Country Report

Lebanon

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This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. It is part of a series covering 23 countries (listed below) on four continents. More basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in these states is available in our Country Profiles series. This report was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

Countries covered in this series:
Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

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The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Racius from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Table of Contents

1. **INTRODUCTION**

It is possible to offer two contradictory interpretations of Lebanese political and social life from the 19th century Ottoman times to the post-independence era:

Negative and even catastrophic readings generally portray the country on the brink of collapse or dysfunction due to the intense polarization among different sects. The unending involvement of regional and global actors is also considered to be a further element of destabilization. Lebanon is also argued to have failed to develop a binding national identity vis a vis these challenges. Accordingly, the confessional system which has been improvised as a temporary solution within the framework of consociationalism has itself turned to be a prevailing problem by sliding into a suffocating cage of sectarianism. It was believed to be "temporary" since the 1926 Lebanese Constitution was also inspired from the French model of laïcité as a universal ideal.

However, there are cautious optimists, too. Some commentators draw attention to "the vitality of Lebanese political life, the multiplicity of its actors and the variety of its topics from women's rights to election laws…that displays a capacity for continuous adaptation. The actors' "path of resilience" (their capacity to face the many dangers threatening the country)" (Di Peri and Meier, 2017) should be taken seriously to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the country beyond the repetitive analyses of failure.

I contend that Lebanon offers an interesting case of continuous efforts of adaptation in the middle of seemingly insurmountable challenges posed by extremely politicized and polarized religious diversity with domestic and regional variables. The country has legitimate political actors playing within the parameters of a national political field. Despite the existence of prolonged and fundamental crises, this political class seems to either defer their problems to an uncertain future or provide short term solutions working, at least, until the outbreak of the next crisis.

Especially after the civil war (1975-90) and under the shadow of Syrian domination (1990-2005), the rival Lebanese political elites have managed to work within an institutional framework defined as consociationalism which was inherited from before the war. Consociationalism is a model of consociational democracy, which is employed in countries that have a variety of different segmental groups along social, political, ethnic, linguistic and racial lines as well as by religion or by region/nationality. In other words, it is a form of power-sharing among various segmental groups in order to maintain political stability, civil order and to avoid the outbreak of civil violence (Lijphart, 1977). Confessionalism is a sub-category of consociationalism where the main lines of divisions take place around religion (Reinkowski and Saadeh, 2005).

In scholarly research on religious diversity governance, the two models that are typically put forward when talking about European approaches to religiosity are France's laïcité or radical secularism characterized by its refusal to acknowledge and accommodate religious diversity in the public space and Britain's moderate or 'multiculturalised securalism' (Moodod 2019: Chp.8). In this regard, the Lebanese confessionalism does not fit into the either model. On the contrary, there is no recognition of a secular state authority as guarantee of religious and non-religious freedoms. As Makdisi argues, (In Lebanon) "the modern state was established as liberal and (putatively) democratic, but not secular." (Makdisi, 1996:3).

Furthermore, Lebanon presents a unique case as its confessional system, the weak state capacity and the existence of powerful armed militias as a result of continuous geo-political challenges puts the country so apart from all the other GREASE cases.

The Lebanese confessionalism can be considered as an improvised form of the Ottoman millet system based on a hierarchy of religions. While the Sunni Muslim population was at the top of the hierarchy, the Ottoman imperial state granted each millet some form of autonomy in their internal legal, judicial, as well cultural and educational affairs and each was represented by a leader whose position was incorporated into the central administration of the empire (Barkey, 2008).

There is an ongoing and intense political and intellectual debate in Lebanon whether the confessional system is a working solution or source of enduring political, cultural and economic problems. While some defend the viability of Lebanese confessionalism and blame external causes for the ultimate breakdown of the political system in 1975, others contend that Lebanon's peculiar corporate power-sharing model hardens sectarian identities, invites systemic deadlock, precludes the emergence of cross-sectarian modes of political mobilization, and, ultimately, leads to cyclical domestic crises that invite external interventions (Salloukh, 2015).

This is the reason why those supporters of secular or a post-sectarian Lebanon tend to blame the persistence of Lebanese confessionalism and related sectarianism for the failure of emergence of a sense of trans-sectarian inclusive citizenship as well as the interest-based rather than identity-based political affiliations (Clark and Salloukh 2013; Kingston 2013). Those critics of the confessional system argue that the Lebanese remain unequal sectarian subjects compartmentalized in self-managed communities rather than citizens with inalienable rights.

It is important to note that there are various efforts and calls for a post-sectarian Lebanon. In fact, during the Arab uprisings, the Lebanese 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" (Di Pieri and Meier, 2017: 2).

Will these struggles for post-sectarian Lebanon manage to create conditions for a secular Lebanon or lead to some improvements in the otherwise resilient confessional structure in a regional environment eroding the bases for inter-confessional trust? In fact, the relevant question for the proposed study is whether the confessional system of power-sharing could adapt itself to the new challenges emerging in the aftermath of the Arab uprising, especially with the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War?

All the risks and challenges which Lebanon is facing today seem to have exacerbated the historically existing animosities especially among the religious communities. Indeed, Lebanon experienced several serious challenges since the late 19th which involved the risk of turning the country into a failed state and failed national-political community as well. Nevertheless, it managed to survive primarily because of its elites' willingness to remain and work within the framework of confessionalism and consociational democracy. Even though all communities pose harsh criticisms towards this system of power sharing, they do not leave the table and tend to be creative in bringing about novel elements into the system to cope with the pressing new and old challenges.

