in Hizbullah's decision to support the Assad regime in Syria and produced a new wave of sectarian claims that have increased the distance between the country's communities (Aslam 2012).[x] Despite Saad Hariri's brief return to Lebanon in August 2014, following three years of self-imposed exile after his government was toppled by a coalition including Hizbullah, Harirism seems to continue to be deep in crisis. As Ahmad Fatfat, a deputy of *al-mustaqbal*, declared, "the threat against Saad Hariri will remain as long as there are illegitimate weapons in Lebanon" – a declaration that clearly illustrates the perceived persistence of the threat of the Islamic Party for the Sunni leader and Hariri inability to produce a new political strategy (Daily Star 2014).

The game changer in town: Ahmad al-'Asîr as a new face of political Sunnism

The transformation of the Sunni community is also palpable when it comes to the emergence of a new profile and means of mobilisation. Among the sect's radical fringes, it is recognised that "most Salafists of all stripes have in some ways mobilised their community against Hizbullah and the Syrian regime" (Rabil 2014). Within this process of change and radicalisation among the Sunnis, mainly in the area of Tripoli (Rougier 2011; Gade 2015), the figure of Sheikh Ahmad al-'Asîr emerged late in 2011 as an interesting Salafist preacher who managed to gather a local radical group of partisans around a small mosque in Abra, a suburb of Saida. The main rationale for this mobilisation was in line with two main stances of the

Future Movement: the support of the Syrian insurgents (Caillet 2012) and the denunciation of Hizbullah as a factor in the destabilisation of Lebanon. It is therefore necessary to focus on the mobilisation strategy that Sheikh al-ʿAsîr followed in order to understand the kind of shift within the Sunni community at the double level of means of action and self-perception. We will see that, surprisingly, al-ʿAsîr adopted a behaviour, a repertoire of action, and a general imaginary that refers to a minority sect.

The social context in Saida in 2011, when al-ʿAsîr started his mobilisation, is marked by the polarisation of the Lebanese political forces with respect to the Syrian crisis, as *al-mustaqbal* was facing Mustapha Saʾad (a local ally of March 8) and Hizbullah militants in the city and its surroundings. The socioeconomic situation in Saida was already critical. Beneath the touristic reshaping of roads and streets in the old city, a process of pauperisation was affecting the majority of local inhabitants, mostly Sunni, because of a lack of investments, and it was slowly disenfranchising the local population at its fringes.[xi] Sectarian affiliation soon became the only common identity for inhabitants who perceived themselves as abandoned by the central power and instrumentalised by the main political parties. This is where Al-ʿAsîr found fertile ground for his mobilisation based on resentment and a feeling of marginalisation. He was also able to capitalise on a frustration with the Shiites because of the political fight of early "May 2008 events" that saw a confrontation between Hizbullah and the March 14 government led by Fouad Siniora. During these heady days, Hizbullah's militiamen and allies sealed off West Beirut and stranded Walid Jumblat and Saad Hariri[xii] in their houses, thus shedding a crude light on the Future Movement's impotence against the Shiʾi movement. In the following years, several attacks targeted senior security officers and political leaders, all of them coming from the Sunni community. Al-ʿAsîr was able to play on sectarian honour and transform a political weakness into a sectarian threat. This link between sects, politics, and honour was repeated in his Friday sermons along the following lines:

We won't accept this abject (*haqīra*) Syrian-Iranian tutelage (over Lebanon)! [...]
Enough contempt for the Sunnis! Enough contempt for their blood, their security and
the honour of their wives![xiii]

Manufacturing a sectarian reading of the situation, al-ʿAsîr was able to mobilise anger and
dissatisfaction to blame the pro-Syrian regime partisans identified with the Shi'i community.
One way in which this strategy of sectarianising dissent from the Shia was built is quite
apparent in the religious dispute that occurred with Mohammad Yazbek, a top-ranking leader
of Hizbullah.[xiv] Sheikh al-ʿAsîr sparked a religious dispute after claiming Yazbek had
"insulted" Aisha, the mother of the Prophet, and thus he positioned himself as the defender of
the Sunni community. This sensitive matter in a multi-sectarian society allowed him full
media attention and the ability to reach a larger Sunni constituency, close to *al-mustaqbal*. By
mentioning the Hizbullah weaponry issue, a classical topic of the March 14 coalition, he
implicitly bridged sectarian and political dissent. The strength of al-ʿAsîr's posture lay in the
powerful position of his Shi'i foe in the political game and in the brutality of the repression
that the Syrian population, mainly Sunnis, suffered because of the Assad regime. The latter,
defined as primarily Alawite, has been affiliated with the Shia since the onset of the Syrian
uprising in Salafi circles, which pointed to an "evil alliance" between the two minorities in
Islam: the Alawites and the Shia. This "natural" explanation of their political alliance helped
Sheikh al-ʿAsîr identify Hizbullah as an internal threat for the Sunnis of Lebanon and thus
positioned his community as a victim and possibly as a gatekeeper of Islamic orthodoxy
against deviant groups.[xv] The notion of the Sunnis as victims of Shi'i power was also fuelled
by Miqati's government, clearly oriented towards the March 8 coalition and pro-Hizbullah
forces, which promoted its "dissociation policy" towards the Syrian uprising as a means of
staying neutral in this turmoil. This so-called "neutrality" of Lebanon quickly revealed itself

as an ideological way of masking Lebanon's tacit agreement with the Syrian regime's brutal policy.[xvi] By opposing such a policy, al-'Asîr kept calling for the fall of the Assad regime in Damascus and the disarmament of the Shia-led Hizbullah (Abi-Akl 2012).

The seriousness of this political context and the general environment of the Syrian uprising and Hizbullah's political domination in the era after the signing of the Doha Agreement seem to be quite significant, as al-'Asîr's biography did not suggest his life would take such a radical trajectory. One should note that he was not a recognised cleric and was preaching in a small mosque located in a suburb of Saida. Moreover, his previous affiliation with Jamaa al-Tabligh, a quietist religious movement that avoided any statements that could lead to conflict, was not really conducive to the gathering of radical partisans (Caillet 2012). In the meantime, among the opportunities that served al-'Asîr well was the duration of his involvement in that mosque and his strategic opportunism in side-lining Saad Hariri's Future Movement the moment the uprising started in Syria. His activism and his reputation as a Salafi figure grew during Ramadan in the summer of 2011 and secured him an audience. The economic situation in Saida also helped him to capitalise on discontent, as seen above. But most of all, Hizbullah was a very useful rival group, as it mobilised on the basis of religious affiliation, which al-'Asîr violently denounced. In sum, this Shi'i image of Hizbullah, built up as a foe and progressively as the group responsible for the Sunnis' disempowerment and vulnerability, largely contributed to the forming of al-'Asîr's identity as a radical leader struggling to defend the Sunnis' pride and honour in Lebanon. Thus he stood in stark contrast to Saad Hariri, who lacked the ability to unify the Sunnis.

Built on his social capital as a cleric, Sheikh al-'Asîr's Salafi movement was closely linked to him as a person. In this sense, his movement was familiar with the classical Lebanese political pattern, characterised by the personalisation of power as a main trend in politics (Messarra

1996). Between 2000 and 2003, Sheikh al-'Asîr became known as a Salafist, as it seemed clear that he followed the doctrinal principles of Salafism (Caillet 2012). In the meantime, like other sheikhs, he wanted to promote an image of himself as a non-sectarian figure by showing his moderation in the media in order to reach a wider spectrum of the Sunni citizens he was primarily targeting. Nevertheless, the populist and radical dimensions of al-'Asîr's movement can be highlighted by examining the steps and repertoire of the kind of mobilisation he adopted (Meier 2015).

During an initial period, al-'Asîr organised demonstrations in support of the Syrian uprisings or against Hizbullah's weapons, exacerbating the polarisation of the political spectrum with regard to the Syrian uprising. Mobilised via social media, the Sheikh al-'Asîr movement grew in number and tended to radicalise its actions by organising a sit-in in Saida for one and a half months, blocking a main road and thus continuing its strategy of entrism, and raising the flag of the Sunni community threatened by Hizbullah's weapons. He explained this new approach by making an analogy with the Arab uprising in Egypt: "Our movement is similar to the one on Tahrir Square in Cairo. But the difference is that here injustice is armed" (l'Orient le Jour 2012). He also gave a definition of his protest as one that is intended to gather people from everywhere in Lebanon, as "all regions of Lebanon are hurt". Al-'Asîr clearly mentioned who hurt these regions: He identified the Shi'i movement of Hizbullah and used its "Resistance" label to show the contradictory nature of Hizbullah since it became involved alongside the Syrian regime. "You can live without bread or electricity but not without dignity. The Resistance party stole our dignity. From now on, we cannot accept this anymore" (l'Orient le Jour 2012).

The second step was taken when another protest of the al-'Asîr movement turned into an armed confrontation on November 11, 2012, because al-'Asîr militants had torn down

Hizbullah posters. The riots across the city of Saida resulted in several people injured on both sides and two dead among the al-'Asîr militiamen (Daou 2012). Days later, al-'Asîr displayed bloody images showing the faces of two of his partisans who were killed and a Hizbullah flag tarnished with blood, including sentences that read: "Hassan Nasrallah killed Ali Samhoun in Saida", and "Hassan Nasrallah killed Lebanon". This event signalled a process of militarisation of the movement that was visible when the Sheikh unsuccessfully tried to mobilise the Palestinian refugees from Syria in the Ain el-Hilweh camp in December in order to form a proper militia. In early 2013, he publicly appeared in military fatigues with an AK-47 rifle in his hand during a strong protest against the presence of Hizbullah militiamen in the vicinity of his mosque in Abra (l'Orient le Jour 2013a).

A third and last step was taken later during the spring of 2013. Against the backdrop of the Qusayr battle that saw the Syrian Army being backed by Hizbullah members against the insurgents of the Free Syrian Army, al-'Asîr issued a *fatwa* for *jihad* in Syria. In April, the area close to his mosque in Abra became the stronghold of his movement with big screens to see him preaching and carpets in the street for Friday prayer. While Hizbullah's General Secretary revealed the involvement of his militia in the Qusayr battle alongside the Assad regime, the Sheikh publicly displayed the forming of a new militia named "the Phalanges of the Free Resistance", primarily dedicated to enrolling local volunteers to fight in Syria for the Sunni cause (Baaklini 2013). In June, several militiamen, clearly affiliated with al-'Asîr's group, took control of Saida for a few hours as a means to flex their muscle (Khalil 2013). A few days later, a violent clash erupted at an army checkpoint near Abra. It resulted in the killing of four soldiers and led to the intervention of troops that ended up dislodging and killing many of al-'Asîr's partisans in an extremely brutal fight lasting 48 hours.[xvii]

The effect of this disastrous end to the al-'Asîr movement helped the *al-mustaqbal* movement officially distance itself from such extreme actions, although dialogue between Hizbullah and the Future Movement remains a challenge, particularly after Saad Hariri returned to Lebanon one year later. The disappearance of the Sheikh did not resolve the issue of the Sunnis' feeling of marginalisation. Some of the radical fringes of the al-'Asîr partisans went to Syria and joined Salafist jihadi groups like al-Qaeda.[xviii] However, in the light of the lingering political crisis affecting Lebanon, the majority of the community continues to see no reason to expect a significant change for the Sunnis in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Sunnism is currently being challenged by both internal and external factors. At the internal (domestic) level, the Sunni leadership's confrontation with Hizbullah and its loss of credibility are the two main components of the crisis. At the external level, the regional transformations and the Syrian crisis have contributed to a change in the country's confessional equilibrium. If, after the end of the civil war, the Harirification of Sunnism rested upon the creation of a unified leadership firmly in the hands of Rafic Hariri, the situation quickly changed after his death. The example of the mobilisation of Sheikh al-'Asîr revealed a far less moderate and pragmatic face of Sunnism and pointed to a deep change in collective self-perception. This change is something new for Sunnism and one of the unexpected consequences of the Hariri assassination. As one of the historic communities of Lebanon for many decades, the Sunni community has been at the heart of the Lebanese political game, as evidenced by its centrality in the National Pact and in the Taif Agreement. However, after 2005, the Sunni community seems to be living – both politically and socially – in limbo. This community appears to be unable to fill the political vacuum left by Rafic Hariri

and to tolerate its slow marginalisation within the country, which is also caused by the political rise of Hizbullah and to some extent, the "death of Harirism".

Another factor in the mutation of Sunnism in Lebanon is linked to the transformation of the balance of power in Lebanon. The Doha Agreement signed in 2008 clearly recognised the continuation of Syrian influence over Lebanon, manned by Hizbullah and its allies in the March 8 coalition. The context of the decline of the heirs to Harirism and the loss of its key influence over the state's destiny opened the door to the emergence of several forms of radicalism, as had brutally come to pass in the Nahr el-Bared camp during the summer of 2007. It became palpable in Tripoli during the confrontation between the rival suburbs of Baal Mohsen and Bab Tebbaneh after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, and later in Saida with the goal of targeting "Shi'i power" under the lead of Salafi Sheikh Ahmad al-'Asîr. His movement appeared as a by-product of the local dynamics of social exclusion in the Sunni environment and regional dynamics marked by the polarising effect of the Syrian uprisings on the Lebanese political scene. The radicalisation of the al-'Asîr movement and its violent repertoire of action gave voice to a deep frustration of some fringes of the Sunni community and highlighted a major transformation of Sunnis' self-perception as victims and a threatened category within Lebanese society. In the meantime, the failure and the violent excesses of al-'Asîr radical trajectory as well as the spectre of uncontrolled violence affecting Sunni cities like Tripoli with the 2013 double car bombings, have probably contributed to a moderation of the internal political confrontation between the two opposite 8/14 March blocs.

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[i] While not all the Sunnis identified with Hariri before his assassination, the wave of outrage following the assassination caused a reconsolidation within the community that is also expressed through the large participation in the event organised in Beirut on March 14, one month after Hariri's killing.

[ii] All these terms, including sectarianism, factionalism and confessionalism are the European translation of the Arabic *Tā'ifīya*.

[iii] One of the most interesting examples of this lack of political exposure is Rafic Hariri's decision to push for the candidacy of his sister Bahia in 1992 in the district of Sidon instead of his own. Bahia had already been president of the Hariri Foundation, and with her candidacy Rafic Hariri decided to lay the groundwork for building a family dynasty.

[iv] Obviously not all Sunnis identified with Hariri and his party. However, it should be emphasised, as they were the majority.

[v] Di Peri interview with a militant from the Communist Party, Beirut, November 2014.

[vi] For example, the strong disagreement about Syria between Saad and Kabbani, the mufti of the republic. See Chirinne (2016).

[vii] Di Peri interview with a Lebanese Maronite deputy, Beirut, December 2014.

[viii] The protests were sparked after Hizbullah's nomination of the new prime minister the Sunni, Najib Mikati, a move that brought the group one step closer to controlling the government. See Saghiyeh (2011).

[ix] This is, in general, a legacy of Lebanese Sunnism, of how it was built from the days of the French Mandate to preserve its specificity from the influences of regional Sunnism. See Khoury (1987).

[x] See chapter 7.

[xi] Meier interview with Ahmad Beydoun, Beirut, June 2013.

[xii] The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, the prominent Druze movement, and the co-founder of the March 14 coalition, respectively.

[xiii] Quoted in Caillet (2012).

[xiv] Ibidem.

[xv] From the perspective of the Sunnis, Muslim non-Sunni communities have long been perceived as deviant. Thus Alawites, as well as Shiites, were designated with stigmatising labels as *nosayris* and *metwalis*, respectively. (Mervin, 2000).

[xvi] By arresting Syrian opponents of the regime of Bashar al-Assad and bringing them back to Syria (Meier and Galeno 2012).

[xvii] While the LAF lost 18 men in this fight, no precise death toll was made public concerning the partisans of the Sheikh. The state's silence on the final episode of Sheikh al-'Asîr could be linked to Hizbullah's involvement in this assault and the secrecy the party of God tends to favour in such security issues. See l'Orient le Jour (2013b).

[xviii] At least three of them blew themselves up in terrorist attacks targeting Hizbullah. See Rowell (2014)

Rebordering the Lebanese Shi'i Public Sphere

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Introduction

On August 23, 2015, a group of young men from the disadvantaged neighbourhood of Khandaq al-Ghamiq, on the edge of Beirut's central district, joined the street protests against the abysmal mismanagement of the garbage crisis that had erupted a few weeks earlier. Sparked by the overflow of landfills that had reached their limits to dispose of the city's trash, the crisis exposed both the inability of the government to provide viable alternative options and the dismal consequences of the political gridlock that had crippled the country since 2013. The crisis also revealed the limits of Lebanon's consociational system and the inability of the traditional power-sharing agreements among elites to provide stability and governance (el-Husseini 2015a).

The young men from Khandaq al-Ghamiq carried slogans and images that positioned them as working-class Shia, and they displayed the kind of political repertoire that is usually performed by or associated with supporters of Amal and Hizbullah. This unexpected presence elicited puzzlement and mistrust among protesters who were more closely associated with a bourgeois background and a liberal political discourse. After all, a concoction of class-based and sect-based cleavages had already marked the street protests in 2005 and prompted a perception of the Shi'i community as the threatening Other among demonstrators who otherwise portrayed themselves as being progressive and pluralist (Gahre 2007: 113–14, 140, 143, 152–3, 157–8, 196–8). The small Shi'i groups that joined the rallies in August 2015 were soon labelled *mundassīn*

("infiltrators") and stigmatised as potential *agents provocateurs* who were trying to foment sedition and tarnish the polished image of the demonstrations.[i] Left-wing groups, on the other hand, tried to reach out to the Shi'i working-class protesters, realising that the latter had carried apparently sect-specific imagery because they could not conceive their self-identification otherwise. In fact, their presence on the streets was motivated by social and economic grievances and had not been prompted by any calls from their sect's established political leaders. Several activists therefore saw a historic opportunity to start doing what the Lebanese left had only dreamt about accomplishing since the outbreak of the civil war: separating the working class from their loyalty to sectarian leaders and notables (Nakhal 2015).

Not even the most enthusiastic activists were romanticising the Khandaq al-Ghamiq episode to the point of expecting Lebanon's sectarianism to wane overnight. However, it produced one further example of the dysfunctionality of the sect-based clientelism, and of the increasing gap between an impoverished lower-middle class and the sectarian parties that pretend to represent it in the Lebanese political arena. Would Amal and Hizbullah have a weaker grip on a Lebanese Shi'i community that has often been portrayed as tightly knit and ideologically mobilised? Or will the summer outburst of dissatisfaction be reabsorbed into the consolidated narratives and practices of sectarian homogenisation?

The "You Stink" campaign, styling itself as "citizen-led" and "anti-corruption",[ii] made it a point of honour to slam all the major political actors in the country by deploying witty irony and sarcasm to convey the message that "everyone means everyone", and no party was spared from criticism.[iii] How was it for Hizbullah to be put in the same basket with the other "corrupt"

politicians and sectarian leaders, especially as the party had craftily cultivated an image of being "different" and morally superior to other political actors through its anti-system rhetoric (Di Peri 2014), while actually working mostly within the framework of the Lebanese political system?

This chapter seeks to problematise perspectives on the Lebanese Shi'i public sphere, which has often been portrayed as substantially coterminous with Hizbullah, Amal, and other distinctly religious actors such as late Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah. In this regard, scientific literature explored the notion of a Shi'i "Islamic sphere" (*ḥālah islāmiyyah*) (Harb 2005) or the existence of a "countersociety" project (Le Thomas 2008) in ways that seemingly mirrored Fraser's notion of "counterpublics" (Fraser 1992). If we assume borders less as a territorialised function and more as communicatively generated semantics that associates spaces with societal meanings and mechanisms of legitimacy (Stetter 2008, 35–65), the bordering of this "counterpublics" has less to do with spatialised perimeters and more to do with a polycontextual system of symbols and with a monopoly of meaning.

