

Revisiting Lebanese Civil War

Murat TINAS*

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Abstract

Although the confessional system in Lebanon seems to guarantee the political representation of different groups, it is far from a centralized nation-state model based on the idea of citizenship in modern sense. On the contrary, it has prevented the consolidation of modern nation-state and the integration of different sectarian groups. Additionally, after the independence, the feudal lords could be able to hold their socio-economic privileges, and certain families could establish their leadership in various sectarian communities. This complex social structure has been further fragmented during the civil war years from 1975 to 1990. Although there is a fairly extensive literature on the Lebanese civil war, revisiting the war once again is believed to be a very timely study as the intensification of sectarian conflicts leads to the *Lebanonization* of the whole Middle East. This study aims to analyze the civil war by dividing it into certain periods and argues that socio-economic disparities fed by sectarian differences turned into identity-based conflicts with the intervention of regional and international actors, which further deepened the sectarian fragmentation in Lebanon. As a qualitative research, this study draws its sources from both primary and secondary sources in addition to a field work in Lebanon.

Keywords: *Lebanon, Confessional System, Civil war, Identity, Sectarian identity*

* Araş.Gör.Dr., Gazi Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, muratinas@gmail.com.

Lübnan İç Savaşı'nı Yeniden Okumak

Öz

Mezhebe dayalı temsiliyet nedeniyle farklı grupların yönetime katılımını teminat altına alan bir sistem gibi görünen Lübnan'daki siyasi yapı modern bir ulus-devlette esas olan vatandaşlık kavramının toplum ve birey nezdinde yerleşmesinin önünde engel olmuş ve ülkedeki dini/mezhebi grupların uzun dönemde birbirine entegre olabilmelerinden ziyade bu cemaatlerin sınırlarını çizerek gruplar arası iletişimin dini/mezhebi kimlikler üzerinden yürütülmesine yol açmıştır. Ayrıca, bağımsızlığın kazanılmasından sonra eskinin feodal beyleri sosyo-ekonomik üstünlüklerini elinde tutabilmiş, belirli aileler farklı mezhebi gruplarda öne çıkarak liderliklerini tesis edebilmişlerdir. Bu karmaşık sosyal yapı, 1975-1990 Lübnan İç Savaşı ile derinden parçalanma sürecine girmiştir. Lübnan iç savaşına ilişkin literatür oldukça zengin olmakla beraber, mezhep bazlı söylem ile çatışmaların giderek yoğunlaştığı Ortadoğu'nun giderek *Lübnanlaştığı* bir dönemde, bu çalışma bahse konu iç savaşını belirli periyotlarda inceleyerek başlangıçta yerel ve daha çok sosyo-ekonomik eşitsizliklere dayanan sosyal sıkıntıların, süreç içinde yerel, bölgesel ve bölge dışı aktörlerin de katılımıyla kimlik çatışması çerçevesinde algılandığını anlatmaktadır. Bu anlatımda bahse konu dönüşümün, siyasi söylemi ve toplumlar arası ilişkileri daha derinden ve şiddetli bir biçimde mezhebleştirdiği vurgulanmaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma olan bu çalışma, birincil ve ikincil kaynakların yanı sıra Lübnan'da gerçekleştirilen saha çalışmasına dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Lübnan, Konfesyonel sistem, İç savaş, Kimlik, Mezhep kimliği*

Introduction

The distinctiveness of the Lebanese society is its collection of eighteen officially recognized religious and sectarian groups, which are mostly centuries older than the modern state of Lebanon. Since Mount Lebanon and its periphery had been a kind of a safe haven for various religious minorities throughout the history due to its geographical conditions, Lebanese society was extremely diverse with an almost equal share between Christians and Muslims at the time of independence, and currently Shias and Sunnis make around 30%, Maronites around 21%, and at least three of them constituting more than 5% of the country's population, and no community holds a majority over the others. In this regard, there are five officially recognized Muslim sects (Twelver Shia, Sunni, Druze, Ismaili or Sevener Shia, Alawite or Nusayri), twelve Christian sects (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic or Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox or Gregorian, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox or Jacobite, Roman Catholic or Latin Catholic, Chaldean Catholic, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant) and Judaism (Canadian for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, 2007; Malaspina, 2008; Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008; Tinas, 2015; US Department of State, 2013).

Having in mind that all demographic estimates should be viewed with extreme caution in the absence of an official census since 1932, there is a fact that although the demographic numbers and patterns of settlement changed over time, the divisions and rivalries between these multitudes of sectarian communities dated far back as centuries, and are still considered as a significant factor both in politics and social life. It must be emphasized that sectarian communities are not just about religious affairs because "belonging [to a sectarian group] does not [only] refer to attendance at places of worship; it means a sense of distinctiveness based on particular histories, myths, festivals, commemorations, localities, and -not least-different external ties" (Harris, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, belonging to Lebanon becomes an ambiguous concept where uniformity is not the main aim in the society (Reinkowski, 1997, p. 493).