An analysis of the construction, reconstruction, and morphing of mechanisms of meaning and legitimacy, as well as the mechanisms of contestation, should therefore highlight a nonessentialist reading of identities, socially constructed practices, and political systems. Through an analysis of speeches and writings that were part of a public debate in the summer of 2015, this chapter looks at whether the "garbage crisis" highlighted the weakness of the consociational system and the stress symptoms in the hegemonic discourse of identity, meaning, and semantic bordering of the Lebanese Shi'i public sphere, as well as the potential rise of new political subjectivities that are not based on sectarian cleavages.

Taken by surprise? Hizbullah and the garbage crisis

The magnitude of the protests in the summer of 2015 and their autonomy from the established political parties came as a surprise to many actors and observers. Hizbullah's earlier reaction to the August 2015 protests was loaded with mistrust and apprehension, particularly as the emerging phenomenon did not fit neatly into the binary narrative that the party has deployed over the past decade to frame regional and domestic events (Mazzucotelli 2014). On August 31, MP Muhammad Raad, a senior member of Hizbullah and head of the Loyalty to the Resistance parliamentary bloc, (Hamzeh 2004, 117) admitted that the party shared concerns and goals with the protesters but questioned "the identity of those who were leading the people in the streets". Raad emphasised that the position of the party was "not adverse" to the fight against corruption, but he immediately added that Hezbollah was not going to endorse the protests "without knowing the program and the leadership" of the protest movement. Raad also asked "with whom and under which direction, and within which national vision" the anti-corruption campaign was devised, and whether those who wanted to address and fight corruption had explained their methods with clarity (Ra'i al-Yawm 2015).

A few days later, however, an editorial in *al-Bina'* (the newspaper of the Syrian Social National Party) argued that Hizbullah was lending its support to the anti-corruption movement and noted that, despite the conspiracy theories and the inclusion of Hizbullah among the corrupt political parties, there were shared goals between the protest movement and the Party of God. The

editorial explained that the garbage crisis arose at a time of heightened sectarian entrenchment at the domestic and regional levels, and that this entrenchment was diverting attention from both living conditions and national interest. According to the editorial, both Hizbullah and the politically conscious segment of the protesters share an awareness of the "structural problems" of the Lebanese system, and of the necessity of a "fair and strong state" as a prerequisite to face all the internal and external projects aimed at weakening the entire country. The editorial praised the "cross-sectarian" nature of the protest movement and the refusal of its leaders to meet the former US Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. The main argument is interesting because it was one of the first attempts to reconcile the garbage issue with the traditional discourses on resistance deployed by Hizbullah and its allies.[iv] The protest movement is seen as a positive sign of the consolidation of Lebanese society, and in turn a solid society is viewed as a "strong solid incubator" of the resistance "in the face of guardianship projects on Lebanon" (Hammud 2015).

A similar point was raised a few days later in an op-ed in *al-Aḫbār*, where again it was argued that the "real protection" of the resistance could only come from "the living forces in Lebanese society". Hizbullah should stop its cooperation with political actors that are only interested in perpetuating their own power and should instead "get rid of the despicable sectarian system". According to the article, the hope generated by the garbage crisis and the protest movement marked a breakthrough in a consociational system that has been dominated by the same *muqāṭaʿğī* (feudal landowning) families not only for the past 40 years but since the Ottoman era.[v] Noting how the 2013 trade union protest (coordinated by Hanna Gharib) was eventually forced to resort to collaborate with sectarian leaders because of rampant clientelism in the public sector, the author praises the organisers of the protests for refusing to allow the representatives of

established parties to participate in the management of the rallies and eventually exploit them from within, as was the case during the 2011 anti-sectarian campaign. At the time of writing, the author noted that the protest movement had only just started, and that the litmus test would be its ability to convey to the general public the idea that political involvement does not necessarily depend on sectarian affiliation. Reaffirming the leftist argument that we saw earlier, the author of the editorial in *al-Aḫbār* argued that the "real victory" would be the day when the "sectarian kings" lose the ability to take "their masses" to the streets and use the threat of sectarian civil war at will (al-Awwur 2015).

A few days later, an op-ed in *al-ʿAhd* (Hizbullah's official newspaper) stated that while the garbage protests and the movement against corruption had legitimate roots and goals, the problems that the rallies highlighted required shared responsibility, and the ruling class was not the only side responsible for coming up with a solution. The article, which probably reflected a discussion inside the core of the party, argued that "the popular mobilisation occurred as a result of the accumulation of oppression and corruption in the government", that its roots were "positive and legitimate" and its goals predicated on the legitimacy of its causes, and therefore it deserved support and endorsement (Hamadeh 2015).

The magnitude of the protests eventually prompted Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah to clarify Hizbullah's official position in an interview. Nasrallah admitted that the party initially sat on the fence because, even though the claims of the protests were rightful, it was not clear what the leadership, the project, and the goals of the movement were. He added that any popular segment in Lebanon putting forward a rightful demand in a legitimate way "is good, and we don't oppose

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it". Nasrallah stated his wish that the movement focus on "achievable political causes" and added that Hizbullah did not take part in it because the whole protest would have been depicted as "a Hizbullah demonstration" (Da7ye.com 2015).

The tone and the content of Nasrallah's interview prompted a website based in South Lebanon to wonder whether Hizbullah was ready to enter the protest movement and accommodate its requests. The article signalled the strained condition of the informal agreement that had allegedly delegated the management of the Shi'i community's domestic affairs to Amal, while letting Hezbollah handle matters at the regional and international levels. According to the website (which is believed to be mostly critical of Hizbullah), the party was trying to absorb the civic movement through a strategy of entryism in order to deflect the corruption charges against its opponents and its controversial ally, Amal (Fadel 2015).

Does this debate within the Shi'i community ever question the hegemonic role of Hezbollah and Amal? Over the past 10 years, intra-Shi'i opposition to Hizbullah (and the uneasy coalition between it and Amal) mostly came in the form of notable individuals, scions of traditional landowning families, religious clerics, and a few intellectuals related to the art scene in Beirut. The most influential among these figures were Ahmad al-Asaad (leader of the Lebanese Option Party and son of the late speaker of parliament, Kamal al-Asaad), Ibrahim Shamseddine (son of the late Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine and chairman of the Higher Islamic Shi'i Council), Ali al-Amin (former mufti of Tyre), and the late cleric Hani Fahs (el-Husseini 2015b). None of them appeared to have broad enough appeal nor was able to command wide enough popular base support to gain clout and become a credible alternative. The suggestion that those figures created

a "crack" in Hezbollah's alleged "monopoly" on Shi'i political representation therefore appears to be problematic, especially when it is predicated on a simplistic portrayal (mirrored in Western mainstream media) of Beirut's southern suburbs as being a Hizbullah stronghold (Deeb 2006a). The depiction of the contemporary Shia of Lebanon as a monolithic bloc primarily comprising an underclass that (out of desperation) is largely sympathetic to Hizbullah is also factually inaccurate and has been disproved by 15 years of historical and anthropological research into the diversity, fissures, contradictions, and multiple layers of identity within the Shi'i public sphere in Lebanon.[vi]

It is true, however, that, since of the end of the civil war and the formation of a complex *modus vivendi* with Amal, Hizbullah has been trying to create, implement, and preserve its own cultural and political hegemony over the Shi'i public sphere in Lebanon, largely relying on the concept of resistance and political mobilisation that is based on pious commitment (*iltizām*) (Harb 2005). In this process, Hizbullah used a mix of societal pressure, spatial control, and increasingly isolated the dissenters' to silence the opposition voices from within (Zaccak 2007).

This process of silencing was mostly carried out under a low-profile approach, and cultural outlets like the Umam documentation and research centre in Haret Hreik were tolerated, possibly in order to project a benevolent image of Hizbullah and a compact image of the Shi'i constituency. This approach, however, was altered substantially in May 2015 when Hizbullah's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, delivered vitriolic criticism of some Shi'i opponents who were described as allegedly tied to the US embassy in Lebanon (AlArabiya 2015).

"The embassy Shia"

Since 2012, the daily newspaper *al-Aḫbār* (which is often believed to be mostly sympathetic to Hizbullah) has been helping WikiLeaks disseminate allegedly confidential material, including loads of diplomatic cables (Daher 2015). Many of them supposedly show the involvement of the US embassy in a plan aimed at tarnishing the image of Hezbollah and creating a political, United States–friendly alternative from scratch within the Shi'i community. The cables published by the newspaper and shared by other outlets include references to almost all of the major Shi'i figures who oppose Hizbullah and its domestic and regional policy (Ayoub 2012a). These files are highly controversial and particularly problematic from a methodological point of view with respect to their authenticity, although some appear to be highly credible in terms of content and characters.[vii]

The secret files allegedly disclosed by WikiLeaks allowed most of the anti-Hizbullah Shi'i personalities to be profiled and eventually to look like American tools or political opportunists vying for external support and even rejecting loyalty to their own constituency. Some of them, such as mufti Ali al-Amin, claimed to be representing the "silent majority"; others decried the purported neglect of their regions and asserted that support for Hizbullah was waning to the point that alternative lists for municipal elections looked feasible; former ministers allegedly tried to fashion themselves as reliable interlocutors (Ayoub 2012b).

On May 24, 2015, on the occasion of the Hezbollah Day of the wounded of the resistance, Hassan Nasrallah lambasted these Shi'i' figures as "the embassy Shia" (*šīʿa al-safāra*) and called

them "traitors, agents, and morons" (Al-Arabiya 2015), which sparked an intense reaction across the web both inside and outside Lebanon (Ğanūbiyya 2015). In an emotionally charged debate, anti-Hizbullah voices interpreted Nasrallah's statements as an exposure of the increasing criticism of Hizbullah within the Shi'i community because of its taxing involvement in the Syrian civil war and alleged obedience to Iranian interests. According to the party's critics, the words of the Secretary-General also signalled divisions and disputes that had previously been muted (al-Rashed 2015).

Many pan-Arab media outlets, which are generally critical of Hizbullah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, have reiterated the argument of a domestic plunge in popularity and mocked the idea that "the path towards the liberation of Jerusalem passes through Homs and Qalamoun", two areas where Hizbullah was heavily involved in battle. They have also provided ample coverage of critical voices on social networks. Most of the arguments on Twitter and on a dedicated Facebook page appear to chastise Hizbullah as "the soldiers of *wilāyah al-faqīh*" and for having supposedly betrayed the cause of pan-Arabism in the name of yielding to Iran. Other users defined the "embassy Shia" as the alternative that might save the Shia of Lebanon from "the dictatorship of Hizbullah" or styled them as the "real supporters of the oppressed, those who refuse iniquity and humiliation" (al-Ğazīra 2015). With these words, they deploy the lexicon and tropes that have emerged as distinctive features of Shi'i political discourse in the past 40 years.

A few commentators tried to engage in a more sophisticated analysis by arguing that "the promotion of the idea of the necessity of sectarian purity", which reverberated from Nasrallah's words, had the (intentional or unintentional) potential to engender a sectarian conflict inside

Lebanon (Mintash 2015). Others remembered how in the 2009 parliamentary election Shi'i opposition to Hizbullah and Amal was reduced to a few notables of feudal background and other marginal figures unable to make a breach, and therefore they defined the "embassy Shia" as "orphans of the March 14 coalition". According to this line of thought, the coalition that has been Hizbullah's main rival at the national level since 2006 failed to reach out to the Shi'i constituency and deliver an inclusive message based on a civic platform devoid of sectarian tints. In this way, Lebanon remained "the state of the sectarian parties", each of which is vying for hegemony in its respective sect (Chebaro 2015). Hizbullah's alleged "suicide" in Syria was also decried (Fawaz 2015). An editorial in *al-Mustaqbal* (the newspaper of the movement led by Saad Hariri, an archfoe of Hizbullah) went as far as to define Nasrallah's speech as a "*takfīrī* fatwa" that showed Hizbullah's alleged "sectarian fascism" (Ossi 2015) and its nature of being "a state within the state", reiterating a concept that had been deployed by earlier detractors (Abdul-Hussain 2009).

A website based in South Lebanon hosted what appeared to be a sort of putative manifesto of the "embassy Shia". It echoes the argument against the state within a state and the logic of sectarian statelets, the refusal to partake in "Arab civil wars" and in particular "to die for the sake of Bashar al-Assad", as well as once again rejecting the doctrine of *wilāyah al-faqīh* (Barakat 2015).[viii] This barrage of rhetorical devices was countered by argumentations comparable in tone on the opposing, pro-Hizbullah camp, whose commentators questioned the ability of the "embassy Shia" to "defend their alignment with America and the sheikhs of Riyadh and Doha" and challenged the legitimacy "of those who stand on a financial platform built by the Gulf, and do not represent a local or popular current", even though they cling to an ideal image of moral superiority (Mohsen 2015).

Despite the vicious language used by the opposite sides, the arguments of the past few months have often seemed to be a tired repetition of slogans that have been hurled across Lebanon's political arena for almost a decade. The speech delivered by Hassan Nasrallah against the "embassy Shia" highlighted an increasing nervousness in a highly tense scenario at the domestic and regional levels, but it may be to fair to ponder whether the balance of power is really going to change in the Shi'i constituency. The enthusiasm of some anti-Hizbullah activists and personalities might be ill-fated after all. Hizbullah-friendly sources argued that, if one compares the posture in 2007 and 2008 with the current one, a noticeable change has taken place in the US embassy. This change supposedly affected the priority of the embassy and the scope of its involvement in local politics, in part as a result of a substitution of diplomatic personnel, and in part as a result of a change in attitude of the later Obama administration towards Syria and Iran. In any case, the outcome was allegedly a much colder attitude of US envoys towards financing and supporting anti-Hizbullah activism within the Shi'i constituency (Ayoub 2015).

Is the Syrian war really shifting the balance?

Although the research is complicated by spatial and security limitations, the outcome of current fieldwork does not seem to fully support the hypothesis of an increase in the resentment against Hizbullah among the Shia of Lebanon because of its involvement in the Syrian conflict, although anecdotal evidence supports the idea of pockets of discontent. The International Crisis Group report on Hizbullah's involvement in the Syrian quagmire is a particularly well-referenced analysis that includes direct quotations and plenty of interviews with supporters and detractors of

the party, both inside and outside the Shi'i public sphere. Critical voices have described the reputational and material harm inflicted on Hizbullah as a result of overstretching itself on the Syrian battleground, and they have defined its behaviour as a form of hubris that has translated into muscle-flexing and intimidation of dissenting voices within the Shi'i constituency. Still, the report underscored that "Hizbullah's standing among Shiites in Lebanon remains strong, despite criticism". While the party's involvement might have rendered Shi'i areas vulnerable to a string of terrorist attacks, the very virulent nature of the sectarian, anti-Alawite, anti-Shi'i development of the conflict in Syria exacerbated perceptions of vulnerability and "caused the Shiite community to rally around Hizbullah" (International Crisis Group 2014, 10–11).

The fear of Daesh and other *takfīrī* groups is seen as the factor welding many Shi'i men and women to Hizbullah, which doesn't seem to face recruitment problems for its military operations in the war in Syria. On the contrary, the prospect of fighting for Hizbullah seems to remain rather an attractive option among the under-25 age group, and according to a poll commissioned by Hayya Bina (ironically, an NGO founded by Loqman Slim, one of the most prominent "embassy Shia"), among the Shia of Lebanon popular support for Hizbullah remains very high. This process is sometimes interpreted as a "community reflex" sparked by the sectarianisation of the war in Syria (Abgrall 2015) and the perception of an existential threat posed by Sunni Islamist groups based in both Syria and Lebanon. A particularly significant point is the growing production of a religiously infused discourse that legitimises Hizbullah's involvement as a duty along the lines of the "sacred defence" narrative (Khosronejad 2013, 3–9) that largely revolves around the protection of Shi'i shrines, in particular of *sayyida* Zaynab (Abgrall 2015). The latter had already played a central role in the gendered mobilisation of Shi'i women in social and

political engagement (Deeb 2005; Deeb 2006b, 217–18). This discourse also plays on messianic aspirations and supernatural narratives that saturate Shi'i popular religiosity (Amanat 2009, 221–51; Kassatly 2008).

Running counter to the widely held but factually incorrect assumption that Hizbullah is capitalising on a disenfranchised underclass detached from a Westernised, liberal-leaning middle class, fieldwork research (Deeb and Harb 2013: 1–11, 24–8) seems to suggest the consolidation of a middle class that is organically connected to Hezbollah's discourses and practices of local governance, as well as the emergence of spaces of marginalisation and exclusion that are largely untouched by a selectively implemented system of provision of resources and welfare (Carpi 2015).[ix]

Conclusions

The threat to Hizbullah's ideological thrust seems to come neither from the liberal/neoliberal discourse of a fringe group of politicians, intellectuals, and media personalities, nor from the stress resulting from involvement in the Syrian civil war. Instead, it comes from the possible alienation of the disinherited and oppressed it claims to represent, while the party actually has a broader and more complex base of support that includes swathes of the urbanised middle class. The question is therefore how Hizbullah will deal with social issues such as corruption, poverty, lack of and access to resources in the future, and whether it will continue to accommodate the patron/client logic. In the latter case, despite all of its anti-system rhetoric, the party will unlikely

find a way to defuse the criticism of being just another example of Lebanon's sect-based clientelism, as evidenced by the street protests in the summer of 2015.

Over the past 15 years, the symbolic borders of the Lebanese Shi'i landscape have revolved around two main topics: a language of piety and morality in the internal field, supported by the consolidation of a network of charitable associations and mobilisation efforts (Harb 2005), and a grand narrative of resistance against imperialism at the regional level. While Hizbullah's position in the Lebanese Shi'i landscape will most likely not be eroded any time soon, the controversy surrounding the garbage crisis, the existence of an internal opposition, and the debate around the intervention in the Syrian conflict highlight an increasing tension over the legitimacy of the production of symbols, meanings, and identity borders. In this sense, it seems fair to question a certain exceptionalism that has often surrounded analyses of the Shi'i scene in Lebanon and perhaps pay attention to the factors of integration, inclusion, and exclusion shared with other segments of Lebanese society.

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i See Chapter 4.
ii YouStink Home – Tol3et Re7etkom (2015) http://goo.gl/xCCXmp, date accessed 4 January 2016.
iii Al-Rahel al-Kabir (2015) 'Kellon ya3ni Kellon', *YouTube*, 27 August 2015. https://goo.gl/48bZYF
iv On the "resistance paradigm" and the development of Hizbullah's narrative, see Mervin 2008, Alagha 2011, Korban 2013, Mazzucotelli 2014, and Geisser 2014.
v On the persistence of kinship-based relations, clientelistic networks, and the relevance of landowning families, see Chalabi 2006 and Shanahan 2005. For the early history of tax farming under Ottoman rule, see Winter 2010.
vi Among the vast body of scholarly literature, the following works seem particularly relevant on this point: Deeb 2006b, Jurdi Abisaab and Abisaab 2014, Mallat 1998, and Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008.
vii Among the many files, also see the one provided in the references.
viii For more information on the doctrine of the "Guardianship of the Jurist-Theologian" and the party's relationship with the supreme jurist-theologian, see Qassem 2005, 50–8.
ix See also chapter 6.