With this complex and divided society, Lebanon becomes a sectarian *state par excellence* (Hirst, 2010, p. 2). The existence of different, if not contradictory, ideas of 'what Lebanon is' and 'what Lebanon should be' lead these sectarian groups to search different and sometimes contradictory outcomes regarding both foreign and domestic affairs of Lebanon. Between 1975 and 1990, Lebanon experienced one of the longest and bloodiest civil war in the living memory. Although there is a fairly good understanding of causes and consequences of the Lebanese civil war from different perspectives, revisiting the Lebanese civil war is believed

to be a very timely study as sectarian identities come to seem continuous as well as permanent in the whole Middle East while “many countries in the Arab world are starting to look like Lebanon, once considered an Arab anomaly” (Salloukh, 2014, p. 1). This study argues that although the conflicts started between the sectarian groups in Lebanon, it rapidly turned out to be a regional affair, where neighboring countries, then some other international powers, were involved in. Indeed, this foreign infiltration made the conflict more extensive and irresolvable, which in time further deepened mutual suspicions and enmities based on the differences in sectarian identities.

This article starts with a diachronic analysis of the emergence and the orientations of sectarian groups in Lebanon in order to understand the construction of identity-based sectarian groups and their roles in Lebanese politics. The following part deals with the period where the National Pact laid down the fundamentals of modern Lebanese state and society until the outbreak of civil war in 1975 with a special focus on the inner mechanisms of sectarian politics and the socio-economic dynamics of the early independence period, which lead to the civil war. The third part of the article focuses on the breakdown of the state in 1975 by dealing with the discussions on communal transformations, militia-based politics and the patterns of external intervention through multi-level alliances during civil war years. In the last part, this study aims to reach certain conclusions about the civil wars by revisiting the Lebanese example in order to understand how sectarian perceptions are integral parts of communitarian imaginations and interest-building processes and how sectarian identities are important in building political and economic trans-regional alliances within a wider context. While doing that, this study relies on data derived from both primary and secondary sources, such as a vast literature of scholarly books, journals, statements, interviews, writings and memoirs of the key Lebanese actors.

1. Making Sectarian Lebanon

The issue of sectarianism has been a central phenomenon in Lebanon both before and after the independence in 1943 and the first part of this study aims to analyze the making of sectarian Lebanon from a historical perspective in order to examine the origins and the construction of sectarian identities and to demonstrate how diverse identities emerged in Lebanon in relational manner. In this manner although the existence of different religious communities in the territory of current Lebanon had been a reality for centuries, it is believed that the history of Lebanese confessional system goes back to the late Ottoman period with the emergence of the Qaimaqamate, when the sectarian division had firstly been institutionalized

under the auspices of great powers of Europe. The French Mandate period is also very significant in order to demonstrate the impact of colonialism in the region and the nature of the colonial state-making and Lebanese nation-building process on the basis of sectarian divisions.

1.1. Lebanon under the Ottomans: The Long Peace¹

The territory of the modern Lebanese Republic had been under the Ottoman rule from 1516 to 1918 when the Ottoman troops left the territory towards the end of the First World War. The territory of modern Lebanon under the Ottoman sovereignty experienced three kinds of administrative systems: Emirate, Qaimaqamate and Mutasarrifiyya.

1.1.1. The Emirate and Double Qaimaqamate Periods

The first recorded political entity during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the lands of modern Lebanon dates back to the establishment of the Emirate. The Emirate rested on a quasi-feudal system based on landlords, called Emir who was required to maintain social order and deliver required taxes and other obligations to the Sultan. During the early Ottoman authority in the mid-sixteenth century, there were mainly four communities, namely Druze, Maronite, Greek Orthodox and Shia (*Mutawali*) (Farah, 2000, p. 5). Historically speaking, the mountainous Lebanon has been a port of refuge for sectarian minorities even before the Ottomans because the geographical character of the Mountain prevented foreign direct control and provided these small communities with considerable autonomy. In addition to this, the natural compartmentalization of these mountains has made the autonomous evolution of various sectarian groups possible in a historical process (Harris, 2006, pp. 59–60). Having developed strong traditions of local autonomy in the mountainous land, a Maronite-Druze feudal association controlled the territory until the mid-nineteenth century and a tradition of autonomy as a separate political entity had been established (Malik, 2000, p. 3).

Inter-sectarian struggles started in the very early of the nineteenth century. Following the rise of inter-communal tensions, the first sectarian conflict occurred in Mukhtara Battle in 1825, where Bashir Chehab, Emir of Mount Lebanon between 1788 – 1840, with the support of the Maronite Church and the Governor of Egypt Mehmed Ali Pasha² overwhelmed Druze leader Bashir Jumblatt. What was novel about Mukhtara Battle is that although there were Druze and Shia chieftains fighting on both sides, Maronites concentrated their support on one side alone, which means that sectarian solidarity and identity in a conflict had already evoked in the early period of the nineteenth century (Akarli, 1993, p. 21).

During the Emirate, sectarian communities of Mount Lebanon had their relations with foreign powers generally based on their sectarian identities. Among them the Maronites had become the main channel for France to extend its influence in the eastern Mediterranean. For instance, French Ambassador in Istanbul was instructed to protect the Christians of the Levant in 1639 and the Maronite clergy visited French Court in order to ask protection of the French King in 1649. In response, French King Louis XIV issued letters-patent, declaring the Maronite community in his special protection, which led to the establishment of a particular relationship between them (Hourani, 1946, p. 147). Continuously, the Maronite Patriarchate entered into a full union with the Church of Rome by accepting its doctrine and recognizing its superiority in 1736 (Farah, 2000, p. 11; Harris, 2006, p. 28 and 70). In addition to religious union, there are some archival documents which demonstrated that the Pope in Rome commended the Maronite Church in political issues. For instance, in a letter dated September 1610, Vatican commanded the Church to enhance the existing relations with Emir Fakhraddin, who was known with, as the letter reads, “his strong enmity to the Turks” (Abu Husayn, 2009, p. 36).

The inter-sectarian tensions of the Emirate had not been exempt from the rivalries of regional and European powers because as France assumed the role of protector of Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, Russia tried to bear the role of guardians of Orthodoxy in the Empire while Britain entered into an alliance with the Druze in the early nineteenth century towards the end of the Emirate (Harris, 2009, p. 10; Weinberger, 1986, p. 42). The emergence of the conflict between the Sublime Porte³ and the Governor of Egypt caused deepening of mutual suspicions, when the Druze sided with Istanbul and the Maronites supported Cairo (Akarli, 1993, p. 25; Salibi, 1965, p. 28). After the Maronite-Druze clashes of 1841, French, British, Russian, Austrian and Prussian ambassadors in Istanbul met with the Ottoman Foreign Minister in order to bring the situation under control on an agreeable solution and to prevent the Ottoman government to solve the issue of its own accord in 1842. Consequently it is decided to divide the Mountain into two qaimaqamate, or districts: one in the north under a Maronite district governor (qaimaqam) and the other in the south under a Druze district governor, where the Beirut-Zahla-Damascus road formed the rough boundary between these two districts (Keleş, 2008, pp. 134–135). What is very important in terms of sectarianism in this new system was the establishment of advisory councils to assist each district governor. Each council was planned to consist of six judges and six advisors representing six major communities, namely Sunni, Shia, Maronite, Druze, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox.⁴ This is a very important

development because confessional representation in the administration as an institutional principle was introduced for the first time in Lebanese history (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 26) and Abdul Rahim Abu Husayn stated that the institutionalization of sectarianism can be dated back to this period under heavy foreign pressure despite it was not Ottoman's will (Interview with Abu Husayn, 2016).

The new system had been built on the false assumption that Beirut-Damascus road divided the region into two homogenous social entities. However, the Druze and Christians had been living together in most of the regions. The number of Christians in the southern district, for instance, was more than double number of the Druze, although it was defined as Druze district (Salibi, 1965, p. 63, 1988, pp. 15–16). Beside this false assumption, division of the Mount into two as Druze and Maronite areas had excluded the existence of other sectarian groups like Shias, Greek Orthodoxes, Greek Catholics and Sunnis.⁵ Therefore, the settlement of double Qaimaqamate left the matter unresolved. Another problem in this period was the foreign infiltration because the consulates in Beirut and embassies in Istanbul were so involved in internal affairs of the Ottomans concerning Lebanon and inter-sectarian relations that even a very daily problem in Lebanon might become Anglo-French affair (Keleş, 2008, p. 138; Salibi, 1965, pp. 72–79). To conclude, the new system could not provide solution for the troubles of the Mountain; rather it aggregated the problems by institutionalizing sectarian differences and the channels for foreign interventions, which would end up with another civil war in 1860 and led to the establishment of the Mutasarrifiyya in Lebanon.

1.1.2. The Mutasarrifiyya

In February 1860, another mountain-wide clashes started and spread to the southern Beqaa and Damascus (Najem, 2012, p. 6). The political settlement which would shape the future of Lebanon came after several negotiations between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers. Finally an organic statute, named *Règlement Organique (Règlement et protocole relatifs à la réorganisation du Mont Liban, Cebel-i Lübnan Vilayet Nizamnamesi)*, signed in Istanbul on 9 June 1861 for the reorganization of Mount Lebanon. The organic statute constituted Lebanon as an autonomous province under the guarantee of the six signatories, namely the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria and Prussia.⁶ The *Règlement Organique* granted Mount Lebanon a sui-generis structure, Mutasarrifiyya, first subdivision of a governorate, with a limited autonomy. According to this regulation, the administration was going to be established under a Christian plenipotentiary, or mutasarrif