SECOND PART From (re)-ordering to nationhood

CHAPTER 4 **From *isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi* to the garbage crisis movement: political identities and antisectarian movements**

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Introduction

A revolution against sectarianism in Lebanon would entail a change of political culture and institutions. It would presuppose first and foremost a new political consciousness marked by and all-encompassing commitment to deconfessionalization, otherwise any project proposed or imposed by a Lebanese party to desectarianize the system would acquire confessional tones. (Fakhoury 2011, 11)

Fakhoury's reflections on a Lebanese revolution based on deconfessionalising the Lebanese system were written at a time in the country's history when antisectarian activism reached a new peak and protests led by political activists and civil society actors flared up in the country's larger cities (Beirut, Saïda, Tripoli, Byblos, and Nabatieh). Although Fakhoury (2011, 8) does concede that the movement had not managed to "mobilize large sections of the population", she nevertheless describes the protests as an expression of preexisting "counterpublics" that have been pressing for a new nonsectarian political consciousness in

successive waves of political protest over the past few decades. Many social science studies and publications have tackled the various avatars of these movements "advocating for universal citizenship and social rights" (Kingston 2014, 13) and the difficulties encountered in a regime where the political institutions, participation modalities, and mobilisation processes contribute to shaping political identities – confessional ones in particular (Picard 2011).

In the light of these successive waves of prewar student or labour movements (Favier 2004) and postwar civic, ecological, human rights (Karam 2006), or alternative globalisation movements (AbiYaghi 2013), this chapter seeks to consider two major antisectarian movements in Lebanon after 2011: the *isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi* (downfall of the sectarian system) (Meier 2015) and the garbage crisis protest in the summer and autumn of 2015 that initially started with the slogan, hashtag, and eponymous movement *tul'it rihetkun* ("you stink"). This chapter will assess the extent to which the two movements – emerging and evolving on the already tense terrain of sectarian and antisectarian notions – help to negotiate and reshape "political identities" in the context of the political hegemony of sectarianism.

By looking at the way in which this "reproducing sectarianism" (Kingston 2013) interacts with the antisectarian narrative and the mobilisation in the movements observed, the paper builds upon the notion of a "sectarian ghost". This term refers to a double dynamic: On the one hand, most of the movements' activists consciously adopt a clear and often militant antisectarian narrative. On the other hand, on an almost subconscious level, this narrative is often combined with sectarian approaches, discourses, and practices within the Lebanese political and social fields. In certain respects, the rise, challenges, and decline of these

antisectarian movements are not only the direct deleterious effects of the regime but also result from the "hidden census" at the level of individual political behaviour and perception. Using the term "hidden census" ("*le cens caché*"), sociologist Daniel Gaxie (1993) analysed the socio-spatial gap within the electorate to characterise the sense of powerlessness that keeps groups of citizens away from the polls because of unequal politicisation processes. This is not to say that all things are sectarian in the end but rather that attempts to build a prevalent antisectarian consciousness in Lebanon are inevitably caught up in sectarian and antisectarian realities, with such interactions and tensions expressing themselves in different ways in these movements.

The metaphor of the "sectarian ghost" allows us to develop an approach based on political identities not as a starting point but as what is at stake in any political struggle or practice (Fassin 2008). At a time when Middle Eastern societies in general are acutely raising the issue of identities and their intersecting projections in the social and political sphere, identity politics are analysed through the lens of either the culturalist or the utilitarian perspective. We endeavour to take a critical distance vis-à-vis these two approaches (either Picard (2006) or Chaïb (2009)). We propose to analyse how identity labelling, the expression of demands, or more soft-spoken, identity practices are embedded on varying scales in local social interactions in these antisectarian movements. This embeddedness includes ordinary sectarian sociabilities and benchmarks. To what degree are these anchored in rights claiming and, as such, do they constitute "acts of citizenships" (Isin and Nielsen 2008)? Also, are they a means by which subjects can perceive themselves as citizens, thus challenging the perception of a citizenship as an enduring legal and formal political status? We attempt to highlight the

manner in which these "identities" that are experienced, represented, and mobilised are subject to hybridisation processes that sometimes blur the lines. Social actors are not merely driven by political identities: They also contribute to the production of a narrative on identities and citizenship.

This process is evidenced at the end of the chapter, when we take a look at the so-called "infiltrators" (*mundassin*) in the antisectarian movements. It is interesting to examine these social actors, including political figures, as *alter egos* of the antisectarian activists. They allow us to question their disputed role as "counterrevolutionaries", an accusation that is often the product of a sectarian narrative. The analysis of such actors sheds light on how and to what extent they differ, sociologically speaking, from antisectarian activists, though not necessarily in terms of sectarian cleavages and motives.

A new cycle of antisectarian mobilisations

In the vein of the Arab revolutions in 2011, leftist parties and collectives (the Socialist Forum, Trotskyist; the Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth, the youth movement of the Lebanese Communist Party; the Democratic Collective, mainly composed of former activists from the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL) in Saïda; the Secular Club at the American University of Beirut) and civil society organisations (such as the Civil Society Current) launched the "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*" campaign. The campaign succeeded in bringing thousands of protesters into the streets of Beirut and was one of the most important

antisectarian mobilisations in the post–civil war era. However, it quickly faced internal dissent with regard to the framing of the movement. Discussions mostly centred on whether the activists wanted "to bring down or reform the regime", or on which "position to take regarding political leaders" or towards the Syrian conflict. Such issues very quickly led to the disintegration of the movement (AbiYaghi and Catusse 2014), which gave birth to several smaller campaigns that are still active at the time of this writing (AbiYaghi 2012).

The "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*" movement was not born out of "an immaculate contestation" (Allal and Pierret 2013, 20) but was rather a moment that contributed to reviving previous causes for a wide array of activists in Lebanon. On the one hand, the country's Left had been mobilising for secularism for years (Younes 2016), and on the other hand, the antisectarian movements that incubated mainly in the civil organisations of the 1990s (Karam 2006) and the "antiglobalisation nebula" in the 2000s (AbiYaghi 2013) mobilised around secularism as the smallest "common denominator". Against the backdrop of such immaterial political demands, the #youstink movement also revives previous local collectives for material demands (regarding waste management policy). In many ways, the movement's leadership resembled its precursors from the 1970s, 1990s, and 2000: They mainly comprised educated men living in Beirut (although some demonstrations took place in other towns) who were politically educated in strongly ideologised and disciplinary organisations (few political newcomers) and mainly came from Shi'i or Christian sects (Maronite and Greek-Orthodox) (Favier 2004; Karam 2006; AbiYaghi 2013; AbiYaghi and Catusse 2014). However, while these predecessors from the 1990s were mainly upper-middle class (academics, lawyers,

journalists, etc.), today's activists are younger and characterised by considerable social but often precarious economic capital.

In the summer and fall of 2015, a double deadlock triggered the garbage crisis movement: The Lebanese government had decided not to renew its contract with Sukleen, the private company responsible for waste collection and street sweeping in Greater Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and the biggest landfill at Naʿameh had reached its capacity and closed on July 17, 2015. Since then, no political decision has been taken (as of this writing in January 2016) to resolve the "garbage crisis".[i] The protest movement also clearly drew from previous political and social movements. The beginning of the protest movement saw the mobilisation of local residents and a few ecological activists as "not in my backyard" movements (NIMBY), notably in the small locality of Barja in the Chouf district, close to the Naʿameh landfill, as early as 2014. This movement grew quickly, first on social media and then on the streets of the capital as people rallied behind the two main hashtags of "#youstink" (*#tol3it_ri7etkun*) and "#wewantaccountability" (*#badna_n7asib*). From local development and ecological demands, the movement grew to denounce the collusion of private interest companies (particularly Sukleen, the firm in charge of waste management), the Lebanese government, and sectarian political parties, as well as widespread corruption and a lack of accountability (Bekdache 2015; Dot-Pouillard 2015).

While the "youstink" group (mainly formed by independent and "civil society" activists, as well as ecological and human rights associations, among others) primarily pushed for short-term sectoral measures to solve the garbage crisis, other groups had a more political – and

often radical – approach, with demands ranging from denouncing corruption to criticising the consociational system to working to bring about its downfall.

The left-leaning collective "*badna nhasib*" ("we want accountability") made an explicit connection between the garbage crisis and the corrupt political system. Another leftist group, "*ash-sha'ab yurid*" ("the people want" was a phrase that echoed the recurrent slogan of the various Arab uprisings), launched its Facebook page at the end of August.[ii] In contrast to "*badna nhasib*", which tends to incorporate major political parties, "*ash-sha'ab yurid*" consists of grassroots movements and collectives, as well as smaller political parties born out of different leftist initiatives and (re)configurations over the past decade (notably the Socialist Forum, a Trotskyist party, founded in 2010). While this group does not enjoy the same level of mobilisation, it has been quite active on the ground by handing out leaflets and holding public debates.

More generally, the main "entrepreneurs" of the movement, like the "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*" movement, are activists who gained their political experience in other and/or previous political and civil organisations, notably the campaign to end the sectarian regime in 2011, or in various attempts to fight the regime and its institutions. Both "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*" and the garbage crisis movement contributed to renewing recurrent topics of contestation and reinvigorating older forms of activism.

Through its somewhat spontaneous expression of a grievance literally affecting all the residents in those early weeks (namely the growing garbage piles in Beirut, but also outside

the capital), the movement gained sympathy among the population and succeeded in attracting thousands of protesters to their marches in summer 2015. In this movement, the main "historical" protagonists are civil society experts and political activists (mostly men) active in Beirut-based circles. Despite the lack of an extensive survey, but based on the sectarian affiliations of the movement's main public figures, they seem to come from a confessionally mixed and urbanised milieu. Moreover, their geographical location and social background is also telling: On the one hand, the driving force of the movement came from urbanised Beirutis; on the other hand, there has been a considerable degree of mobilisation in the northern region of Akkar (*#akkar_mana_mazbaleh*), in the Bekaa (*#hirak_ba'albeck*), and in the Metn and Chouf districts (*#Jal_el_Dib_revolution*, *#barja*, *#al-hamleh_al-ahliya_li_'iqfal_matmar_an-na'meh*). Among other things, these were the areas where the garbage crisis was the most visible and where the population felt politically neglected in the face of the crisis. There was less mobilisation in the south and in Beirut's southern suburbs. This was attributed in particular to the dominance of Hizbullah in those areas and alleged fears of the region's inhabitants. It is nevertheless remarkable that there was considerable mobilisation in other Shia/Hizbullah-dominated areas, like Baalbek, where the establishment of a landfill was discussed at one point. The geographical dissemination of the different movements showed that confessional affiliations did not play a dominant role in creating modes of action and mobilisation. Rather, these were mostly influenced by previously established forms of activism and concrete grievances based on perceptions of neglect in the various areas.

While the movement gathered multiple ideological stances (mainly the radical leftist movements, civil movements, and socialist and/or nationalist movements), it mobilised around the common denominator of antisectarian narratives. These narratives go beyond merely criticising and fighting sectarianism. Rather, they include a critique of the confessional system, sectarian affiliations, and religious extremism, in addition to the repudiation of corruption, ineffective governance, and social injustice, and demands for public spaces, accountability, transparency, gender equity, etc. Finally, they also include far-reaching political demands such as the resignation of the government, electoral reform, and the overall downfall or reform of the confessional system (depending on activist affiliation).

These recurring forms of activism and demands notwithstanding, the garbage crisis movement displayed some features that set it apart from these previous movements. Although stemming from the development of the trash crisis and the widespread dysfunction of public services in Lebanon, the movement itself was born out of the need to protest against and ultimately solve an immediate "emergency situation". Therefore, the movement should be considered at a very specific historical moment within the state of Lebanon, when an accumulation of crises expressed themselves in a context of sluggish political discourse, the near-stagnation of public services and governance, and increasing socio-economic decline. Moreover, developments since 2011 seem to have accentuated older processes of decline in public services and the ineffectiveness of institutions in addition to a political crisis. From this perspective, advocacy for nonsectarian policies and politics appear as acts of citizenship (i.e. the extraordinary expression of shared belongings and the claims for rights anchored in a shared community), regardless of – or breaking with – the very sectarian affiliation of the demonstrators, and their

everyday life.

In this fatalistic moment, the movement managed to mobilise people quickly, and participation exceeded the scope of the previous movements and the antisectarian mobilisation, and it probably exceeded the movement's own initial expectations, too. The regime's disproportionate reaction to mainly peaceful protesters contributed to even more sympathy for and participation in the movement's demonstrations. The movement succeeded in bringing together many demonstrators from both sides of the existing political dichotomy between March 8 and March 14. However, it was not long before police brutality started to contribute, among other factors, to dampening the movement: Slowly, demonstrations started to see a decrease in participation, while the movement and its different activist groups experienced criticism and scepticism from many former sympathisers.

In the context of post-2011 Lebanon, these recent antisectarian movements remind us that the devil is in the detail and more precisely how, despite the highly sectarian organisation of Lebanese polity, citizenship can be drawn from lived experiences, extraordinary revolts, and formal entitlements "in order to map out, confine, extend, name, and enact the boundaries of belonging to a polity" (Isin 2008, 15). Citizenship in Lebanon is not only framed by sectarian structures and organisations: Because it results from nonordinary practices, it also takes place through a series of political struggles in which the "sectarian ghost" is ubiquitous but not necessarily a determining factor. Contestation against sectarian structures, their mindset, and narratives appear in recurrent and renewed negotiations among activists and in negotiation with the dominant political and socio-economic field.

The "sectarian ghost"

> We had avoided the problems until then, but some of us decided to put up the pictures of those that they wanted to topple, like Hassan Nasrallah [...] We had a big debate about the pictures chosen; some of us wanted to remove them. This is our big demonstration: We want to set a good image. And it has divided us again. Because the leaders (*zu'ama*) remained strong. There was a real battle about the demonstration. A homosexual also spoke in front of the camera, saying "We are for a secular (*'almani*) system" [...] The media took advantage of this. They showed our divisions to the public.[iii]

This quotation from a member of the Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth who is also a protagonist of the "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*" movement expresses the inevitable internal divisions and subsequent falling out over the course of the movement. He ascribes these divisions to the mounting disagreement among the movement's actors as to how to address the sectarian symbols and expressions of the Lebanese political system during protests, on the one hand, and how to envision a new and reshaped political and social future for Lebanon on the other. These ambivalences within the movement reveal one aspect of the sectarian ghost: Any emerging movement attempting to overcome the prevalent sectarian paradigm is doomed to trip over it. The sectarian ghost exists in the outer political and social realities that the antisectarian movements are facing and fighting. The quotation also reveals another

dimension of this ghost: the issue of how to deal with sectarian signs and manifestations poses the question of "who are we?" in relation to and in dissociation of these manifestations. It is this question that often causes the conflicts and divisions that usually lead to mutual accusations of being sectarian or not distancing oneself enough from sectarian paradigms. In this sense, the "sectarian ghost" also refers to negotiations and interactive processes inside the movement itself.

This seems to be a recurring issue. If sectarian identities play an indisputable role in the primary socialisation of activists, they are also negotiated and contested in their life worlds and stories in opposition to other belongings and identities. This can be seen, for instance, in previous antisectarian movements similar to "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi*". Its main challenges and disintegration can be partly attributed to what we call here the emergence of the sectarian ghost. The difficulties that the activists faced in the process of framing their mobilisation show the underlying political boundaries' primary belongings and identities. These difficulties came up during debates on whether to denounce sectarian political leaders in their slogan "*isqat an-nizam at-ta'ifi wa rumuzihi*" (downfall of the sectarian regime and its symbols), especially when it came to including the picture of Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hizbullah, and questioning the issue of "Hizbullah's arms".

Similar debates have cropped up in the movement for the downfall of the sectarian regime regarding its assessment of the events in Syria. Some activists saw it as a popular revolution, similar to the experiences of Tunisian and Egyptian protesters, while others tended to side with the Assad regime, which feared a radical Sunni takeover of Syria and questioned the

possible implications for Lebanon's neighbour. This led to their alignment along the hegemonic sectarian and partisan divide on the same matter. Hence, the Syrian revolution contributed to the resurgence of sectarian narratives among activist ranks during recent mobilisations.

Four years later, in 2015, with the garbage crisis movement, activists seemed again to be stumbling over the same taboos that simultaneously constitute consociationalism's pillars and inherent limitations. There were similar points of contention among the various actors of the garbage crisis movement. A debate over having pictures of political leaders during demonstrations started in August 2015. Under the inclusive slogan "*killun ya'ni killun*" ("everyone means everyone"), one of the activist groups, which called itself "*3alshare3*" ("to the street"), put up pictures of political leaders along with a few sentences poking fun at them. The campaign included images of Samir Geagea, Walid Jumblatt, Michel Aoun, Gibran Bassil, Nouhad, and Mohammad Mashnuq, as well as Hassan Nasrallah, who until then had mostly been spared from accusations.[iv] The slogan next to his picture read: "'There is nothing in Dahiyeh.' No water… no electricity… The only tanks you care about are those for your wars?!"[v] This approach again led to heated discussions about sectarianism and corruption and finally the deletion of Nasrallah of the pictures.[vi] For some activists, the exclusion of Hizbullah was short-sighted, given that the party has played a big part, both military and politically, in the political developments of the country, and because the regions under the party's control suffer from the same infrastructural problems as the rest of the country. The exclusion of Nasrallah was a sign to many that the leftist groups generally tended towards the

8 March coalition and were therefore reluctant to expand their criticism to that part of the political spectrum.

A different sectarian-tinged discussion developed around the question of the confessionalisation of the garbage crisis itself. With the emergence of the crisis in Lebanon, various solutions were considered with regard to solid waste management from the state's side. At first the government issued a call to various companies to draft a plan for solid waste management. After this plan was cancelled following internal and external criticism, the government approved a waste management plan drafted by Akram Chehayeb, the minister of agriculture, but this plan has since fallen by the wayside.

Chehayeb is associated with the "golden age" of environmental advocacy in Lebanon, the "greening of sectarianism" (Kingston 2013, 129–81). Close to Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Socialist Progressive Party, he was the first Lebanese minister of environment (1996–98), appointed after huge protests against the development of stone quarries in the mountains, as well as president of the Parliamentary Committee for the Environment (2000). Although those initiatives produced few results, this first Chehayeb mandate contributed in the eyes of many Lebanese environmental activists in the 1990s to an ephemeral yet effective institutionalisation of "the norms and rules challenging the free-flowing and unruly nature of post-war clientelistic dynamics" (Karam 2004, 395–405): The activists "succeeded in placing their issues on the national public agenda" (Kingston 2013, 156). In many respects, the same can be said of the 2015 movement. While Chehayeb's appointment to solve the crisis raised some expectations among certain activists, it also exacerbated criticism of his proposed

plan.[vii] Different activist groups heavily criticised it for not providing sustainable solutions, not taking into account environmental consequences, serving the usual politicians clientelistic interests, and not respecting the rights, duties, and financial prerogatives of the municipalities.