appointed by the Porte after the approval of the guarantees (Article 1). Additionally, mutasarrif was to be assisted by the Administrative Council of twelve members representing different sectarian communities as four Maronites, three Druze, two Greek Orthodoxes, one Greek Catholic, one Shia and one Sunni (Akarli, 1993, p. 80; Traboulsi, 2007, p. 43; Winslow, 1996, p. 41).⁷ According to Abu Husayn, Mutasarrifiyya came into existence due to the following reasons: The first one is the declining power of the Ottoman Empire in that era, which prevented the empire to maintain stability and order in the region. The second one is the urgent necessity to end the perpetual local clashes and conflicts. The third one is the heavy penetration of European powers in the Ottoman affairs in the Levant. Ottomans, on the other hand, accepted this solution in order to prevent the direct intervention of great powers but they considered it as a temporary settlement (Interview with Abu Husayn, 2016).

The Mutasarrifiyya Period had lasted from 1861 to 1915, when the autonomy of Mount Lebanon was suspended due to the First World War. This half century experience in Mount Lebanon can be defined as relatively autonomous and peaceful years, which led to the rise of institutionalism and prosperity in the country. First, the peace and order during the Mutasarrifiyya and the rise of European interests in Lebanon led to a general development and prosperity such as the rise of agricultural production, construction of roads and bridges, efficient public services and general security in addition to the establishment of modern administration and bureaucracy (Salibi, 1965, pp. 116–117). Second, this period can also be defined as the full institutionalization of sectarian representation and the enhancement of sectarian affiliations as the primary source identity (U. Makdisi, 2000). Although the issue of sectarian differences had always been a central question in Lebanon throughout history, these sectarian groups were defined on the basis of demographic data and their administrative posts were ensured by law (Salloukh & Barakat, 2015, pp. 13–15; Wilkins, 2013, p. 23). Third, Lebanon's special autonomy under the influence of European powers was another characteristic of this period (Harris, 2006, p. 36; Reyhan, 2011, p. 217). During the Mutasarrifiyya, Lebanese leaders make a routine of consulting to guarantor powers for the foreign support. Akarli points out that opportunistic ambitions of certain individuals from leading families led to the reliance of local population in general and the Mountain's Christians in specific on the international support in internal affairs (1993, p. 186).

1.2. French Mandate: State-Building and the Constitutionalization of Sectarianism

French High Commissioner General Henri Gouraud proclaimed the creation of the State of Greater Lebanon, *Grand Liban* on 1 September 1920, following the the San Remo Conference after the World War I. The French mandate of a nearly quarter century, without doubt, had its own repercussions in Lebanese history and the end of the French Mandate does not necessarily mean the end of the legacy of the mandate period.

First, the very existence of the state of Lebanon with its current borders did not reflect any historical reality, rather it was a Franco-British colonial partition plan of the Middle East in the beginning of the twentieth century (Interview with Al Rayess, 2016; U. Makdisi, 1996, p. 25; Malaspina, 2008, pp. 49–50; Rabil, 2011, p. 9). The Lebanese Republic has emerged out of such a plan and the Lebanese frontiers were determined by European powers against the will of the majority of population to preserve the interests of France in the context of the partition of the Arab provinces between Paris and London (El-Khoury & Jaulin, 2012, p. 2; Traboulsi, 2007, p. 75). Therefore, Lebanon with its current territories and fragmented society stands as a-historical entity, which was a French project with the support of the Maronite Church (Akarli, 1993, p. 180; Malik, 2000, p. 4; Moaddel, Kord, & Gärde, 2012, p. 6).

Second, the constitution of Lebanon, prepared under the auspices of France, marked the beginning of consociational (multi-communal) system based on confessional (multi-sectarian) divisions in the history of modern Lebanon because the Constitution officially recognizes the religious plurality in Lebanese society and legalizes the concessional system. Although the establishment of a sectarian system was neither the only nor the most popular argument in the process of the writing of the constitution and there were serious criticisms to its recognition, those supporting non-sectarianism were suppressed by Paris and the Maronite Church (Malaspina, 2008, p. 48; Thompson, 2000, pp. 50–51). This sectarian regime (*al-nizam al-taeifi*) has become central to the Lebanese system and subsequent constitutional amendments could not annul it despite verbal dedication to its annulment.

Third, the mandatory power was not aware of the fact that, as Salibi states, “to create a country is one thing; to create a nationality is another” (1988, p. 19) and French rule certainly failed to achieve the latter. Identity basically remained in sectarian and patrimonial contexts, and it could not be transformed into a national affiliation (Lewis, cited in Wilkins, 2013, p. 24) because the Lebanese nation state from the beginning lacked the internal legitimacy due to different concerns of Muslim and Christian groups. Moreover, the legacy of French Administration was far from a centralized nation-state model with a powerful bureaucracy

(Thompson, 2000) and the result is merely the constitutionalization of the sectarian system in a weakly established state.