The different propositions of the government also sparked a discussion not only of the clientelistic but also of the confessional nature of Lebanese waste management and the solutions to it. The geographical allocation of the landfills was soon tied to the alleged confessional prevalence within those areas, tied to the clientelistic way of allocating shares and benefits to the different political leaders and their followers. This led to a discussion about the confessional nature of the garbage crisis plans. Activists started to mock the "confessional garbage" of Lebanon by posting pictures on social media of the growing garbage piles with confessional references to single garbage bags like "a Shi'i garbage bag in Ashrafieh" (a Christian neighbourhood). While the confessionalisation of discourses regarding the crisis was dealt with through humour and irony, it also caused frustration among many of the activists and gradually seemed to poison their modes of action and discourse. In one of our interviews, one independent long-time activist recalled her own experience with this confessionalisation process:

> I used to go to the demonstrations with three long-time friends. It was the first time that we had a common political cause. They are all Aounists. And suddenly two of them told me that they didn't want to go anymore. When I asked them why, they said the movement had become confessionally biased, that they only attacked members of

the March 14 coalition and seemed to be supported by March 8. I had no idea what to say to this.[viii]

These examples show not only that the movement was reiterating sectarian realities in Lebanon by means of various conscious modes of action – discussions and confrontations, as well as humour and irony – but also how such discourse often leads to dissent within the movement in terms of how far and which symbols of Lebanese sectarianism are to be incorporated into the protest, and how these symbols are addressed. This is further complicated in light of the fact that the dominant political discourse resorts with startling ease to confessional explanations for modes of dissent and protest. In this ambivalent situation, it seems that antisectarian movements like the ones discussed here face a kind of sectarian trap in which sectarian discourses appear to reproduce themselves.

The discourse on sectarianism within antisectarian movements demonstrates how this ambivalence in terms of discourse and practice is related to questions of dominance and distribution of existing mobilisation resources and agency facilities within the Lebanese political scene. It is therefore crucial not to fall into fatalism and label everything as sectarian or a reproduction of sectarianism but rather to explore the dynamics of restriction, power asymmetries, mobilisation, domination, and entanglement within Lebanon's political and civil society (Kingston 2013, 3). Instead of dealing with sectarian affiliations and political skills as things that produce equal kinds of political capital, we suggest taking into account the "hidden disfranchisement" or "census" and thus considering the social conditions of political

behaviour. In other words, we suggest that Lebanese citizens are unequally predisposed to raising their voice against any political issue, be it sectarian or not.

Such a reactivation of identity narratives could also be observed more recently in the use of the term "*mundassin*" (the infiltrators), which brings to mind the "*baltagiya*", or "thugs", of the Egyptian revolution. Presented as counterrevolutionary figures in opposition to the "*shebab*" (the revolutionaries), they remind us of at least two classical political symbols and paradigms of depoliticised actors: on the orientalist side, the Lebanese or Syrian urban "*qabaday*", the local gang leader and "social bandit", himself at the service of a *za'îm*, functional element of the sectarian and clientelistic system (Johnson 2001); on the Marxist side, the "lumpenproletariat", a collection of faceless individuals, devoid of political consciousness, available to the highest bidder and always on the bad side. Ultimately the "*mundassin*" as antisectarian activists raise the question of how identity intersects with other forms of allegiance.

Narratives of dissent on the "*mundassin*"

A considerable amount of literature deals with social movement activists, yet very little or no attention has been given to social movement infiltrators or, more broadly, to social movement actors whose allegiances are in dispute. Indeed, as we will see in this section, the "infiltrators" (*mundassin*) have been accused of spreading dissent within the movement or even of undertaking illegal activities to "justify" official action and/or repression.

It can be challenging for the researcher to study such actors, as the difficulties range from access, to the scientist's empathy for more accommodating or exhilarating subject matter, to the sometimes recurring temptation to reproduce the conspiratorial narratives of activists. However, examining the role and participation of these actors should be at the core of the social movement literature, especially with regard to actors evolving "within a context".

The first time the *mundassin* appeared was not as part of the waste management protest movement. Activist accounts in the 1990s and the early 2000s often refer to state or party member infiltration through direct observation (for example, by participating in their meetings and systematically checking attendees lists, notably during the "Syrian presence" era) or repression (direct confrontation with security forces, for example). Within the scope of this chapter, we seek to illuminate how all these actions, allegiances, and motives are at play and intertwined within the frame of a protest movement.

During the garbage crisis movement, the state apparatus used a wide array of means to contain protests in the summer of 2015: massive military deployments, arbitrary arrests, tear gas, activists being tried in military courts, and shooting protesters were just some of the coercive tools being used. Other means focused on undermining the movement by accusing the protesters of being drug addicts (thus forcing detained demonstrators to undertake and pay for their own urine tests) or of being manipulated and funded by a "small Arab country",[ix] thus introducing the notion of "infiltrators". Although the Minister of the Interior was trying to categorise "infiltrators" (a term used interchangeably with "rioters" or "trouble makers") as

foreigners (Syrian and Sudanese refugees had allegedly been detained by security forces), it was not long before the narrative of the so-called "infiltrators" started to be used by some of the activists themselves.

The term emerged during the demonstrations in late August 2015, when for the first time large and diverse segments of the Lebanese population began to join the protests. The state's rather excessive kneejerk reaction against peaceful protesters (including many children and elderly people) demanding basic civil rights led to an even bigger mobilisation. Many people joined the protesters in downtown Beirut to show their solidarity with the movement and to denounce the state's reaction to it. During these demonstrations, divisions among the protesters started to appear. While some – mainly young men – called for a violent removal of the security blockades erected by the police to separate the protesters from the seats of power, others confronted the wall of armed police (and the army) chanting "*silmiyeh, silmiyeh*" ("Non-violence, non-violence") to voice their disapproval of violent confrontations with the state. This tense situation further escalated in the evening when the sit-in protest turned into a full-fledged demonstration. The same young men reappeared, running bare-chested through the crowd and carrying empty plastic bottles to throw at the police and the army. Their seeming willingness to use violence as a mode of action as part of the protests took many other demonstrators by surprise and alienated many of them, who clearly struggled to find a narrative of inclusion/exclusion in response to the emergence of the "infiltrators".

Activist narratives regarding the rioters or "infiltrators" differ depending on groups and campaigns. Some activist groups distanced themselves from the rioters by claiming their

mobilisation was "pacifist and civilised" (*hirak musalim wa hadari*) and even asking the security forces to help them keep the infiltrators out of the demonstrations. Others reversed the stigma and started identifying themselves as "infiltrators" by wearing T-shirts stamped with "*indisas*" (infiltration) and mocking the exclusion dynamics and labelling of certain modes of protest (violence vs. peacefulness) of some of the protest groups.

However, even among the latter groups, and as the presence of the infiltrators and violent encounters within the protest movement increased, some activists started questioning the hidden motivations of the rioters:

> Although I am totally against the dominant discourse, especially as our group approves of the use of violence or civil disobedience, I can't help but wonder why these people are attacking other demonstrators who want to hold all politicians accountable, including Nabih Berri [head of the Amal party and speaker of the Lebanese parliament]. Why is it forbidden to say his name? I can't help but think that the Amal militia sent these individuals…[x]

All these narratives can be linked to the question of recourse to political violence and disobedience as a mode of action in protest movements, not a consensual issue among protesters, although the prevalent discourse consisted in emphasising the peaceful nature of the protest. Rioters were almost automatically identified as coming from the poor Shi'i neighbourhood of Khandaq al-Ghamiq, and their peer demonstrators (sometimes

condescendingly) perceived the political expression of their anger as "ordinary" or even "timely":

> I am personally a pacifist, but I think that to have things really moving and changing, we need some people to shake some trees, you know? Poverty in the poor suburbs and areas of Lebanon and the lack of education, jobs, livelihoods, and horizons for these youth make violent actions a normal way for them to convey their message. At some point, we just need to admit that they are taking risks that we can't afford to take.[xi]

Hence, the issue of the infiltrators – and the question of how to address the issue within the protest movement - ultimately touched on many topics central to the self-positioning of the activists and protesters calling for demonstrations against a corrupt and sectarian system. The question of the infiltrators' sectarian belonging (and the attendant political implications), along with their class affiliation also raised the question of patronage networks and political offer. Their identification as Shi'i youth from an Amal bastion automatically made them suspects in the eyes of a predominantly middle-class, Beirut-based circle that has been active in a certain *entre-soi*. "When they burst into the demonstration and walked in this kind of procession, it really made me think of 'Ashura", said an activist, adding "we never used to see them in the protests".[xii]

However, considering the infiltrators as a monolithic bloc (whether based on sect or class) strips them of any sociological background, disregards their political and social socialisation processes, and ultimately denies them any political consciousness. The question of infiltrators therefore seems to show a dilemma essential to the very self-positioning and self-perception

of the protesters themselves. On the one hand, distancing themselves from the infiltrators and labelling them in relation to their alleged affiliation with one of the main pillars of the corrupt sectarian system, namely the Amal Movement, meant giving in to the same dichotomous and dominant interpretation that in the Lebanese mainstream media and the politicians took up regarding the movement. On the other hand, the denial of this affiliation (in favour of class sentiments) somehow equalled a rather naive denial of the fact that sectarian affiliations can move along with other affiliations and that they are therefore important to address as an ambivalent notion. Both approaches – mainly adopted in a rather sudden way after the infiltrators' arrival caught the protesters by surprise – somehow turned a blind eye to the links between the dominance of sectarian affiliations, ideology, and patronage networks in Lebanon on the one hand and the rather marginal but appealing antisectarian and demand-oriented protest movements and mobilisations on the other. The denial of these links shows a tendency to ignore the protesters' own entanglement in these dominant structures and discourses. Exploring these links – in terms of conscious self-conception as well as unconscious exclusion/inclusion mechanisms within protest movements – can reveal how these two notions are at play and hinder, facilitate, and change the movement itself. Unlike *qabaday* and lumpenproletariat, both of which refer to political immaturity, the *mundassin*'s presence can channel some acts of citizenship, a citizenship framed by sectarian narratives and solidarities.

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed political identities in the context of a dominant sectarian political society. We shed light on practices and acts of citizenship within extraordinary movements

and moments that challenge assigned and stable definitions of identities and status. Moreover, we analysed the linkages between these extraordinary moments and more ordinary political struggles: sectarian affiliations, local forms of political and social mobilisation, or past sympathies with antisectarian contestations.

We looked at the interplay and linkages by conceptualising the metaphor of the "sectarian ghost" to demonstrate that sectarianism plays a major role in the conscious strategy of activists with antisectarian demands. Likewise, sectarianism plays a somewhat subconscious role in the positioning of those activists.

Still, one has to look beyond the ghost. The ghost does not inhibit the actions and practices of citizenship exemplified by the two movements analysed. Rather, although the ghost tends to pervade discourses on and within the movements, as seen by the question of the *mundassin*, it does not hinder demands for material or immaterial rights challenging something else than sectarianism, from NIMBY demands to the downfall of the regime.

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[i] For a chronology of the "garbage crisis", see: Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. 2015. "Waste Management Conflict" http://goo.gl/gwA4Y2 (last accessed January 29, 2016).

[ii] Other smaller groups also emerged during the last mobilisation, including '*ash-shara'a* ("to the streets"), which gathered activists from the moribund Democratic Left Movement; "*thawrat 22 ab*" (revolution of August 22), a group of independent leftist activists; and the "Feminist Bloc", notably around the feminist collective "*sawt an-niswa*".

[iii] One of the ULDY activists, interview with the authors, May 6, 2013.

[iv] The pictures can be found on the campaign's official Facebook page: https://goo.gl/IgWT4p. Pictures of August 27–28, 2015 (last accessed December 11, 2015).

[v] Owing to the heated reactions the picture caused, it is rather difficult to find a copy of it online, which also led to some activists posting it repeatedly on their personal page.

[vi] See chapter 3.

[vii] For an overview of the Chehayeb plan and its flaws from the activists' point of view, see the video of the collective Akhtaboot: 'Akhtaboot #001', Akhtaboot al-Qarar 9, https://goo.gl/oBECZe (last accessed December 12, 2015).

[viii] Interview with the authors, September 20, 2015, Beirut.

[ix] An expression used by the Minister of the Interior, N. Mashnuq, January 9, 2015.

[x] Interview with the authors, September 4, 2015, Beirut.

[xi] Interview with the authors, September 5, 2015, Beirut.

[xii] Interview with the authors, September 8, 2015, Beirut.

CHAPTER 5 **"The People Want the Army": Is the Lebanese Military an Exception to the Crisis of the State?**

Vincent Geisser

Introduction: Does the LAF Protect the Civility of the Regime?

It has become a tradition that every year on August 1, which marks the official Lebanese holiday celebrating the anniversary of the foundation of the army, the country's citizens pour into Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut to chant the slogan "The people want the army!"[i] This may appear surprising in a country that has never really had a militarist tradition comparable to other "garrison states" in the Arab world (Lasswell 1997; Picard 2008). Since Lebanon achieved independence in 1943, the military has only played a minor role in public life. When high army officers held power, they did so as civilians and swapped their military uniforms for suits and ties (Barak 2006 and 2009). This story seems to belong to the process of the "civilianisation in the armed forces as described by social scientists (Huntington 1957; Joana and Smyrl 2008; Geisser and Krefa 2011). The process of "civilianisation" corresponds to a functioning of the military institutions that overlaps with civil standards.

From this point of view, Lebanon appears to be an exception in the Arab world: Except for the reign of General Fuad Chehab, the founder and commander in chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which has left a profound mark on Lebanese society (Malsagne 2011),

political and religious leaders have mostly side-lined military elites to the point that centrifugal forces have often overwhelmed and reduced the LAF to a state of chronic weakness. While the General Chehab's presidency was relatively short-lived (1958–64), it has often been seen as a golden age of politics, a period of stability, security, and relative prosperity. In the context of the current institutional crisis[ii] that is taking place across Lebanon, the power vacuum in the office of the president, and the prorogation of Parliament, Chehabism constitutes a genuine political mythology (Girardet 1990). It combines composite and sometimes contradictory symbolic repositories: The nostalgia for a security order accompanies a desire to return to a "normal democracy," a regime that has supposedly been besmirched by corrupt politico-religious elites and is controlled by private interests. As paradoxical as it may seem, the nation's army has been made to play an idealised civil role (Iskandar 2002) to compensate for the deficiencies of a civil governance system that is perceived to be bankrupt.

Since 2011, the LAF has been at the heart of socio-political struggles, as the fallout from the Syrian crisis and the ever-present threat of jihadist terrorism have deepened feelings of political failure and insecurity among the general population in Lebanon (Geisser 2013). Yet the popular call for the army's "return" to the public scene is not connected to the lasting power of militarist tendencies rooted in society. In Lebanon, social militarism – exemplified by young women dressed up as soldiers to express their support for the army or posters that glorify army officers and frequently cover the walls of the city centres – is no more than folklore and the theatrical staging of patriotism. The majority of political, religious, union, and civil organisation actors reject the idea of a military government, which is considered to

be fundamentally "contrary to the constitutive principles and values of 'Lebanese consociational democracy'" (Picard 2001). In Lebanon, a very negative connotation is still attached to militarism, which is associated with the painful memory of the Syrian occupation and the abuses committed by Syrian soldiers. A majority of Lebanese citizens are trying to distance, their state from these experiences of militarism by working toward a higher degree of civility in the Lebanese state than is found in their "large neighbour" (Picard 2013). Loyalty to civilian power thus evinces a quasi-patriotic desire to differentiate Lebanon from the hegemonic ambitions of Syria (and of Israel): The country's civility is also a way of directly or indirectly differentiating it from the supposed "incivility" of the Syrian regime and, more obliquely, from other Arab states.

It is clear that the complex notion of the "pro-army" mythology permeating Lebanese society today should not be mistaken for a popular desire to restore a military regime. On the contrary, in the context of a profound crisis among public institutions and the general discrediting of partisan and religious actors, this myth of the army primarily works upon an imagined civility. From this point of view, the LAF is valued not for its ability to militarise society but mainly for its potential to "civilise" public space and state institutions. In short, in this chapter, I argue that in a Lebanese society continually in search of moral and political standards, part of the population holds up the army as a vector of civility, even of civic-mindedness. Consequently, I reject the thesis according to which the LAF is a "sociological exception" (the army as sanctuary) or, by contrast, an incarnation of the state's weakness.

To this end, I present an innovative view of the military institution and analyse the political communication processes that the army utilises as a means to compensate its structural weakness.

I have analysed the popularity of the army as an ideological construct that is fabricated, articulated, and legitimated by social actors holding particular interests. In the first place, the army itself takes an active role in producing its social image through a communications policy that matches the complexity and sophistication of larger Western armies' communications policies. Just like in most of the world's armies, while high army officials are constrained to a "duty to remain neutral," the LAF is far from being silent in the public sphere. In Lebanon, the army employs a professional marketing structure aimed at the public at large (poster campaigns), the media (press releases), and opinion leaders (frequent meetings with political party, union, and religious leaders). I have gathered and analysed more than 50 images and videos produced by the LAF between 2000 and 2015 and used in public campaigns, strategy bulletins that appear three to four times a year, and official statements.

The Army and 'Its' People: The Construction of a Patriotic Mythology in the Context of Permanent Crisis

As political scientist Nayla Moussa (2009) reminds us, the LAF's popularity is both a political and ideological construction. There is nothing spontaneous or natural about it; rather, it is the product of actions ordered from high up in the military institution with the goal of conferring political and social legitimacy in the public space upon the army. Studying the "popularity" of

the LAF requires analysing the apparatus and mechanisms through which the army manufactures its own image for ordinary citizens, opinion leaders (the media, political and religious leaders) and international actors.

The Myth of the Neutrality of the Military Institution

If the notion of political neutrality is common to the majority of armed forces around the world, and especially to those emanating from the "French military matrix" (Cohen 2008a), in Lebanon this notion entails a particular meaning due to "segmentarist dynamics", that is to say a political and religious logic that cuts across other public institutions. In this sense, the LAF is an exception. Very early on, it found itself given the role of being a vector of national cohesion ("Making the Nation"), similar to the role assigned to the public school in France's Third Republic. Since its founding in 1945, the army's neutrality (*al-jaysh al-muhayid*) has been considered the unifying cement of the military institution and, beyond that, of the Lebanese nation itself. During the early years, General Chehab – a former officer of the troops of the French Mandate (French Forces of the Levant), an ardent Francophone and someone fascinated by the French military model – left his mark on the functioning of the LAF and its relationship with other state institutions (Barak, 2009). This Chehabist influence is so powerful that even today the military mythology remains mixed in with the mythology of Chehabism, which itself is part of the mythology of the nation:[iii] The Lebanese population frequently cites Chehab, the "father of the army" (Soubrier, 2013), as one of the founding fathers of an independent Lebanon.