2. Sectarian State and Society on the Eve of the Civil War

During the mandate, domestic struggles and widespread anti-French resistance were far from being settled in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2007, pp. 75–80). From international perspective also, the war conditions of the World War II and the invasion of France by Germany and the Franco-British competition over the colonies matured the conditions for Lebanon's independence. On 22 November 1943, French High Commissioner George Catroux declared the end of the French mandate.

2.1. The National Pact: A Compromise between French Tutelage and Penchant for Syria

The National Pact was a verbal compromise between the two major political leaders, President Bishara Khuri and Prime Minister Riad Solh and laid the main principles of the independent Lebanon (Al Solh, 1994, pp. 126–128; El-Khoury & Jaulin, 2012, p. 6; Riad Solh's Ministerial Declaration, 1943). It was neither a written agreement nor referred to popular referendum, rather it was a product of a traditional feudal style politics which ensured that the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister would be Maronite Catholic and Sunni Muslim respectively.⁸ In terms of the functioning of the government and the state, the National Pact brought a better participation of the Muslim community in administration (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 110), where the Maronites in specific and Christians in general still preserved their prerogatives because the Constitution gave exceptional power and primacy to the post of Presidency in state affairs. This uncontested authority gave a very functional power in governmental affairs and foreign affairs to the President, and so to the Maronite community, but it can still be argued that the National Pact introduced a balanced understanding especially during the times of powerful Sunni prime ministers.

The most significant aspect of the National Pact in terms of this study is its interpretation of Lebanese identity. Although Lebanese Constitution emphasized the independence of Lebanon with indivisible unity and integral sovereignty (Art. 1, Constitution (1926 Version), 1926), the lack of a social consensus among Lebanese about their national identity had always been a problem. While most of the Muslims identified themselves as Arabs seeking Syrian tutelage, or even unity with Syria; Christians were in search for sovereign Lebanon from Syria with an aspiration to establish a very close relationship with the West, and especially with

France (Salibi, 1965, pp. 27–29). Both Khuri and Solh were aware of this identity crisis. Within this framework, Lebanon was defined as *an independent country with Arab face* (Riad Solh's Ministerial Declaration, 1943). Actually, it was a compromise where Christians accepted the Arab identity and forsake Western tutelage; and Muslims accepted the Lebanese independence and forsake their aspiration for being part of Syria or a larger Arab state. More simply saying, as Attié affirms, the agreement aimed to *Arabize the Christians and Lebanize the Muslims* (2004, pp. 8–9).

Defining Lebanon as an independent country with Arab face aimed to bring a balanced approach for creating a common ground for Lebanese; however, it could not be realized in real sense because, as Attié states, the National Pact was more of an effort to create an alliance between confessional elites for a functioning government by defining Lebanon between east and west, rather than seeking an integration process of different confessional communities through creating a national identity (2004, p. 24). To conclude, the National Pact turned out to be another step to jeopardize the idea of citizenship being loyal to the state, rather than a loyalty to confessional leaders (Najem, 2003; Wilkins, 2013, p. 26). In the absence of a common national identity in a deeply divided society, the pact failed to create a necessary ground for a functioning government, which deepened the frictions between leading sectarian groups.

2.2. Lebanese Delicate Journey

The political developments of 1940s and 1950s had presented continuous challenges to Lebanon, which turned into domestic struggles between various groups. It was clearly understood that the National Pact no longer provided a working ground for the Lebanese politics due to the domestic socio-economic developments and continuous foreign interventions. The underlying problem of the National Pact was its vague commitments about state's policies without addressing the root causes of the problem, which was the lack of a national identity and so the lack of common national interest. Within this line Lebanon's neutrality in regional affairs could not be realized in a divided nation in both Arab-Israeli context at regional level and the Cold War rivalry at the international level. In this manner, disagreements among Lebanese confessional groups over foreign policy issues, most importantly the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli conflicts, easily turned into domestic problems, which paved the way for further fragmentation at domestic level and further foreign penetration. (Salem, 1994, p. 74; Salloukh, 2008, pp. 283–284). In such a conjuncture, sectarian actors tried to

develop their relations with regional and international powers or strengthen their own financial and military capabilities in order to enhance their domestic leverage.

Especially after the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, the Palestinian guerillas had become one of the major issues among Lebanese actors and a pretext for regional powers to intervene into Lebanese politics. From the perspective of Christians, particularly Maronites, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was perceived as a source of Israeli attacks and Syrian-Egyptian intervention. In addition, according to Lebanon's foremost historian Salibi, from the perspective of Maronites in general, the Palestinians were seen as a Trojan horse which Lebanese radical parties could use to subvert the Lebanese system (1976). Muslims, on the other hand, were tolerant to the presence of armed Palestinians not only because they are sympathetic towards their co-religionists but also because they regarded the armed Palestinians as a potential balancing power in the domestic politics against the Maronite dominance. Therefore, the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) led by Kamal Jumblatt with a collection of populist parties against the Maronite-Sunni establishment in Lebanon supported the presence of armed militias and aligned with their causes (Rowayheb, 2011, p. 417).