Throughout the history of contemporary Lebanon, the military staff has advanced the notion that the army's neutrality guarantees national sovereignty, produces social cohesion, and serves as the final rampart against the break-up of territorial unity. In 1958, even though Lebanese society was on the brink of civil war (Freiha, 1980; Barak 2009), the army refused to take sides. This neutrality allowed Chehab to be considered a genuine statesman; a few months later, he became president of the Lebanese Republic. In the 1990s, in the aftermath of the Taif Agreement that brought the civil war to an end, the army was petitioned to play a central role in the nation's reconstruction:

> [I]n the ideological vacuum and the political disorder of the postwar period, the army quickly made it so that it was elevated into a national symbol of patriotism and integrity, which contrasted with the image of militia forces that had in the past been valued but finally ended up being despised, and also with that of non-Lebanese military officers in the country. (Dupont 1999, 66)

In 2005, after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, while two hostile political camps (the pro-Syrian 8 March Alliance and the anti-Syrian 14 March Coalition), ready to resort to arms, squared off against each other, the army established a kind of *cordon sanitaire* so that the political conflict would not spiral into deadly violence. In May 2008, Hezbollah militia fighters entered Sunni neighbourhoods in downtown Beirut, which provoked a strong reaction from the 14 March Coalition (especially from the Sunnis, members of Saad Hariri's Future Movement[iv]) and led to clashes that caused dozens of casualties, some fatal, among the Future partisans. The LAF high command decided not to choose sides in the conflict. Since 2011–12, due to the dramatic fallout of the Syrian crisis on Lebanese territory – among others,

the massive influx of refugees and the question of jihadist terrorism,– the high command of the LAF regularly delivered messages calling out against particularistic logics that insinuate themselves into the heart of the military institution, as well as in the heat of the political game:

> In more than one region, you have risen to the challenges, obstacles, and pressures aiming to force you off the accomplishment of your message; sometimes through political campaigns that have tried to affect your determination to protect your internal workings from external repercussions, sometimes by trying to affect the national immunity of military officers by provoking religious and confessional beliefs among a certain number of them with the goal of pushing them to adopt communitarian beliefs that serve neither the interest of the army nor that of all of the citizens. These desperate measures, whatever their results, are clearly destined to fail. The army will remain determined to preserving its structure in order to protect the soul of the martyrs and the hopes of the Lebanese people. (Direction de l'Orientation, 2012)

Beyond the management of political and security crises, neutrality is also declared to be one of the *sine qua non* conditions of recruitment for the army:

> At the moment of enrolment, the candidate must resolve his or her transfer, and before being enrolled, the candidate must disengage, abrogate or suppress his or her affiliation to any party, association, or union, with the exception of professional unions, and to no longer attend any of their meetings.[v]

However, to a large extent, the principle of army neutrality reiterated in regulatory institutional texts, official communiqués from the chief of staff, and public declarations from high military officials showcases a political mythology. In this sense, the issue is not so much a radical non-political behaviour but rather hyper-interventionist neutrality. From this point of view, the Chehabist period, which is presented as the golden age of the impartiality of state institutions in general and of the army in particular (Corm, 2003), more strongly points towards an ambivalent conception of army neutrality. Indeed, Chehab's presidency, far from being synonymous with the retreat of the military institution from political life, was characterised by an important growth in the army's intelligence apparatus (known as the "deuxième bureau"), which frequently intervened in politics and strengthened the security dynamics of "Lebanese democracy" through surveillance of political parties, interrogation of union leaders and civil society activists, restrictions on public liberties, and press censorship. For political scientist Oren Barak (2009, 53) the Chehabist management of public space belonged less to the promotion of military neutrality than to a neo-patrimonial mode of government, with President Chehab at times behaving like a traditional *zaïm* (leader), surrounded by young officers, the *Chehab lieutenants*. Calling attention to this historical fact puts into context the myth of the LAF's "total neutrality" and underlines its recurrent interference in the country's public life in the name of defending the national interest, without succumbing to the temptations of pretorianism (Cohen 2008b, 77). In Lebanon, the army never took over power in its own name.

The LAF: Media Actor and Opinion Leader

When it comes to the management of public speech, the LAF cuts a contrary figure to the French army. While about the French army it is often said that "the army does not speak, it marches" (Bois 1991, 523), about the LAFA one can symbolically turn the phrase so that it becomes "the army does not march, but it does talk." Indeed, thanks to its strategic direction (*moudiriyyat al-tawjîh*), the LAF engages in relatively successful public communication, which in part consists of the classic propaganda of a political organisation and in part is made up of high-tech marketing by advertising agencies. At the outset, the bulletins of the *moudiriyyat al-tawjîh* were meant to broadcast internal institutional messages for important events or crises. Over time, however, these written notes from the commander in chief of the army transformed into real press releases reporting the institution's positions and points of view for the public, the media, and political, union, and religious leaders.

Colourful posters and banners regularly cover the urban landscape of Lebanese cities and villages with slogans that play up romantic, heroic, and patriotic registers: "From the heart of the family to that of the nation!", "The dawn of martyrs is not absent!", "[The military]'s hand brings people together!", "Together we accomplish independence, together we come together!", "Year after year, we continue to give!", "Trust in the protecting steps of the nation!", and "In the heart [of the country] and on the border!" Indeed, along with written communication, the strategic direction organises publicity campaigns several times a year to utilise giant or medium-sized posters depicting the privileged relationship between the army and the people (Dupont 1999). While it is difficult to measure the real impact of these propaganda campaigns on public opinion, it should be noted that ordinary citizens in Lebanon generally respect these posters, which are rarely vandalised or covered in insults. Smaller

posters glorifying the military institutions are sometimes found on rear bumpers, shop windows, or the walls of personal residences. Following the changes in communication techniques, the army has more recently cooperated with Lebanon's leading telephone companies (Alfa and Touch) to develop support campaigns for soldiers through text messages, which are sent directly to the inboxes of hundreds of thousands of subscribers.

But without a doubt the most noteworthy event is Army Day on August 1. In Lebanon, this is a public holiday just as important in the official calendar as Independence Day on November 22. These two events are sometimes mixed together for a number of Lebanese citizens, because Army Day is celebrated as a moment of national unity and as a patriotic commemoration, leading to popular mobilisations that will be analysed in the following section (Bois 1991). Unlike most countries, where the anniversary of the founding of the army is either not celebrated in any particular way or perceived as a social obligation (for military regimes), different sectors of society appropriate this anniversary in Lebanon. At a local level, it is not rare to see mayors and municipal councils organise public festivities and put up banners honouring the armed forces.

This portrait of the army's public communications would be incomplete if it did not refer to the martyrology that, in Lebanon, plays a major role in social life: In every locality, neighbourhood, village, or city, and on the outskirts of the headquarters of large public, political, and partisan organisations, one can see portraits of the martyrs (*shahid*) from different conflicts (Chaïb 2011). In Lebanon there is a kind of competition in martyrology, and it essentially concerns who can claim the most martyrs from its own ranks. The LAF is

not free from this competition: The portraits of military martyrs are regularly put up on the walls of Lebanese towns. On its Internet site, the army scrupulously details the number of soldiers who fell in each conflict, along with their names, as if to compete with other organisations and to remind them that the army has a monopoly on legitimate violence and, by extension, on *legitimate martyrdom*.[vi] Even if this competition in martyrology is fought with Hezbollah (Chaïb 2014), the army is the only national organisation capable of reuniting all Lebanese in a patriotic commemoration with unanimist overtones: "The commemoration of fallen soldiers, by naming camps and courses after publishing their biographies, aimed to instil the values of heroism and sacrifice and portray the army as one large family" (Barak 2009, 39). In this sense, the social function of the army's martyrology aims to strengthen the primacy of the military institution over other social sectors of the society and to restate the belief that it is the only real representative of the national interest.

The Army and Social Mobilisations in Postwar Lebanon

It may seem surprising at first to consider the army as a major actor in social mobilisations, because observers and specialists of the military institution mainly represent it as being "in the background" of street movements and popular protests. In the Lebanese context, however, it makes sense to adopt such an analytical viewpoint: firstly, because the LAF articulates a discourse on the state, democracy, and society that may provoke feedback effects in the public space; and secondly, because the army is very visible in public demonstrations as an agent of order, playing a repressive role just as important as the one played by other security corps (notably the Interior Security Forces [ISF]).[vii] Finally, since the end of the 2000s and the Nahr

al-Bared turning point in May 2007, the military institution has been the subject of a "public cult," which has taken the form of "pro-army" demonstrations.[viii] In this sense, the LAF should be treated as a leading actor in the postwar socio-political mobilisations.

The Army and Social Movements: A Feared and Respected Repressive Actor

A majority of social scientists and experts have advanced the idea of hazy borders between the different security corps of the state (Belkin and Schofer 2005; Picard 2008), with the rising privatisation and internationalisation in managing security being collateral phenomena. Unlike "garrison states" and military regimes from the "developmentalist" period (1960–80), the exercise of legitimate violence is no longer the preserve of a single force but is shared between different security corps that are sometimes rivals and sometimes work together (Belkin and Shofer 2004; Picard 2008). In Lebanon, the tendency of dispersing and uncoupling the use of public force is reinforced by legislation and regulations that give the army police powers just as expansive as the ones held by other security forces. This situation is not new. Since the early years of independence, as Oren Barak (2009, 51–62) notes, the LAF has been called upon to play the role of mediator and referee in the major political, social and tribal conflicts that shook the country. After the civil war, this role as intermediary was confirmed and even consolidated by the Taif Agreement (1989–90): "the essential task of the armed forces is the defence of the country, and, as the case may be, the defence of public order when the danger is beyond the means of the Interior Security Forces" (Moussa 2011, 13).

In this sense, it is not in any way unusual for the army to have police functions and maintain order: These tasks are part of the primary missions of the LAF, in competition with or complementing other security forces. Far from being seen as a militarisation of the public space or a threat to democracy, the repressive role of the army has for the most part been "naturalised," and even valued, by the majority of citizens. In Lebanon, the presence of the army's khaki uniforms at public sites and during demonstrations tends to reassure the population thanks to its reputation for having more integrity and being more competent than other security corps that are thought to be more politicised, clientelist, and corrupt.[ix] However, the police mission given to the army is not without inconvenience: Despite its long tradition in mediating and refereeing internal affairs, the LAF is neither equipped nor trained for public order operations in the same way as the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS) or the mobilised *gendarmerie* in France (Monjardet 1988). As a result, during these operations, there are often problems that result in a number of victims within the army, as happened in June 2013 when clashes between Salafists close to Sheikh Ahmad al-'Asîr and army soldiers in the city of Sidon, the capital of southern Lebanon, caused a significant number of casualties on both sides.[x]

Unlike the other actors, the army does not seem to be repressive. With some exceptions, the military institution is mainly spared public criticism, even from protesters.[xi] As paradoxical as it may appear, the military institution tends to draw a certain democratic, if not popular, legitimacy from its intervention in domestic affairs and its role in internal conflicts, notably in 1958, and more recently in 2008, (inter-sectarian, intertribal, or political issues), escaping in this way from the general discrediting of other security institutions.[xii] More recently, the

army's rising involvement in the fight against the jihadists at the Syria–Lebanon border seemed to have strengthened this popularity among large sectors of Lebanese society. The army's high officers know all too well how to profit from this state of affairs; they reinforce their stature as public men and legitimate contenders to the supreme magistracy (political functions and the presidency of the republic). In the face of a tumultuous climate provoked by the threat of terrorist groups (*Daesh* and *Jahbat al-Nosra*), the army appears to be the institution that guarantees national unity.

PUT Pictures about here

Popular Pro-Army Demonstrations: Spontaneous or Inspired by Military Command?

Lebanon is probably one of the few countries in the world where citizens organise popular demonstrations in honour of the army without the military institution or the government ordering them to do so. These "pro-army" rallies organised at symbolic sites like Martyrs' Square or Sassine Square, or in front of the government's Grand Serail building, are not uncommon: They take place on Army Day (August 1), but also during other circumstances, like the success of a military operation, the death or wounding of combat soldiers, the kidnapping of soldiers, or a devastating attack on the army. These rallies usually bring together several thousand people and are choreographed following an elaborate scenography that is repeated over the years: For the event, women dress as soldiers; the more pious among them wear khaki-coloured hijabs, while others wear berets or helmets, with the Lebanese flag

tattooed on their cheeks or shoulders. Children and teenagers also wear imitation military uniforms and sometimes even carry plastic guns. The men, flexing their chests, brandish large white flags with the colours of various LAF arms (crossed swords for the army, the anchor for the navy, and wings for the air force) surrounded by laurel and the cedars of Lebanon. At the forefront of the rally is the motto "honour, sacrifice, loyalty." At the same time, loudspeakers several thousand megawatts strong blast out patriotic songs dedicated to the military institution: the "Army Anthem" by the Fleifel brothers, *Nahnou al Jounoud* ("We Are Soldiers"), *Al Majd* ("Glory"), *Inna Loubnanou Lana* ("Lebanon Belongs to Us"), "The Martyrs' Hymn", etc. At the centre of the rally, a large stage is erected. One after another, well-known journalists, famous actors, popular singers, leaders of civil society, and religious leaders (Maronite, Catholic and Greek-Orthodox priests, imams, patriarchs, and sheikhs) take to the stage to say how much they value the LAF and the sacrifices it makes to defend the country. In this patriotic scenography, nothing is left up to chance: The speeches are adroitly orchestrated to accommodate religious and communitarian feelings and to reinforce the idea that the entirety of the Lebanese people supports the army.

A Consolidation of Popular Support for the Army?

These popular "pro-army" rallies were resurrected after the dramatic events in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian camp close to Tripoli in May 2007, during which hundreds of soldiers were killed while fighting the radical Islamist group Fatah al-Islam. This episode can be interpreted as a "re-founding moment" for the military institution: In the context of a generalised

institutional crisis, it contributed to consolidating the legitimacy and the popularity of the army for large sectors of Lebanese society:

> For the first time in their history, the Lebanese people are unanimous when it comes to the national role of the army, as can be seen by citizens with different political and religious affiliations rallying around the army, offering it their support in the discharge of its national missions, just like the support of Palestinian brothers expressed by all of the leaders of the Palestinian parties, who are at the side of the army and have rejected this abnormal phenomenon that harms our brothers, the Palestinian people, and their just cause – all this definitively ensures that this operation will not affect the other camps.(Direction de l'Orientation, 2007)

More recently, since 2013–14, the kidnapping and decapitation of soldiers by Syrian jihadist groups have raised emotional responses in the country, and a number of rallies in support of these "martyrs of the army" and their families have taken place. Yet these mobilisations have been relatively limited in terms of the number of people involved; the average number of people taking to the streets is around several thousand people (between 2,000 and 5,000). Furthermore, with the exception of several public personalities, religious leaders, and political party activists, it seems that these demonstrations have mainly been led by the relatives of the kidnapped and assassinated soldiers – mothers, wives, widows, children, and extended family.[xiii]

The military hierarchy has adopted an ambivalent position with regard to these popular "pro-army" demonstrations. On the one hand, it keeps its distance from such events in order to

respect the public order, dissuading Lebanese citizens and political actors from taking to the street, even when they are expressing their support for the army. On the other hand, the military hierarchy is happy with these popular campaigns, because they strengthen the army's social standing and status as an opinion leader, in conformity with its tradition of interventionist neutrality: In the face of the permanent deficiency of public institutions and the recurrent failings of the political class, the army is determined to consolidate its image as the final rampart of Lebanese democracy (Iskandar 2002). In the context of socio-political crisis, amplified by the aftershocks of the Syrian conflict, the myth of neutrality is stronger than ever and gives the army the role of providing "national reassurance": The LAF reassures and delivers. Nevertheless, its popularity is far from being homogeneous and uniform throughout the national territory: In some sectors of Lebanese society, such as the Sunni pro-Syrian rebellion circles, the crisis in Syria has given rise to doubts and criticisms concerning the neutrality of the army, which is accused of sometimes being too accommodating of Hezbollah.

Conclusion

Most of the social science research on the LAF oscillates between two opposing representations. On the one hand, the military institution is considered from the point of view that it is a sociological exception (the army as a sanctuary). This view reproduces the discourse of social actors by taking the myth of the "most popular" institution of the country at face value and by valuing the army's pretense of "neutrality", which distinguishes it from other state institutions thought to be corrupt. Yet, as we have seen, there is nothing natural

about the "popularity" of the LAF: It is, in large part, a political and ideological construction produced by a long-term voluntary action from the LAF command. This creates a permanent reactivation of the Chehabist mythology of an impartial army, supposedly above the fray of political institutions. On the other hand, a number of writings tend to see the army in the context of its structural fragility and its inability to detach itself from the rest of society, permanently sapped, like other Lebanese public institutions, by religious, communitarian, and inner dynamics. In this sense, the weakness of the army is part of the weakness of the Lebanese state: "Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness." Thus, a weak state necessarily has a weak army ("*picture book army*"), and this is even more true when its actions and development are limited by international actors (the United States refuses to allow a strong LAF in order for Israel not to feel threatened) and national actors (Hezbollah challenging its monopoly of legitimate violence) (Geisser 2013; Lutz 2014).

My analysis transcends this double representation (the army as an exception versus the army as a weakness) in order to place the LAF in its socio-historical context and to display the interactions between the military institution and other sectors of Lebanese society over a long period of time (1945–2015). Thus, instead of obsessively verifying the "true nature" of the LAF's popularity (a quasi-impossible task for a sociologist and, in any case, besides the point), this chapter has shown how the political myth of the army's neutrality has produced visible social effects in terms of mobilisation and counter-mobilisations, as well as social legitimacy. It is not the least of paradoxes that the "popular demand for the army" in Lebanon in the 2010s expresses not so much a militarisation of society but rather a claim for greater civility in the state. And this tendency of the population to identify spontaneously with the

military institution has been reinforced over the past few years in the context of a crisis of legitimacy of state institutions at an internal level and because of a geopolitical threat (the Syrian conflict and jihadist terrorism) at a regional one. More than ever before, the army today appears as the protector of Lebanon's democratic institutions.

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[i] "Le Peuple veut l'Armée: manifestation de soutien à l'institution militaire, place des Martyrs" website of the *Courant patriotique libre* (CPL), August 1, 2013. Accessed 20 June, 2015. http://goo.gl/Vz755j.

[ii] The chapter was written at the end of 2015.

[iii] Chehab became president of the Lebanese Republic in 1958 in the context of an acute political and social crisis that almost led the country into civil war. Chehab took office succeeding President Chamoun, and he was nominated as a consensus candidate who could restore peace in the country. Chehabism can be defined as an "authoritarian statism" that bases its popular legitimacy on a leading role of the state in the socio-economic development.

[iv] See Chapter 2 in this volume.

[v] See http://goo.gl/Nolt9V Last accessed December 14, 2015.

[vi] The website of the LAF: http://goo.gl/qmq0ma, last accessed December 14, 2015.

[vii] The Interior Security Forces comprise a police corps of approximately 30,000 men. The scope of its missions includes maintaining public order, road safety and counter-terrorism. The ISF troops wear a grey uniform, which leads them to be mistaken for the army at times.

[viii] The "heroic" moment of Nahr al-Bared, when the army lost 168 men, including 12 officers, in its confrontation with the extremist group Fatah al-Islam, is also considered by the high command to be the founding moment of the army's new relationship with the Lebanese people.

[ix] The LAF is present at public demonstrations, with armed soldiers cordoning off demonstrators for security and light armored vehicles or transportation vehicles. Soldiers rarely mix with other security forces (field observations conducted by the author, 2012–14).

[x] 'Armée et sunnites radicaux libanais s'affrontent à Saïda,' *LeMonde.fr*, June 24, 2013. Accessed June 20, 2015. http://goo.gl/P05fce. See also Chapter 2 in this volume.

[xi] In May 2012, the death of the Sunni sheikh Ahmad Abdel Wahed (who was said to have close ties with the Syrian rebels) at an LAF checkpoint in the Akkar district (in the Northern Governorate) gave rise to a public campaign of protest against the military's "communitarian bias". Some politicians with links to Saad Hariri's Future Movement accused the army of playing into the hands of Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad.

[xii] The Interior Security Forces (FSI) in particular have the reputation of being incompetent and corrupt.

[xiii] "Manifestations à Beyrouth pour la libération de 26 otages", Radio France Internationale (RFI). Accessed October 21, 2014. http://goo.gl/27mmNa

CHAPTER 6 Rethinking Lebanese Welfare in Ageing Emergencies

Estella Carpi

Introduction

A large number of people working in the NGO sectors, broadly defined under the heading of
"emergency", are currently operating in the Middle East. A look at either conventional
welfare services or emergency assistance poses the challenge of identifying a clear-cut line of
separation between emergency and non-emergency agencies and programmes. In the case of
Lebanon, what is the "official state of emergency" in a country that has historically witnessed
a continuous transit of regional refugees, and in which internal displacement and refugee
crises have reached chronic proportions?

The recurring states of emergency resulting from a cycle of internal displacement, produced
by warfare and regional refugee influxes (primarily Syrians, Iraqis, Sudanese, and
Palestinians), have compelled local systems of (non-)state governance to deal with the
international humanitarian apparatus that rushed over to provide relief. External intervention
therefore causes local systems of care to reshape their welfare schemes, and to mobilise social
and economic resources more rapidly in order to meet the growing needs of local
communities and refugee newcomers.

In spite of historical incapacity on the part of the state, Lebanon does have well-developed service provision in the communities (Jawad 2007). In this chapter I will use welfare as a screen on which to project a larger understanding of human relations, identification processes, and social frictions in Beirut's southern suburbs (known as Dahiye), where the international humanitarian technocracy, which has mostly been assisting the resident population since the July War of 2006, has turned its emergency programmes into long-term or "normal" welfare services.

Dahiye is a large assemblage of neighbourhoods where life is constantly reorganised in relation to new or expected emergencies. It is traditionally known for being abandoned by the state, but also for having a well-developed network of community services mostly started by the major Shii party Hezbollah. Such a wide assistance network, especially during the 1990s (Harb 2010), practically established a social contract between local authorities and citizens that was almost non-existent in Lebanon at the national level. Foreign agencies further funded local welfare in Dahiye after Israel's war on Lebanon in July 2006.

At present, Dahiye's social setting and systems of care are being reshaped in response to the Syrian refugees who have relocated there over the past five years. In this context, what happens in Dahiye on a societal level when international humanitarian organisations turn their emergency relief programmes into long-term systems of care? How have local welfare regimes changed with regard to their established relationship with international assistance and humanitarian action? And what impact does the longstanding and community-oriented welfare system have on international intervention-driven assistance?

While there is a vast body of literature on policy making and resource allocation related to confessional communities (Fawaz 2005; Jawad 2007; Harb 2010), the politicisation of welfare (Cammett 2014; Ben Nefissa et al. 2005), and the role of religion in welfare associations during and after Lebanon's Civil War, the grey areas between everyday welfare and emergency states have been under-researched. So where on the settled/unsettled continuum is the critical line?

Emergency has generally been studied in relation to humanitarianism, refugee regimes, and "states of exception" (Agamben 2008). Similarly, in the recent literature on humanitarianism in the Middle East (Feldman 2012), aid has increasingly been studied as a triggering factor for identity (de)constructions and as a source of ethnic or confessional frictions. In this regard, aid does not appear to differ from welfare. The tireless Lebanese search for an efficient state is nothing but a request for secured welfare, and, in the case of earlier refugees, an efficient entity able to provide protection and assistance. Likewise, both citizens and *de facto* refugees – not legally recognised as such in Lebanon, because the country is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention – expect the state to recognise them as civic and political agents, and to enable them to achieve their rights.

In a similar vein, welfare goes beyond service provision: It should rather be conceived as a lens through which to interpret people's desires, privileges, individual and collective identifications, human relations, and feelings. In addition, welfare has always been an instrument of power disputes, like in the case of the two large Lebanese Sunni families of

Hariri and Salam (the former founded the Hariri Foundation, and the latter established the Makasîd Foundation), which provide services to segments of the local population. The rivalry between the two families, born out of politics, subsequently turned to welfare competition (Karam 2006). However, welfare not only comprises political and ideological work: It is also able to shape the relations between service recipients.

This study intends to draw on semi-structured interviews carried out between 2011 and 2013 with service providers from the municipalities in Dahiye – mainly Haret Hreik, ash-Shiyyah, and al-Ghobeiry – and 20 local and international organisations operating in the suburbs during and prior to the Syrian crisis. In order to identify continuities and discrepancies between times of emergency and relative stability, I interviewed a sample of 30 people, mostly comprising local residents and longstanding migrant communities who are beneficiaries of social assistance, as well as earlier and more recent refugees.

First, this chapter will assess the "social orders" that the humanitarian and social systems of care seek to achieve in a bid to maintain stability and guarantee their practices. How do these ideal social orders differ from each other, and where do they intersect? And how do these two systems co-exist, rival each other, or merge together? Second, unearthing how social and emergency policies have been changing in Dahiye will shed light on how this hybrid transnational governance – constituted by international and local, state and non-state agencies – is influencing the way in which the beneficiaries voice their self-perceptions, and how their identification processes are experienced; and, consequently, how this governance manages and disciplines the different categories of social vulnerability in Lebanon. Finally, after

discussing the interplay between social order and identification from the beneficiaries' perspective, this chapter will assess the possibilities of nationhood in Lebanon, where the lives of earlier refugees and local communities are becoming increasingly enmeshed, although their beneficiary statuses and hierarchical systems of service provision are defined in different ways.

Social Policy and Humanitarianism on a Line of Continuity

The qualitative exploration of the intersection between non-emergency and emergency policies, which is the aim of this chapter, highlights the changing politics of vulnerability and its societal effects, often unheeded in Lebanon's narratives of human agency and care. The salient points of this intersection run through the three main themes of human relations and feelings, social order, and the construction of nationhood.

While welfare has always symbolised community engagement and community accountability in Lebanon's history, humanitarian aid increasingly became a strategy to show the impartial humanity of political parties and domestic communities (Carpi 2014). On the one hand, humanitarian assistance covers social and political problems with food aid (Agier 2010); on the other hand, local welfare in Lebanon is charity-oriented and not aimed at eradicating poverty and human hardships, nor leading to material transformations. The traditional approach of Lebanese welfare providers can thus be defined as mainly palliative to social grievance, while the central state abdicates its responsibility to end poverty and misery within its own boundaries (Jawad 2009; Das and Davidson 2011). Indeed, the role of the Lebanese state is merely to administer social policy, as it prioritises economic growth and development

over resource equality (Jawad 2007). Since apolitical international humanitarianism has never pursued reforms and changes in the societies of intervention, neither of the two systems of care proactively stimulates social change; instead, they preserve the balance that is vital to their own survival.

Emergency-driven humanitarianism and social policy emphasise human well-being, they share the morals of empathy and solidarity in the name of collective identity, and they assign a moral value to their work. Likewise, both share a paternalistic approach to beneficiaries by taking mercy on a necessarily selected number of recipients. In this way, both systems in Lebanon pursue the preservation of a diversely conceived social order: The former relies on the imperative ethics of political neutrality and the latter on political accountability as a way to achieve social stability and secured welfare. Lebanon has become an example of a territory in which the "catastrophisation of political life" (Vazquez-Arroyo 2013) takes place. Lax states try to enhance their accountability during the state of emergency: their consequent need for assistance motivates the governors to adopt measures of depoliticisation in an effort to uphold stability and social order in a country on the brink of what could become much "worse".

Unlike the central state, longstanding community services have cultivated the trust of citizens over the years in compliance with societal compartmentalisation. Once an emergency is declared, non-emergency policies co-exist with humanitarian emergency programmes, which lack social accountability because of their *ad hoc* approach (Belloni 2005; Fassin 2007; Pandolfi 2000; Bornstein and Redfield 2011).

Ultimately, the two systems of human agency and care are cultivated in the bosom of the Lebanese culture of "familism" (Khalaf 2002), that is to say the personal and vertical nature of the patron-client network also embedded in the Lebanese family unit's social pattern. In fact, local welfare associations are generally created through a genealogy of kinship and clientelism. This also shows how emergency-driven humanitarianism, although initiated by the West and a colonial past, still needs to comply with local patterns in order to gain access to territories and be effective in practice.

The Sisyphean Cycle of Resourcefulness/lessness in Lebanon

Emergency is normally meant as a transitional state following a harmful event that is caused by human action (usually warfare) or a natural disaster and disrupts ordinary life. In such circumstances, urgent interventions are viewed as desirable and self-legitimising given that infrastructures, lives, environment, and health are all heavily damaged by unpredictable events. Nonetheless, the notion of emergency often implies muddled and predictable processes, instead of what the NGOs' simplistic language suggests (Calhoun 2008).

In the wake of large- and small-scale armed conflicts, popular protests and requests for economic reforms and political freedom, the Middle Eastern region has had to cope with a massive influx of refugees, especially from Syria. In times of emergency, humanitarian governance – formed by domestic and international non-governmental apparatuses, also named "non-governmental government" (Fassin 2007) – acts in the name of "moral universals" and paves the way to a "*pietas* market" (Badie 2002) of humanitarian agencies

intervening in the conflict-ridden territories out of compassion. Such intervention generally occurs in economically and politically volatile states where governmental institutions do not have sufficient resources to cope with emergency crises, whether endemic or as the result of a neighbouring country's spillover.

The neoliberal phenomenon of NGOisation takes shape in the massive intervention of non-state providers. The popular demands advanced for social assistance and nationalisation of services over the past five years in the Middle Eastern and North African regions are vested with moral purposes that, in practice, seek to justify and strengthen the very neoliberal orientation (Hanieh 2015). Although non-state organisations still need the approval of local authorities to intervene, they often become the *de fact*o statehood of the targeted territory in terms of political and technical decision-making. Such non-state entities therefore contribute to the phenomenon of "catastrophisation" or "emergencisation" (Ophir 2010; Vazquez-Arroyo 2013), according to which emergency-driven programmes become a modality of governance and a proliferating professional sector.

The Sisyphean cycle that is identifiable throughout various historical periods is the transformation of humanitarian programmes into long-term development projects, when "emergency" becomes an ordinary instrument of social policy, and the state further burdens non-state welfare actors with tackling emergency crises. The transformational stages of social policy in Lebanon *from* and *to* humanitarianism have gone underexplored, as they have deceptively been dealt with thus far as two separate fields of studies.

In the process of "emergencising" societies, most of the changes that have occurred in times of emergency are actually identifiable and isolable (Calhoun 2008, 18) and certainly not a product of fate. Hence, the humanitarian structure's *ad hoc* approach is shaped by the cyclical need to turn itself into long-term development programmes and integrate pre-existing welfare regimes in order not to abandon the territory of intervention. For example, large international organisations, which seek to remain anonymous in this study, first came to assist the war-stricken population in the July 2006 war and then started long-term projects in Dahiye in the postwar period. A large part of their funds has been redirected towards aid for Syrian refugees in the wake of the 2011 Syrian political crisis. According to 15 out of 20 international and local NGOs interviewed in Dahiye between 2011 and 2013, this reallocation of funds caused a sudden interruption of some of their projects in order to meet the requests of their donors, who mostly wanted to prioritise emergency needs and repurpose their funds accordingly.

Furthermore, five local NGOs asserted that, in the wake of an emergency, the cooperation with international NGOs allegedly strengthens new welfare systems. However, whenever these international NGOs tackle new refugee and displacement crises, they tailor their services to emergency-driven needs. Such actors prioritise newly occurring emergencies by implementing adhocratic[i] programmes, taking the resources that were initially meant to reinforce the non-emergency system, and therefore causing a cyclical weakening of the latter. As a result, in a bid to survive, most local welfare regimes also address short-term needs and comply with the ethical tyranny of emergencies, while they give up on eradicating endemic poverty and deprivation and struggle to develop long-term plans. In so doing, these local welfare associations, increasingly working in partnership with larger international NGOs, are

abandoning their initial purpose of improving the condition of chronically vulnerable people who are not the "protagonists" of the new emergencies.

In the cycle described above, social policy and humanitarian policy evidently take on a blurred character. A deeper exploration of this interface is relevant to understand to what extent social welfare regimes influence external emergency programmes, and vice versa. Exploring political and historical probabilities is a crucial factor to avert human hardships, contrary to the humanitarian priority of alleviating suffering, rescuing lives, and preventing a greater catastrophe.

"Social Orders" in Lebanon

Within this framework, and in order to implement their practices, the international humanitarian apparatus and normal welfare agencies seek to maintain a social order that suits their agendas. The contribution of service provision to the preservation of social order plays an important role in maintaining stability, guaranteeing practices, and complying with the political agendas that allow for implementation. So, how do these ideal social orders differ from and intersect with each other? How do these two systems of care co-exist, compete, or merge?

Humanitarianism has traditionally sought to uphold human security, namely the social protection of the emergency victims. Meanwhile, "Western" social policy thinkers are moving towards a social development perspective in which capacity building and the acquisition of

"citizen capital" (skills, freedoms, and competences) become more significant than social protection (Wood, 2004). This is where the perspectives of the two systems of care coincide.

However, complex dynamics point to an ephemeral balance between the different inhabitants of the (post)humanitarian space. After the July War of 2006, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) started the ArtGold project in Dahiye in partnership with local municipalities – the first-ever cooperation between Hezbollah and the United Nations. ArtGold was aimed at enhancing municipal health care in the war-torn Beirut periphery. As a result, Dahiye's municipalities largely upgraded their services through cooperation with international donors who funded the local welfare system.

Nonetheless, the legacies of the international humanitarian assistance in postwar Dahiye can be defined in terms of solipsism and technocracy. In this regard, a UNDP officer argued:[ii]

> The leaders require our detachment from domestic politics and provision of technical skills to their area. This is an excellent way of maintaining balance. […] In return for this cooperation, the UNDP gained the reputation of being democratic, flexible, and cooperative by also including Hezbollah. We're all winners out of this collaboration, although we've often been reduced to the role of donors due to administrative totalitarianism.

Here, the social order that the municipal governor desires seems to prevail, while UNDP intervention is downsized to the role of financial partner. The UNDP preserves its

international accountability while having no impact on the local community, which rather identifies new benefits insofar as their own municipalities are able to provide them, as the interviews with the beneficiaries proved.

Maliha as-Sadr,[iii] head of the Imam Sadr Foundation, points to an interesting discrepancy between the purpose of international humanitarianism and the goals of the local charity organisations, which developed a specific notion of humanitarianism: "Humanitarianism for us is like welfare. It *is* charity, aimed at equality and empowerment. As such, it must be a continuous effort." Welfare, charity, and humanitarianism have therefore become synonyms. This process blurs the lines between emergency and relative peacetime. This particular account stresses the solipsism and the ephemeral character of the international aid industry in Dahiye during the war in July 2006, and it highlights the difference between local and international notions of humanitarianism, consisting the latter in intervening in emergency states only. In this context, social orders that emerge in different temporal frames end up rivalling each other.

The short-term effort of international humanitarianism and the *ad hoc* character of assistance in postwar Dahiye stood in stark contrast to the local way of facing adversity: guaranteeing services in everyday life. Thus, the international approach to aid provision failed in not viewing the July War as an event on a historical continuum. In this regard, Kamel Mohanna, president of the Amel Association,[iv] recounted the following:

The UNDP and the 'West' came here in 2006 only to control Hezbollah *through* humanitarianism. When humanitarian actors are at risk during wartime, you guys are the first ones to dash out. Westerners are all tourists. […] We've been taking care of Lebanon since 1976!

He mentioned the "humanitarian scandal" when 55 UN officials and some workers from the International Committee of the Red Cross left during the war, because they believed Israel would destroy Hezbollah in three days. The departure of the UNDP ended up triggering greater internal mistrust towards the international aid industry and worsening the uncertainty already caused by warfare. On the same note, 'Ali, a young man from ash-Shiyyah,[v] said: "Nothing dies if coming from inside. Corruption has increased because of the presence of the foreigners."

The social order that is *desired* is unlikely to be distinguished from the social order that is simply *accepted* by international humanitarianism in order to survive and continue carrying out its tasks on the ground. Technocracy and social solipsism define humanitarian intervention in postwar Dahiye, which, as seen, still ensured that the local governors received major credit and popular recognition for the betterment of local systems of care.

Welfare as a Screen of Relations, Feelings, and Identifications

Lebanese communities often rely on informal networks to access services, secure their needs, or serve their ambitions. Nonetheless, development policies have been reduced to mere

survival, without producing tangible and significant material transformations. In the long run, this model is oriented towards shaping and limiting the will of the people.

Amid the international humanitarians assisting refugee newcomers, people are responding to the emergencisation of their own territory, policy changes, and the presence of the new aid industry rather than to emergencies *per se*. Assistance regimes include or exclude particular social groups according to their political agenda and the primary humanitarian purpose that attracts the most funds. These new exclusions and inclusions tend to generate local frictions (Polman 2011), resilience, crises of identification (Feldman 2012), or gratitude and allegiance among the (non-)beneficiaries.[vi]

For instance, while Dahiye's local middle and upper classes have come out of war more empowered in gentrified districts thanks to Hezbollah's reconstruction and compensation strategies (Harithy 2010), the earlier refugees who resettled in the suburbs because of the cheap cost of living found themselves back on the bottom level of the assistance hierarchy once the Syrian refugees started pouring into Lebanon to flee violence and destruction. The refocusing of services towards a new "emergency cause" exemplifies how an assistance regime can be the source of societal conflict once the social space returns to being humanitarian. On the one hand, local communities in Dahiye have historically been neglected by state service providers and then excellently assisted by an articulated network of developed community services. On the other hand, refugees from longer ago – mostly Sudanese and Iraqis who had relocated to Lebanon in the early 2000s – brought about a Dahiye of ageing emergencies after the 2011–14 influx of Syrian refugees. These *de facto* refugees are

emergency products but are no longer referred to as such. Instead, they are tackled as beneficiaries of a flawed welfare, even while they continue to lack the means for survival.

Nevertheless, some of the international and local emergency programmes[vii] targeting Syrian newcomers in Dahiye have gradually included the local population – in particular in the Palestinian camp of Shatila – by designing projects for different segments of residents. Education and cultural services for the Palestinians have been enhanced because of the Palestinian refugees from Syria in the neighbourhood. These moves were basically aimed at stifling local dissent towards the emergency-driven providers and the newcomers, and to manage instability. In summary, emergencisation is overshadowing the catastrophic conditions of everyday life in the country that have become routine (Vazquez-Arroyo 2013): a mix of chronic vulnerability and ageing emergencies.

In this scenario, social policy and humanitarianism emerge as patterns of expression of local solidarity, empathy, moral obligation, disaffection, frictions, or moral adherence to a given socio-ethical system, in relation to official or silenced states of emergency. The construction of the emergency state affects local governance and normal policy making in a complex way. The constructive character of the notion of emergency (Calhoun 2008) served the purpose of rethinking vulnerability in the Lebanese areas where normal welfare for segments of the local population – citizens[viii] and refugees – is sometimes less than the aid provided to refugee newcomers.

The central state and several non-state aid providers tend to overlook the heterogeneity of the vulnerable and instead embrace the normative concept that vulnerability acquires in

compliance with their own political interests. As a result, those who are officially vulnerable in Lebanon – refugees, migrants or citizens – are those whose care feeds the political accountability of different political and humanitarian actors. Anything outside their political agenda is not considered "humanisable" (Carpi 2015).

Within this framework, providers end up changing the beneficiaries' self-perception of their own identity, status in society, and their political subjectivity rather than producing real, material transformations. For example, Bilal, an Iraqi refugee[ix] who resettled in Haret Hreik in 2005, mentioned that he was now receiving free computer classes. However, he was still unable to purchase food and other goods, just like when he first arrived in Lebanon. What was the sense of making him employable in Lebanese society as a refugee produced by an ageing emergency and, as such, no longer entitled to the same aid as the Syrian newcomers? The purpose of the service provider – delivering computer classes – is to engage with the beneficiary's subjectivity by making him a viable part of the "host" society. This anecdote illustrates how the basic needs of older emergency refugees persist, as well as how few tangible changes (post)humanitarian providers have actually made on the ground. Such ageing emergencies, like the experiences of the Sudanese and the Iraqis in Lebanon, should in fact be studied as unresolved political crises.

The dyad between the subjectivity of the beneficiaries *versus* living conditions provides insight into how welfare systems end up changing the perception of people's well-being rather than bringing about material changes. As a result, poor material progress is achieved, and far-

sighted development is rescaled to a minimum whenever international security needs to be protected during threatening emergencies.