Another structural problem in Lebanese society during the early independence years was the socio-economic disparities within the society in general and within each sectarian community in specific. Although the laissez-faire policy in Lebanese economy demonstrated itself successfully in the growth of economy in general; the distribution of income and wealth remained a structural problem (Gaspard, 2004, pp. 73–76). After the independence, the feudal lords could hold their socio-economic privileges. Within this conjuncture, the weakly established state was mostly non-interventionist and provided very limited public utilities. It is argued that the disparities were more visible in the south and the north dominated by Shias and Sunnis than in the central parts of Lebanon dominated by Christians, Druze and middle-class Sunni Muslims. The poverty of Shia masses in the south and the Sunnis in the north gave a sectarian tone to this inequity problem (Huse, 2014, pp. 22–23; S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, pp. 7–9).

Starting from the mid-1960s, a bunch of social and economic developments transformed the socio-demographic structure of Lebanon. The agriculture sector heavily suffered from the direct control of big entrepreneurs, influx of low-paid Syrian agricultural workers, crisis of small land-owning farmers and consequently emigration of impoverished farmers, mostly Shias, to Beirut. Parallel to the failures of agriculture sector, the economic growth in the

industrial sector and service sector had marked growing economic inequalities, while the rich, mostly a few numbers of leading families of the Sunnis and the Maronites, were getting richer. As Zahar notes, this did not only deepen the rift between the center and the periphery, which was a chronic problem in Lebanon, but also radicalized the periphery and masses that closely mapped onto religious affiliation (2005, p. 229).

The formal existence of a weakly functioning government and the governmental institutions did not guarantee that Lebanese society would be able to form a political unity and a common aspiration for the future of Lebanon. This fragmented social structure based on sectarian identities had been further weakened by the existing economic disparities. When the unequal system based on sectarian privileges and feudal patronage was accompanied with social frustrations and unbearable living standards in a very troubled regional environment, the result became recurring political and armed crises, which ended up with the full fragmentation of both the state and the society during the civil war years.

3. Breakdown of the State during the Civil War

In 1970, Suleiman Farangieh was elected as President, who was known for his opposition against interventionist policies of Fuad Chehab, his adherence to Maronite prerogatives,⁹ tolerance to Palestinians in the early years¹⁰ and his close friendship with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad. Harris notes that Farangieh's indulgence towards the Palestinians and the leftist groups as well as Maronite prerogatives constituted a disastrous political combination which paved the way for the civil war (2006, p. 154). However, one cannot ignore the social and economic transformations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which swept Lebanon into a series of crisis and were beyond his control. In this part, the civil war will be analyzed in three phases; the first phase is the period until the arrival of Syrian troops in June 1976 and a relative peace in 1977, the second phase is the escalation of clashes and the direct involvement of regional powers until the Israeli invasion in June 1982, and the last phase is the period until the implementation of the Taif Accord in October 1990.

3.1. The First Phase of the Civil War: 1975 - 1977

The attacks against a church in Ain Al Rammaneh in the morning and the following attack against a bus carrying the Palestinians in the afternoon on 13 April 1975 triggered a civil war, as a result of the culmination of domestic and external factors of decades. The combatant parties at the beginning could be defined as two warring camps. On the one side, there was PLO

and the LNM led by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt opposing to the Maronite-dominated traditional political establishment. It also attracted Shias as well as ordinary Sunnis who were in favor of reforms in the system. On the other side, there was a coalition of right-wing Christian leaders, mainly Maronite leaders like Pierre Gemayel and Camille Chamoun. Although this conservative bloc was dominated by Maronite militia-politicians, some Sunni feudal families and others who were in favor of the current system were aligned with this bloc (S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, pp. 15–18; Sorby, 2011, p. 201; Traboulsi, 2007, pp. 187–190).

Both sides were supported by outside powers and Syria was supplying military aid to the PLO while Israel was arming Christian groups (Huse, 2014, p. 52). By the end of summer of 1975, the military balance was in favor of the LNM but the Christian regions like the East Beirut remained under the control of Maronite militias. The LNM gained the control of 80 % of Lebanon by early 1976. Although Syria was supporting the LNM at the very beginning, Damascus did not tolerate a possible LNM's triumph having considered that the absolute victory of Palestinians might have triggered an Israeli aggression or the disintegration of Lebanon. Therefore, Syrian troops entered into Beqaa in April 1976 and launched a large scale operation against the LNM since Assad was concerned with a possible direct Israeli involvement (Harris, 2006, pp. 165–166).

The first phase of the civil war ended with Syrian military intervention and a relative peace in the country had started. Indeed, Huse correctly defined the situation as “the absence of war” (2014, p.111), rather than as a peace because it was soon understood that this period was just the beginning years of the civil war. During this first period, militia organizations at both camps developed into large and complex organizations with complex public and social services and other administrative affairs (S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, p. 17; Sorby, 2011, p. 200). The country was disintegrated into around ten cantons controlled by different sectarian militias (Traboulsi, 2007, pp. 231–237). With the immediate collapse of the state, all warring factions started to act as quasi-states having their own security, social and economic apparatuses.