In this context, what is the understanding that people have about welfare and aid? Accounts collected from long-time refugees residing in Dahiye indicate what it means to be the product of an ageing emergency that goes forgotten. Aid, as well as normal welfare assistance, becomes something that is "owed" to recipients. Welfare becomes *something* that you either morally *deserve* or do not. In this regard, Rajaa,[x] an Iraqi refugee from Basra, said:

> We deserve those services much more than the displaced Lebanese in 2006. Assistance is *owed* to us, although all NGOs pretend they're assisting us for free. […] With our blood and our petrol we already paid for all of this thousands of times!

The tyranny of emergency and the frustration of the ageing emergency's subjects are evident in the words of Qais,[xi] an Iraqi refugee from Baghdad: "The internationals are greedy for new emergencies. And we've become nothing now."

Welfare provision entails hierarchical relations that are also experienced as tools of racial discrimination. Khaldoun,[xii] a Sudanese refugee from al-Khartoum, recounted:

> For Iraqi refugees, things are better, because they look pretty much like the Lebanese. And when they arrived, they obtained much more than we did. We Sudanese have a darker skin colour, and we get more insults and less help.

This account illustrates the hierarchical nature of assistance regimes in Lebanon, and how the subject experiences services as compartmentalised along ethnic lines and as racialising relationships and human struggles. This shows how refugees living in Lebanon have ethnicised their grievance and express their frustration about ageing emergencies and the decreasing assistance they receive as a result. This ethnicisation is leading to what has commonly been called – and feared in the international media – the "Palestinisation" of the Iraqi (and now the Syrian) issue.

Welfare is also experienced as an asset gained through privileged status in politically marked spaces, generally inhabited by homogenous social groups who are ready to pledge allegiance to local parties. Fatma, a young Lebanese girl living in the slum of Hay al-Gharbe, said:[xiii] "Hezbollah enriches just a few families. We've never been the protagonists of the July War, and we're still here waiting for someone to come and help us." The illegal settlement of Hay al-Gharbe never appears in Dahiye's official geography, and it has attracted an ethnically and religiously diverse population (mostly Dom community members and migrant workers from Asia and Africa). The existence of this slum proves how less politically marked spaces in Lebanon benefit from neither state nor non-state services. This situation occurs when local providers guarantee assistance to their constituencies or aim to enlarge them, and on the grounds that international providers partially act in areas of political interests.

Hay al-Gharbe's welfare provision ranks lower than that of the neighbouring Shatila camp, where people can still benefit from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Refugees (UNRWA) services. Fatma's words highlight how Dahiye's "spotted" poverty is shaped by identity politics, and not only by socio-economic factors and structural poverty. Even if Iraqi, Palestinian, and Sudanese refugees cannot gain a legal status that acknowledges their vulnerability as refugees, they are still classified as *de facto* suitable for aid, unlike the Lebanese who have been left behind without access to the assistance regime (Carpi 2015).

In gentrified districts, providers also use welfare as an instrument of political accountability and constituency enlargement. A Lebanese girl in Haret Hreik, for example, complained about the local municipalities abandoning needy people, unlike before the July War. Rania,[xiv] a Lebanese shop assistant, had a similar story: "Now, if you don't have someone among your family members who is a martyr or is wounded because of one of Hezbollah's wars, you're screwed. They're all charity services for particular categories, to show that the party is engaged and stuff like that."

By a similar token, despite the clear sense of territorial ownership among local citizens, a close connection between non-dominant ideas and the lack of assistance has emerged. The following account shows how welfare sometimes means political affiliation and recognition of the dominant social ethos in urban spaces. According to Ahmad[xv]: "Here, if you don't fit [Hezbollah's Islamic] Resistance [against Israel], you are alone, on your own. They take back from you what you've been given during times of war."

It becomes evident how ageing and new emergencies start to rival each other with the introduction of new assistance regimes that can define the moral and political eligibility –

sometimes ethnic and community-oriented - to meet assistance. On the grounds of the empirical evidence provided, welfare and humanitarian aid trigger similar individual processes of identification and feelings.

What are the Grounds for Nationhood?

The ways in which social orders, people's relations, feelings, and identifications interplay with each other in relation to the provision of services in an unsettled scenario leave open inquiries on the role of nationhood in Lebanon, where the lives of long-time refugees and local communities are enmeshed, as are the beneficiary categories they represent to their systems of care.

Abused narratives of state weakness and passivity in Lebanon have side-lined important political questions, such as how services, despite the state's abdication of its responsibilities, are experienced in relation to social and civic status and feelings of belonging. While numerous solutions are traditionally proposed in international peace building to strengthen state institutions, the way in which different societal components relate to each other beyond religious and ethnic definitions on the basis of aid and welfare provision is a relatively little-travelled terrain. Moreover, classical conceptions of state building are not a standardisable response to such an independently developed network of community-oriented services. The Iraqi case has shown how state building, when employed as a means of peace building, can trigger new group tensions and further jeopardise the socio-political order.

While Lebanon lacks a "public state" that provides assistance (Mouawad 2015), state governors remain the primary policy makers. Informal and fragmented statehoods across Lebanon secure or deny services to different groups. The phenomenon generates social frictions, because the provision of services and the protection of privileges cannot be evenly secured. The NGOisation of Lebanon contributes considerably to an undermining of the public state by further compartmentalising the functioning of community services. Unlike the central state, welfare organisations are only involved in service provision and advocacy, and not much at a policy-making level (Jawad, 2007) . Consequently, welfare, as an assertive statehood, is like a luxury for which single individuals need a mediating agency to ensure their access to benefits and services.

States normally acquire legitimacy through their demonstrated ability to support essential resources, regardless of class, caste, race, ethnicity, or creed. This legitimacy is missing in Lebanese society because of the government apparatus's lack of accountability, and the generalised disaffection towards social welfare and humanitarian providers, which was observed during fieldwork. The sectarian structure of the political system certainly entails the partisan character of service provision and the consequent conception of assistance regime as a token of privilege.

Welfare and aid seem to pursue diverse social orders yet curb the cohesion and feelings of belonging to seamless collectivities that generally define nationhood. A compartmentalisation of services – historically developed along confessional and ethnic lines in Lebanon and operated indistinguishably from each other by welfare systems and humanitarian providers –

has been adopted to better manage and discipline the different societal components. The official declaration of emergency, in response to the Sisyphean cycle of resources described above, triggers rivalry and sentiments of deprivation rather than generating "strategic essentialisation" (Spivak 1996), in which heterogeneous groups – Sudanese, Iraqi, Palestinian, Syrian refugees, migrant workers from Asian and African countries, and local citizens – would present themselves as a single bloc despite internal differences during times of uncertainty and common struggle. Such a compartmentalisation typically serves the purpose of governors to avert a homogenous mobilisation against the elitarian system. In Dahiye, where identity politics marks both privilege and neglect, it becomes an advantage for such subgroups not to essentialise themselves (even temporarily) as a single category. Conversely, they bring forward their single group identity to uphold their (in)formal memberships and an antagonised idea of polity, which is the only one able to avert symbolic death and guarantee their survival as an identity group (Hage 1996). Nationhood, in such circumstances, can be identified through the longevity of "the worst is yet to come" mantra.

Conclusion

In order to assess the provision of services in areas marked by the constructed notion of emergency and post-emergency, social order has been used as a discursive tool to identify the political agendas of providers, unpack the individual experiences and feelings of the beneficiaries, and highlight the ways in which nationhood can be imagined. This investigation therefore explains how welfare regimes have been experienced across Lebanon in the wake of internal and regional displacements. Specifically in Dahiye, the power of local authorities has been reinforced by their collaboration with the international humanitarian apparatus. The

postwar internationalisation of local welfare consecrated the sovereignty of the municipalities and rendered the international aid industry with respect to local people technocratic and solipsistic. The international apparatus's need for local gatekeepers and domestic labour capital further proved this argument.

This chapter has shown the complexity of how social and humanitarian systems of care pursue different social orders, and how people interweave relations, experience identification processes, and express feelings through their (non-)beneficiary status in the Lebanese social taxonomy of services and the cyclical prioritisation of new emergencies produced by predictable politics. It also assessed how nationhood can be rethought in Lebanon across similar social strata and common experiences of grievance. Compartmentalisation seems to provide a better description of how service provision and emergencisation affect individual and global trends in response to global politics.

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[i] "Adhocratic" is a term composed of the Latin expression *ad hoc* + the Ancient Greek term *kratos* ("power"), used in the disciplinary field of humanitarianism by Elizabeth Cullen Dunn in 2012. The compound term therefore seeks to indicate the power of an *ad hoc* approach: an approach that only addresses very specific details, like a particular social group in a territory of intervention, without aiming to eradicate the very cause of it

[ii] Downtown Beirut, November 24, 2011.

[iii] Bi'r Hasan (Dahiye), October 6, 2012.

[iv] Wata al-Mossaitbeh, October 11, 2011.

[v] Ash-Shiyyah (Dahiye), February 3, 2012.

[vi] See chapters 1 and 7 in this volume.

[vii] Often in partnerships with international actors, like the Lebanese NGO Basmeh and Zeitooneh.

[viii] Among the have-nots of contemporary Dahiye, the holders of Lebanese citizenship who inhabit the southern suburbs are mostly concentrated in the districts of Hay as-Silloum, Borj al-Barajneh, and in smaller numbers in Hay al-Gharbe.

[ix] Haret Hreik, December 10, 2011.

[x] Laylaki, December 4, 2011.

[xi] Haret Hreik, October 13, 2011.

[xii] Haret Hreik, February 7, 2012.

[xiii] Hay al-Gharbe, February15, 2013.

[xiv] Haret Hreik, October15, 2011.

[xv] Al-Ghobeiry, October 13, 2011.

CHAPTER 7 Syria's Refugees in Lebanon: Brothers, burden, and bone of contention

Are John Knudsen

Introduction [i]

Over the past five years, the Syrian revolt has escalated into a massive humanitarian catastrophe with regional implications. The 'Arab Spring' protests began in peripheral border villages before spreading to major cities such as Aleppo and the capital, Damascus (Leenders and Heydemann 2012). As regional and international mediation efforts, short-lived truces, and UN-observer missions failed, the conflict intensified into a full-fledged civil war by mid-2012. The civil war has since turned into a complex emergency that has spread to all of the country's governorates and been compounded by the emergence of the Islamic State (Daesh), the al-Nusra Front, and other militant groups that are taking control of the eastern part of the country. Foreign meddling and intervention in the conflict by regional actors and world powers – in the form of troops, military aid, and airstrikes – has internationalised the conflict and made it intractable. With more than 1 million war-displaced refugees in Lebanon alone (Figure 1), this is now the largest displacement crisis in the world (Knudsen 2014).

Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this paper argues that the deep political divisions over the Syrian revolt at first prevented Lebanon from taking control of the refugee crisis and caused the country's open-border policy and non-camp approach. As the crises grew, the special status of Syrian brothers-turned-refugees was changed and admission and residence polices tightened amidst growing economic worries and security concerns. As the refugees settled among the country's poorest residents, tensions rose as unemployment, the budget deficit, and underfunded donor support grew. The refugee crisis has not only led to social

contestation and a re-ordering of national politics and relations vis-à-vis Syria but also

necessitated a re-examination of the purported weakness of the Lebanon state, which is now

reeling under an unprecedented crisis. Hosting more refugees than any other country of its

size has come with high costs to the public and recurring security breaches and attacks. The

situation has also fuelled sectarian tensions amidst a breakdown of public services.

Nonetheless, the country's political system has not buckled, and armed conflict has been

averted. The refuge crisis is therefore an important case study to rethink the nature of

Lebanese statehood (Saouli 2006), consociational democracy (Fakhoury 2014), and plural

power bases (Fregonese 2012).

Figure 1: approximately here
Title: Syria's displacement crisis: March 2011–March 2015 (48 months)
Sources: Data compiled by author from several sources: EUI; HIU, ICDM, OHCHR, SNC, UNHCR, and UNOCHA.

Bone of contention

Lebanon currently has the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world. Since the

start of the conflict, Lebanon has been a favoured destination because of its proximity, long

porous border, and the privileged access afforded to Syrian nationals (details below). Three of

the four main hosting countries – Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq – have set up more than 40 new

camps (HIU 2015), and yet eight out of ten refugees are self-settled, a strategy that can lead

them to forfeit their protection rights and strip them of identification papers. Lebanon is the

only country not to have set up formal camps. Instead, it has instituted a non-camp approach,

which means that nearly all the refugees are self-settled and live precariously in the country's

towns and cities and in the Bekaa Valley on the border with Syria (Rainey 2015). Lebanon's

history as a refugee country and the many problems linked to the militarisation of the Palestinian camps have made the country wary of admitting new refugees. In addition to the economic burden of hosting more than a million refugees, the latter skew the sectarian balance and increase the risks of cross-border attacks and insurgent warfare.

At the time of this writing, Lebanon is also host to more than 60,000 twice-displaced Palestinian refugees from Syria (ILO 2014, 13). However, the Palestinians are refused entry into Jordan, and Egypt does not register Palestinians from Syria, which means they lack access to basic health services, schooling, and more generally, protection. Lebanon's open-border policy and non-camp approach towards refugees from Syria is a consequence of the country's failure to ratify international refugee conventions, the state of its bilateral ties with Syria, and political divisions over the conflict.[ii]

Since 1948 Lebanon has hosted displaced Palestinian refugees under the patronage of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), but it has ratified neither the 1951 UN Refugee Convention nor its extension, the 1967 Protocol (Van Vliet and Hourani 2012, 15). This means that Lebanon does not have a refugee law *per se*; instead, its refugee policies are based on a Memorandum of Understanding (2003) that grants refugees temporary asylum under the patronage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Knudsen and Hanafi 2011). Consequently, asylum is time-limited and to be followed by resettlement; owing to other international legal obligations, however, Lebanon has to protect refugees from being returned to Syria (*non-refoulement*).[iii] In general, Syrian nationals who have arrived since March 2011 can register as refugees with the UNHCR, but Lebanese authorities make decisions regarding the right to reside and work. Similar rules apply to Palestinians refugees fleeing Syria, and their registration with the UNRWA must likewise be

followed up with a formal residence permit (AI 2015). Lebanon lacks a formal legal framework for refugee governance, which is one reason why its admission and residency policy keeps changing. In lieu of a rights-based framework, Lebanon's refugee policy is charity-based.

Deeply divided countries such as Lebanon struggle to police their borders effectively, fail to restrict illegal immigration, and lack the means to monitor those entering closely enough. Lebanon's non-camp approach is not a humanitarian gesture but the result of deep political divisions. The country's parliamentarians are divided over Syria, with one political bloc supporting the Assad regime (March 8) and the other (March 14) backing the Syrian National Council (SNC) and – since 2013 – its successor, the Syrian National Coalition, which also includes the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The most prominent opposition group, Hizbullah, has rejected the establishment of camps (Daily Star 2013b). While residents initially welcomed the refugees and took them into their homes, the mood has changed among sections of the populace, who now see them as a burden. Many politicians, including those opposed to the Assad regime, consider refugees a potential threat to the nation and advocate setting up camps both inside Lebanon and as collection points inside Syria (Daily Star 2013d). Although the government has sought to distance the country from the conflict, it has yet to agree on how to handle the crisis.

Owing to the internal divisions, Lebanon has striven to remain neutral vis-à-vis the Syrian revolt and abstained from voting on resolutions targeting Syria in regional (Arab League) and international (UN) fora. In late June 2012, parliamentarians taking part in the National Dialogue sessions agreed to a dissociation policy for Lebanon known as the Baabda

Declaration, which seeks to shield the country from the internal conflict in Syria (Daily Star 2015a). The declaration has since come under intense pressure from the growing Syrian crisis, which has exacerbated internal divisions. The Lebanese parties, unable to distance the country from the spiralling conflict, have not only sided with their Syrian counterparts but covertly aided the warring factions or fought alongside the army inside Syria. In addition, Lebanese border villages such as Arsal have been drawn into the proxy war through abductions, border violations, and cross-border shelling (Dakroub 2013).

The defeat of Syria's Assad regime would be a major blow to the regime's allies, Hizbullah and Iran, and could sever the proverbial Axis of Resistance (Mohn and Bank 2012). For this reason, Hizbullah has engaged militarily in the conflict to prevent the Assad regime from crumbling. In late May 2013, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizbullah, confirmed that the movement was involved in the conflict and fighting alongside the regime. In June, Hizbullah militiamen were deployed alongside the Syrian Army and defeated anti-regime fighters in the border town of Qusair. Hizbollah's victory was celebrated in Beirut's southern suburbs but heightened sectarian tensions across the country (Foreign Affairs 2013).

Seeking to curb the mounting tensions in his country, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman asked Hizbullah to end its military involvement in Syria, a precondition for its opponents to end theirs. However, the repeated violations of the dissociation policy contributed to the fall of the Hizbullah-backed cabinet when Prime Minister Mikati resigned in late March 2013 (El Bashsa 2013a), Since then, a caretaker government has run the country and has not been able to take decisive action on the refugee issue. While failing to agree on an election law and hold parliamentary elections, the parliament extended its term by 17 months (Al Arabiya 2013). A new (unity) cabinet led by Prime Minister Tammam Salam was finally elected on February

14, 2014, but the presidency has been left vacant since Suleiman stepped down in late May 2014. This shows how the Syrian conflict has deepened political divisions present since 2005 and led to a general paralysis in government.

Relations with Syria have traditionally been lopsided, with treaties (Brotherhood Treaty), councils (Syrian-Lebanese Higher Council), and military forces (Syrian Army) establishing Syrian domination over Lebanon.[iv] The Syrian civil war has redefined Lebanon's relations with Syria by forging an alliance between the March 14 coalition and anti-regime groups and activists in Syria and Lebanon (ICG 2013). Similarly, the ties between March 8 and the Assad regime have been strengthened to include direct military intervention in support of the regime. Increasing polarisation between the two political blocs has strengthened Sunni Islamist charities, parties (*Jamaa al-Islamiyya*), and paramilitaries.[v] The latter include Lebanese Sunnis volunteering as fighters in Syria, which further undermines the dissociation policy.

Nonetheless, the fragmented nature of Lebanese politics have enabled the Assad regime to draw on an array of Lebanese allies to defend its hegemony, most importantly its strategic alliance with Hizbullah (ICG 2013, 26). To this end, Hizbullah has not only engaged militarily in Syria but also monitored refugees and anti-regime activism within its core areas. The army's failure to intervene in Hizbullah's cross-border campaign while arresting Sunni militants, fighters, and jihadists has called the army's neutrality into question amidst charges of it being under Hizbullah's control. This said, there are tensions between the army command and Hizbullah over who should control the border area.[vi]

In addition, conflict spillover, car bombs, and suicide attacks have transformed the refugee problem from a humanitarian into a security issue. Lebanon is now reeling following repeated security incidents that have destabilised the country and weakened the army, with soldiers and

units killed and taken hostage by the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State.[vii] The most recent terrorist attacks in Beirut, popular protests, and campaigns against the government (#youstink) underline the general situation of state failure and the threat of destabilisation.

Ambiguous response

In March 2012 the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis forced Lebanon to take steps to coordinate the relief efforts and establish an inter-ministerial committee.[viii] The committee coordinates relief efforts with the UNHCR, but its ambiguous response to the crisis has compelled political parties, Islamic charities, and non-governmental organisations to step in to fill the gap (Naufal 2012, 7). The lion's share of the relief efforts has been concentrated in the border areas and neglected the towns and cities that are the main destinations for urban refugees (Van Vliet and Hourani 2012). Many of the urban refugees have settled in Tripoli, a city that has become a hotbed of militant Sunni groups; some of them are involved in the Syrian war and fight alongside the FSA, or their members have joined the al-Nusra Front and Islamic State. The interaction between displaced refugees, firebrand clerics, and local militants has since pulled Lebanon deeper into the Syrian quagmire.