3.2. The Second Phase of the Civil War: 1978 - 1982

Despite a relative calm in the country due to Syrian presence, the PLO continued to use southern Lebanon to attack Israel and Israel held the lack of authority in the south as the causes of PLO's attacks and invaded southern Lebanon in March 1978. During its invasion, it did not only create a security zone along the Israeli-Lebanese border but also established a militia

organization, named the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which was made up of mainly Maronite Christians but also included some Druze and Shia soldiers. Israel withdrew its forces in June 1979 after the deployment of UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Ellis, 2002, p. 33; S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, p. 19; Malaspina, 2008, pp. 79–80).

Early 1980s witnessed heavy involvement of both Israeli and Syrian troops in sectarian clashes through their proxies, which led to the actual division of Lebanon into regions that was controlled by the Lebanese Forces, the PLO, the SLA and Syrian troops. Having been highly concerned about the situation in Lebanon, Israel started a large scale ground, sea and air attack to Lebanon in order to root out PLO militias from Lebanon in June 1982. Israel quickly advanced in Lebanon and forced PLO to leave the country. President Sarkis invited a peacekeeping force involving US, British, French and Italian troops in Beirut to monitor the evacuation of PLO. (Malaspina, 2008, pp. 81–84; Rabil, 2011, pp. 45–46).

Israeli occupation divided Lebanon into two: the resistance against Israel and those in favor of a peace treaty with Israel. Successor of the LNM, the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF) since September 1982, consisted of leftists, some Palestinian groups and Shia armed guerillas represented the resistance and mainly active in the south. This group had the support of Damascus since Assad lost his faith in Maronite leaders and initiated a process of rapprochement with Muslims including Palestinians, the Druze and Shias (Rabil, 2011, p. 25). The other group led by President Amin Gemayel negotiated a peace accord with Israel, which was signed on 17 May 1983, but has never been ratified due to the strong Syrian and domestic opposition (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983; S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, p. 20). To conclude, the invasion marked a new beginning in the civil war with the enhancement of the alliance between the PLO and Syria in addition to the gradual consolidation of Shia groups in the southern region, which were waging a guerilla war against Israeli occupation.

3.3. Third Phase of the Civil War: 1982 - 1990

The third phase of the civil war started with the Israeli occupation in 1982 and continued until the implementation of Taif Accord. This phase witnessed the direct outside intervention while both Syria and Israel occupied most of the country. It was also the period of failed attempts to reach a national reconciliation and the rise of Iranian-backed Shia organization Hezbollah under Israeli occupation in addition to rise of sectarian enmities between parties due to the mountain wars of early 1980s and the clashes in the south. In September 1988, the term of Amin Gemayel's presidency ended without an elected successor, therefore he named General

Michel Aoun as prime minister, which was largely opposed by Muslims. The acting prime minister Selim Hoss declared himself as the legitimate one because General Aoun was a Maronite Christian and the prime minister must have been Sunni (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 240). Therefore Lebanon entered to the last years of the civil war without a president but with two prime ministers; one was ruling the Christian areas in the East Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the other exercise power on the rest of the country. These two years until the implementation of the Taif Accord witnessed very bloody intra-sectarian clashes, mainly between the Amal and Hezbollah in Shia community and between Samir Geagea's forces and Aoun's army in Christian community (Harris, 2006, p. 240). Both the domestic reaction to the devastation of intra-confessional war and the changes of regional and international politics in the late 1980s paved the way for a settlement.

Lebanese deputies, gathered in Taif in Saudi Arabia, reached an agreement known as the Document of National Understanding or more popularly Taif Accord on 22 October 1989 under the auspices of the regional powers. After the official declaration, Aoun issued a decree dissolving the parliament and declaring the agreement null and void. It took almost a year to oust General Michel Aoun (Ellis, 2002, p. 37; Harris, 2006, p. 240; Traboulsi, 2007, pp. 242–244; Wilkins, 2013; Zahar, 2005). It is important to note that the external pressure was the main driving force in ending the civil war. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in July 1990 led a formation of regional and international consensus to settle the crisis in Lebanon and to enforce the implementation of Taif Accord before any international intervention to the Gulf Crisis. On the other hand, Michel Aoun lost his support since Saddam Hussein was busy with Kuwaiti invasion. Hafez Al Assad adjusted Syria's foreign policy position very skillfully and joined the US campaign against Iraq in exchange of a US approval for implementing the Taif Accord on his own terms (Altunışık, 2007, p. 6; Bloomquist, Gilchrist, & Indelicato, 2011, p. 25; Harris, 2006, pp. 237–241; MacQueen, 2009, p. 47; S. Makdisi & Sadaka, 2003, p. 36).