As the number of refugees continued to grow, the cabinet agreed to start registering refugees with the help of the UNHCR as from January 2013. To keep track of dispersed refugees, the UNHCR introduced biometric (retinal) scans a year later but did not share the data with the government. The Lebanese authorities, however, requested that the UNHCR share the data with its national security agency (Knutsen 2014). While there are legitimate reasons for biometric profiling of refugees, such as avoiding double registration, the potential misuse of the data could represent a threat to the refugees' right to protection and asylum. Thus, rather than ensuring protection of refugees, it signals that Lebanon is increasingly seeking protection

from refugees. To this end, immigration procedures have gradually been tightened and services and provisions reduced.

While non-camp was meant as no-camp, it has in practice come to include irregular settlements with limited service provision, located in fringe border areas. Non-camps function as temporary collection centres with minimal services and militarised security in the vicinity of the conflict zone. The 80 percent shortfall in the funding of the Syria Regional Response Plan (AI 2015, 6) was an added reason for the government to institute temporary protection measures that privilege national security and control. In the end, this means protection space is privatised, and individuals take up residence and seek refuge where they can find it.

The UNHCR has lauded Lebanon's non-camp approach for being both cheaper for the host state and more humane for the refugees (El Basha 2013b). However, as the number of refugees multiplied, Lebanon gradually tightened border control, forcibly returned bona fide refugees to Syria, and denied displaced Palestinian refugees entry into Lebanon. The authorities have also stripped refugees returning from visits to Syria of their refugee status or dropped them in the no man's land between the two countries. For these reasons, a number of the Syrian migrant workers did not register as refugees because it could turn out to be a liability. They feared being arrested by Lebanese authorities and sent back to Syria or apprehended at Syrian border posts, which could endanger their families still in Syria.[ix]

A follow-up survey of 100 refugees in February 2013[x] found that a large majority came from urban areas and had left Syria because of shelling and rebel fighting that had destroyed their houses and those in their neighbourhoods. The head of the household made the decision to leave, but when more families left together, the move was decided among the family and the clan. All of them had followed complex migration routes, which meant it took them days or

even weeks to reach the border. Most of them entered Lebanon via official border posts, mainly Masnaa and Ka'a, while a minority chose unofficial border crossings because they were closer, safer, easier to access or specifically to avoid official ones. Their first destination in Lebanon was the Bekaa Valley, with two-thirds proceeding to cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Tripoli. The main reason for relocating was safety and familial ties to relatives and co-religionists. Upon arrival, almost two-thirds of the respondents registered with the UNHRC (and for Palestinians, the UNRWA) to receive benefits, send their children to school, and be able to work. The remainder did not register as refugees, because of a lack of knowledge, because they planned to return to Syria, or because they were afraid of persecution at the border or of family members who remained in Syria. Nearly all respondents received help from Islamic charities, with half getting additional support from a range of national, Nordic and European NGOs. Additionally, they received support from friends, the Popular Committees, and political parties (Hizbullah). In other words, the meagre household budgets were a combination of people's own savings, cash and in-kind assistance (UNHCR, UNRWA), charitable donations, as well as their income as day labourers.

Syrian brothers?

Lebanon is not an asylum country; in fact, the term "asylum seeker" is interpreted as seeking asylum in a country other than Lebanon (BUSL 2015). Yet, while most immigrants are denied asylum, detained or deported, this has not been the case for Syrians. Until January 2015, they benefited from Lebanon's special relationship with Syria enshrined in the bilateral Brotherhood Treaty (1991) that, *inter alia*, requires the two to harmonise their foreign policy and not threaten each other's security. Based on this treaty, the subsequent bilateral agreement for socio-economic cooperation (1993) detailed the preferential treatment of Syrian nationals.

This agreement allowed Syrians – who needed only their personal ID – to reside and work in Lebanon without paying any fees or charges.[xi] The privileged status of Syrian "brothers" was one reason for the huge Syrian workforce in Lebanon prior to the conflict, estimated at somewhere around 800,000 in 2010. Because these were mainly unskilled workers, this point underlines the paradoxical situation that pre-war Syria, a politically dominant country, depended on income from labourers and workers in Lebanon (Seeberg 2012).

When the Syrian conflict erupted in the spring of 2011, the refugees faced a number of new obstacles when they fled across the border to Lebanon. Those who had crossed the border outside the official border posts and lacked a valid arrival stamp faced possible arrest or detention (IRINNews 2012). Many also reported being attacked on their way to the border, harassed at the border, or forced to pay exorbitant visa fees. Initially, many of the early arrivals did not register as refugees with the UNHCR for fear of being arrested and deported, and also because they lacked knowledge of the registration procedures.[xii] At the time, the Lebanese foreign minister declared that refugees from Syria should avoid coming to Lebanon (ICG 2013, 7).

Since then, many have been forced to regularise their stay because they have exhausted their savings and in order to access schooling, health service, and cash assistance. This caused an initial registration backlog of close to 300,000 refugees, which led to efforts to ease registration procedures, reduce waiting time, and add mobile registration units outside the major cities. Owing to a legal loophole, the Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria are not covered under the UNHCR's mandate; as a result, they are especially vulnerable, and many of them have settled in the country's Palestinian refugee camps. The interim solution has been to add them to the UNRWA's mandate, the agency set up specifically to cater for Palestinian

refugees (Daily Star 2013a). They now even form a new bureaucratic category as Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS). Despite fulfilling the requirements of refugee status, neither exiled Palestinians nor Syrians are officially called refugees; instead, they are referred to as displaced (*nazihin*). The refugees from Syria have a limited legal status that poses a host of challenges, including limits on freedom of movement, access to healthcare, registration of births and access to justice (NRC 2014, 12). Those who for various reasons lack a valid ID, arrived via an unofficial border crossing, or failed to renew their residency permit face the greatest challenge. All of them will be regarded as undocumented (thus illegal) residents who are eligible for deportation.

Displaced Palestinians were barred from entering Lebanon in April 2014. Shortly afterwards, preparations began to limit the number of Syrians, but there were no formal entry restrictions until December 2014 (BUSL 2015). From then on, Syrian refugees have been required to obtain a valid six-month's visa and fulfil one of seven new admission criteria. Syrians now have to renew their visas every six months. The entry visa and its extension are free, but after one year they must apply to the General Security Directorate at a cost of $200 per person above the age of 15, an impossible charge for an average family. To avoid paying the exorbitant renewal fee, their only remaining option is to return to Syria and obtain a new exit visa to Lebanon. Even though they risk being apprehended at the border, around 300,000 commute across the border for this purpose. Expired residence visas can be renewed for a fee, but if renewal is denied for any reason, they can only be resettled by applying for a 'plea of mercy' (*talab istirham*) with the General Security Directorate and pay a fine of $630 for a status settlement at the directorate's discretion (AI 2014). If the plea is rejected, the applicant can be issued with a deportation or departure order.

Visa regulations have gradually been tightened, and new entry visas and extensions of old ones now require the signing of a pledge not to work, failing which they would face jail (IRINNews 2015a). [xiii] Not only must refugees have a valid visa, their place of residence must be validated, too. If they are not a resident of an approved small shelter unit, collective shelters, or the many informal tented settlements (ITS) that have sprung up, their place of residence must be validated by the landlord, along with a certificate showing proof of ownership of the property signed by the local mayor (*mukhtar*). Most can neither afford nor fulfil these requirements, hence they do not attempt to extend their visas and go underground instead.[xiv]

The families from Syria that I met in Tyre all had expired residency permits; fearing arrest, they kept out of sight and did not venture far from home.[xv] They rent tiny rooms and run-down shacks and eke out a living from the UNHCR and UNRWA donations. In order to survive, they defy the ban on working and engage in clandestine work in the construction or agricultural sectors. Most dream of emigrating to Europe and join the many who have embarked on the perilous sea and land routes. Thanks to mobile phones and new messaging applications such as WhatsApp, refugees keep in touch with families in Syria and abroad. They have first-hand information both of the conditions at home in Syria and the prospects and pitfalls of migration.

Ismael, a Palestinian refugee in his thirties hailing from the Yarmouk camp in Damascus, lives with his wife and two children in a single-story shack. One brother is in Sweden, while another has been detained in Serbia while he was trying to head deeper into Europe. Ismael picks up his mobile and shows me the picture of his third brother, killed by sniper fire during street protests against the Assad regime. With tears streaming down his face, he kisses the

picture. Later we listen to the desperate voice message recorded on WhatsApp by his brother in Serbia before he was arrested by the police. Ismael's plan is to emigrate and reunite with his brother in Sweden. Mobile phones and applications like WhatsApp have revolutionised migrants' ability to share information, stay connected during transit, and circumvent border closures and high-tech barriers meant to keep them out. Increasing numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees are now leaving Lebanon by boat to Turkey from ports in Tyr and Tripoli. Crossing the Mediterranean Sea and then heading through the Balkans, they make their way into Europe. This secondary migration from Lebanon now amounts to an estimated 100,000 people, causing the numbers of registered refugees to drop. Even war-displaced Lebanese families are taking this route, sometimes with disastrous results (Lupo 2013).

Refugee burden?

Lebanon is reeling under the costs of hosting the refugees, who now make up one-quarter of the country's population. In 2013 the combined cost of the war and refugees was estimated at $7.5 billion (Reuters 2013), and the projected GDP growth has since slowed to less than 3 percent. The same year, the government asked for $370 million in aid for refugees at the global donors' conference in Kuwait, to be shared between the state and international agencies. The figure was later adjusted upwards and added to the latest United Nations humanitarian call, which brought the total to $6.5 billion, the largest-ever appeal for a single crisis.[xvi] In mid-March, the then-prime minister opted for camps as one of the options under consideration to contain the massive refugee influx (AlertNet 2013). One month later, the president reiterated the call for the UN to set up refugee camps inside Syria, or on the border between the two countries, under the auspices of the UN (Daily Star 2013c), a call echoed by

leaders of Maronite political parties, some of whom also argued in favour of expelling refugees (ICG 2013, 15).

The government has since pleaded for economic support from the UN, Arab countries, and France. There has been reluctance among both Gulf countries and Western governments to release funds to a government seen as being propped up by Syria and Iran. In the meantime, the UNHCR has advocated for setting up transit camps to aid with registration and relief efforts. Camps are logistically advantageous since relief is more readily distributed and residents controlled. At present, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are spread over more than 1,600 locations (Daily Star 2013), which makes registration and monitoring a logistical challenge and security a nightmare for the authorities who admit they have lost control of the situation (ICG 2013, 8). Some of these areas could become bases of rebel activity, as happened in the past with the Palestinians camps. There are indications that this is happening, and that there is a nascent spillover of the Syrian conflict in the country's border region.

Over the past four years, the crisis has doubled unemployment and swelled the ranks of poor Lebanese amidst losses to trade and tourism (Foreign Affairs 2015). To make matters worse, less than one-third ($650 million) of the initial funding call from the Syrian Regional Response Plan has been met. On the other hand, the Lebanese economy benefits from the crisis in diverse ways. Since 2011, Syrian investment has risen rapidly in the real estate renting, purchasing, and investing sectors, which has driven up rent by 40 percent, boosted demand, and increased bank deposits (Ashkar 2015). Moreover, the economy benefits from an estimated $36 million that refugees pay in rent to the Lebanese property owners every month (IRINNews 2015b). Thus, one consequence of the non-camp approach is boosting the local economy through income from renting out private houses, rooms, and land to refugees.[xvii]

However, while housing rents have gone up, along with a steep price hike, the food allowance (administered through the WFP) has been halved from $27 to $13 per person/month – not nearly enough to cover a family's expenses.[xviii] In the same vein, the UNRWA and the UNHCR cover two-thirds of the costs for treating refugees in government hospitals, while the remainder is borne by the refugees, whose problems accessing adequate healthcare are so dire that many commute to Syria to access free health services.[xix]

Lebanon's infrastructure is struggling to cope with the massive increase in solid waste and electricity and water consumption, especially in the Bekaa Valley, where there are now close to 400,000 registered refugees. Owing to the growing need to regularise the refugees' stay, tented and prefabricated transit camps have popped up along the Syrian border and are served by a plethora of (I)NGOs, despite the government's ban on setting up formal camps. The self-settled refugees are housed in ITS, mainly in the Bekaa Valley and in the Hermel District near the Syrian border. The border area suffers from poor infrastructure and a weak economy, and residents are straining under high living costs, rising rents, and dwindling jobs (mainly in the construction sector and quarries) in the context of a contracting Lebanese economy. Local security threats include cross-border shelling, border-area skirmishes, and growing tensions between host communities and refugees related to undercutting local labour (Christophersen et al. 2013). Stretched resources and growing tensions between host communities and refugees have on some occasions led to attacks on individuals and the torching of squatter camps (Al Akbar 2013).

In the Bekaa Valley, the village of Arsal has seen its population increase sixfold, from 3,500 to more than 18,000 inhabitants, while the population in the coastal city of Tripoli has swelled by an estimated 100,000 refugees (Care 2015). Conflict levels are also on the rise, because

refugees reside in the poorest rural and urban areas among people already living below the national poverty line ($4). The overcrowding in Sunni-majority areas has also led refugees to settle in confessionally mixed towns like Sidon and Tyre. Syrian refugees are increasingly defined as a security threat: Salafists, warriors, and criminals are making local communities fearful of having camps established in their vicinity (Kullab 2014), and some of them have therefore imposed night-time curfews on refugees (HRW 2014). These precautions reflect a general prejudice towards Syrians and growing tensions between old and new residents in the country's refugee camps.

Owing to the dearth of cheap housing, Palestinian refugee camps and adjacent 'grey areas' have become temporary shelters for refugees from Syria. Tensions between Syrians and local residents are now on the rise and are evident in Tyr, where Syrian families have been attacked and forced to leave local refugee camps after falling out with one or more families.[xx] These conflicts can be trivial, like a child picking fruits from private garden trees without permission, but these incidents can lead to fist fights and brawls between adults. Such a disagreement was behind the forced departure of a large Syrian family from a Tyre refugee camp. Fearing new attacks, the family left and relocated to a run-down shack near the centre of town. Shortly afterwards, however, a male family member in his twenties was attacked. Brutally beaten and bruised with swollen eyes, he lay motionless on the floor after an assault by a group of men near Tyr's seaside corniche, a favourite hangout for the town's youth (Perdigon 2009). The incident had also affected the children in the family who faced bullying and taunting. As a result, they are now being escorted to school.

The Palestinian refugees from Syria are warmly welcomed by their fellow Palestinians, who embrace them as compatriots who share the same destiny and help them to find and rent

vacant flats and houses. They are aided by family links and ethnicity that shield them from the insults and racial slurs targeting Syrians. However, they also face discrimination and live in the poorest and most polluted neighbourhoods; for example, two Palestinian families live together next to a noisy diesel generator on the outskirts of a Palestinian refugee camp. In addition to having other family members trapped inside the Yarmouk camp, in transit on their way to Europe and seeking asylum in Germany and Sweden, they had lost in-laws and relatives in the Ghouta (Zemelka) gas attack in August 2013. Thus, the refugees have splintered families and dead and missing family members, and they suffer from deep emotional trauma and despair that they conceal behind an outward cheerfulness. Others struggle to cope with sick, handicapped, and mentally ill children. These families face additional hardships in exile, in addition to a lack of money for medicines and advanced treatment not covered under the current regulations (Sidahmed 2015).[xxi] With all the challenges facing refugees, it is not surprising that many now speak of nostalgia for their old life in Syria and an acute loss of existential meaning in Lebanon (Dot-Pouillard and Pesquet 2015), and in this regard, their trajectory mirrors that of the Palestinians displaced in 1948.

Conclusion

Until early 2015, owing to its proximity to the warzone and the privileged access it afforded Syrian nationals ('brothers'), Lebanon had been a major destination for refugees coming from Syria. Since then, strict immigration rules have reduced the stream of refugees to a trickle, eventually neither admitting nor registering new entrants. The government's erratic response to the refugee crisis must be understood within the context of the post-2005 political

divisions, the country's troubled history as a refugee host, and the lack of a legal framework for handling the refugee crisis.

The government's inability to agree on how to handle the crisis led to the provisional non-camp approach, which made most refugees settle among poor co-religionists. The country has since added a number of informal camps along the border but neither revoked the non-camp approach nor attempted to reverse the spread of refugees from Syria across the country. The country's security situation has deteriorated and will likely weaken further because of Hizbullah's military engagement in Syria and retaliatory attacks targeting the movement and its members.

The refugee crisis has not only led to a re-ordering of national politics and relations vis-à-vis Syria by setting aside key bilateral treaties but also defied the often-held notion of a weak state facing imminent collapse and breakdown. The state has managed to contain the political fallout of the refugee crisis but has faced widespread resentment over the failure to deal with its domestic impact. Moreover, refugee narratives of dislocation and despair testify to the increasingly contested interactions between residents and refugees and the consequent rearranging of community relations. Fear, prejudice, and resentment have grown along with unemployment, poverty, and the budget deficit amidst underfunded donor support. This is a volatile mix in a deeply divided society that is struggling to come to terms with having the world's highest per capita number of refugees.

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[ii] See chapter 6.

[iii] In isolated cases, Lebanon has violated the *non-refoulement* clause by arresting and handing over army defectors and individuals wanted by the Assad regime (Guardian 2011).

[iv] Author's interview with a retired army major, Baabda, June 3, 2015.

[v] See chapter 2.

[vi] Author's interview with Lebanese journalist, Baabda, June 3, 2015.

[vii] The 16-month hostage crises ended following a prisoner swap (Luca and Rowell 2015).

viii The committee is headed by the Lebanese High Relief Commission (HRC), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), and UNHCR. The HRC is only mandated to work in north Lebanon and hampered by a lack of funds and political divisions (Vliet and Hourani 2012).

ix Author's interviews and observations, Tyre and Tripoli, April–May, 2012.

x The survey included displaced Syrians (n=76) and Palestinians (n=24) living in the Bekaa Valley, Beirut, Tripoli, Tyr, and Sidon. Two-thirds of the respondents hailed from the capital, Damascus, as well as other major conflict cities (Idlib, Aleppo, Homs), with the remainder from elsewhere, including Deraa, the start of the uprising. The survey was administered by Jaber Abu Hawash based on a questionnaire prepared by the author following an initial field survey in April–May 2012.

xi For details of the bilateral treaties regulating trade, transport and labour (CLDH 2013).

xii Author's observations and interviews, Tyre, April–May 2012.

xiii The renewal procedure is two-pronged, and different rules apply to Syrians who are registered as refugees with the UNHCR and those who are not (AI 2015, 13-14).

xiv In April-May 2015, Lebanon stopped admitting Syrian refugees and about 5,500 refugees already registered with the UNHCR were de-registered (Daily Star 2015b).

xv Author's observations and interviews, Tyre, May–June 2015.

xvi The amount is shared between the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) assisting IDPs inside Syria and the Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP6), which assists Syrian refugees and communities in neighbouring countries (UNOCHA 2013).

xvii For details on the Lebanon's economic performance during crises, see Corm (2014).

xviii A maximum of five family members are eligible to receive the allowance.

xix Syrian refugees are only entitled to primary health care, and the funding is drawn from Syria's aid budget. UNRWA official, personal communication, Beirut, June 3, 2015.

xx Author's own observations and interviews, Tyre, May–June 2015.

xxi For all of them, a major problem is the lack of proper education, especially the fact that access to higher education is blocked.