Conclusion

This study revisited the Lebanese civil war from a historical perspective by focusing on the issues of the identity problem, socio-economic disparities and foreign penetration while sectarian conflicts are leading to the *Lebanonization* of the whole Middle East in our time. While it is an essentialist stand to argue that all political debates in Lebanon are fundamentally sectarian, having in mind the confessional system and the continuing struggles among constitutionally recognized sectarian groups in the Lebanese society, any explanation ignoring

the role of sectarian identity on this country would miss one of the significant dimensions of the story. Random abductions of civilians on the basis of their sectarian identities and the activities of sectarian militias during the war intensified the sectarian nature of the conflict; and therefore the whole process of civil war can be considered as the process of the reconstruction of collective memories and the self and the others in Lebanon. Despite its heavy sectarian coloring, however, portraying the civil war in Lebanon as a pure battle between the Christians and Muslims is an inaccurate approach because both Christians and Muslims were part of the several opposing parties. Therefore, one also needs to pay attention to the political economy of the civil war in order to explore the socio-economic and political disparities among different segments of the society, which feed mutual animosities between sectarian groups. In sum, this study argues that an approach considering both the sectarian enmities and economic inequalities in order to examine the tension between the deprived Sunni and Shia masses aligned with the Palestinian refugees and the privileged Maronite feudal elites would be more explanatory.

Another important characteristic of the Lebanese civil war is its regional and international dimension. In the absence of a common national identity and a well-established state structure, this study reveals the existence of the high level of foreign penetration at every phase of the internal conflicts. The lack of a national identity together with a lack of functioning state allowed sectarian leaders to build strong relations with external powers and there is a considerable merit in understanding the ambiguous nature of these informal networks, where they pursue their own interests by establishing close links and alliances with their preferred partners at regional and international level. Therefore, this study argues that civil wars cannot be considered as pure domestic affairs of a country because once it started, whether sectarian or socio-economic, Lebanese civil war immediately paved the way for further foreign penetration and it easily turned out to be a struggle for power for both regional and international actors.

Endnotes:

¹ In reference to Engin Akarlı's highly recognized book on Lebanese history, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*.

² The spelling of Mehmed Ali Pasha's first name in both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish was consistent (محمد) with Arabic letters, yet there is a distinction in transliteration. He was known as 'Muhammed' by his Egyptian subjects, and this name is used uniformly in Arab historical scholarship. However, given his original status as a commander in the Ottoman bureaucracy, his first name is rendered as 'Mehmed', which is the standard rendition of that name in Ottoman Turkish.

³ The Sublime Port is also known as the Ottoman Porte or High Porte, which is ‘*Bab-ı Ali*’ in Turkish, literally meaning ‘high door’. It is a metonym for the central government of the Ottoman Empire by reference to the gate giving access to the principal state departments in Istanbul.

⁴ For the full text of the regulation establishing double qaimaqamate, which was revised in 1850 in Turkish see: Erdoğan Keleş, “Cebel-i Lübnan’da İki Kaymakamlı İdari Düzenin Uygulanması ve 1850 Tarihli Nizamname”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2008.

⁵ Indeed, Russia had demanded the establishment of another district for Greek Orthodox community but this demand was not approved during negotiations in Istanbul.

⁶ When the ambassadors in Istanbul reconvened with the Ottoman foreign minister to review matters at the end of the first term of the first governor in 1864, an international protocol was signed for a series of important amendments which remained as the basic document during the Mutasarrıfıyya period. Additionally in 1867, Italy had also adhered to the statutes as a seventh guarantor. For the full text of organic statute in Turkish see Cenk Reyhan: “Cebel-i Lübnan Vilayet Nizamnamesi”, *Memleket Siyaset Yönetim*, 2006.

⁷ Indeed, the Administrative Councilors were equally divided between Christians and Muslims initially, however, a revision in the Règlement in 1864 modified this into seven Christians to five Muslims.

⁸ Being a verbal compromise, there are interpretational inconsistencies in the literature on whether the Pact includes specific regulations about the Speaker of the Parliament, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff are to be selected among Shias, Greek Orthodoxies, Christians and Druze respectively. However, what is important about the pact is the recognition of sectarianism and therefore the above mentioned discrepancy is not a core concern of this study.

⁹ It was claimed by many anonymous interviewees during the field work in Beirut that after being the president, Suleiman Farangieh promised in a secret meeting with Maronite leaders to do everything and sign every contract that leading Maronite families needed, claiming that it was “their time to rule.”

¹⁰ When King Husein of Jordan expelled Palestinians from Jordan in 1970, Farangieh’s lax policy of border supervision allow thousands of PLO fighters to enter into Lebanon, in which they could continue to confront with Israel. Although the Arab-Israeli conflicts have always been a concern for all sectarian groups in terms of demographic concerns, relations with Israel and their armed struggle with Lebanese army, the issue became more problematic after 1970 due to the dramatic increase in the Palestinian population and their armed activities, which had been used as a pretext for Israeli attacks (Sorby, 2011, p. 193).

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