Apparently, this "temporary solution" of confessionalism seems to have survived and developed its own history and reality. This adaptability would further prolong its life in the future simply because the defense of non-sectarian alternatives does not attract the religio-political elites who occupy a disproportionally advantageous position in the Lebanese confessionalism. This is the reason why, rather than expecting a radical rupture towards, for instance, a secular restructuring of the system, one can anticipate further improvements and improvisations in the existing system of power-sharing.

However, the significant question here is whether these improvements and improvisations would gradually prepare the societal conditions for a future move towards a secular partition of power. In this regard, it would be meaningful to analyze the long history of the struggles for civil law and civil marriage in Lebanon. It can be argued that this seemingly micro-arena of struggle highlights many complexities including the powers and weaknesses of the confessional system. Therefore, a brief history of these related struggles will be introduced in the next section as the mirror of weaknesses and strengths of the confessional system.

To offer some modest anticipations for these questions, we need to introduce main pillars of the confessional system and the changes that it has undergone in relation to the unending political crises.

2. **Population Composition**

2.1 Current composition of the population and challenges arising from it

Despite the fact that no population census has been held in Lebanon since 1932 due to a fragile political balance between the Christian and Muslim populations, some projections estimate the total population as approximately 6, 861, 464 in 2019 (World Population Review, 2019). While the Christian population was estimated around 34.9 per cent in 2011, the Sunni and Shi'a' Muslim, respectively, were considered to make 29,3 per cent of the population. According to the last official census held in 1932, the total population of Lebanon was only 786,000. In 1932 different Christian sects comprised 51,3 per cent while the Muslim groups made 48,8 per cent of the population (See the Table I below).

Table 1: Percentage of Christian and Muslim Sects: 1913–2011

Year	1913	1932	1975	2011	2017
Christians Maronite	58.3	28.8	23	19.3	-
Greek Orthodox	12.6	9.8	7	6.7	-
Greek Catholic	7.7	5.9	5	4.3	-
Other	0.8	6.8	5	4.2	-
Total Percentage	79.4	51.3	40	34.9	36,3
Muslims Shi'a	5.6	19.6	27	29.3	28,4
Sunni	3.5	22.4	26	29.3	28,7
Druze	11.4	6.8	7	5.4	5,2
Total Percentage	20.5	48.8	60	65.1	57,7
Total Population	414,963	786,000	2.5 M.	4.8 M.	

Source: (Salloukh et al, 2015)[1].

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[1] It should be noted that that last population census held in 1932 was the basis of the power-sharing in 1943. Since then no census has been held due to the fragile nature of the political balance among different confessions. These numbers, except 2017, were compiled by the authors of Salloukh et al, Politics of Sectarianism in Post-War Lebanon. For 1913 figures, see Ghassan Salamé, Al-Mujtama' wal-Dawla fil-Mashriq al-'Arabi (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiya, 1987), p. 103. For 1932 and 1975, see Helena Cobban, The Making of Modern Lebanon (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 16. For 2011, see "Min Ayna Yabda' Ilgha' al-Nizam al-Ta'ifi fi Lubnan," al-Safir, 2 June 2011. For 2017 estimates see estimates see CIA Factbook Lebanon, https://www.cia.gov/LIBRARY/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html

There seems to be a drastic decline in the Christian population vis a vis the Muslims in Lebanon. Among the 1.5 million people that left the country especially during and after the Civil War (1975-1990), Christians constituted a clear majority. This process that I consider as part of an ongoing de-Christianization in the Middle East and Africa (MENA) in general could be expected to have significant outcomes for the future of the confessional system in Lebanon as it further erodes the basis of power sharing. Besides, the calls for a post-sectarian Lebanon tends to intimidate the Christians in general as they are afraid of losing their existing guarantees secured by the confessional system. They fear that dismantling of the existing confessionalism without building a truly secular alternative would make them a fragile minority vis a vis an expanding Muslim majority.

After the outbreak of Syrian civil war in 2011, nearly one million Syrian refugees - which roughly makes a quarter of the total population of Lebanon- have arrived into the country. This enormous refugee influx has considerably destabilized the country's demography, economy and politics. Today approximately 400,000 Palestinian refugees (mostly Sunni) live in camps in the south of Lebanon, in areas originally home to Shi'a Muslims.

2.2 Economic and cultural factors that relate to the population composition

One of the key issues facing Lebanon is the economic and social impact of the Syrian crisis. The Syrian crisis has already hit a fragile Lebanese economy. The country continues to face several long-term structural weaknesses that predate the Syria crisis such as weak infrastructure, poor service delivery, institutionalized corruption and a bureaucratic inertia. The debt-to-GDP ratio was expected to persist in an unsustainable path, at 151 percent by end-2018, the third highest in the world (Lebanon Economic Monitor, 2018).

Syrian civil war cut off one of Lebanon's major markets and a transport corridor through the Levant. Syrian refugees have increased social tensions and heightened competition for low-skill jobs and public services considerably strained Lebanon's public finances. The crisis is expected to worsen poverty incidence among Lebanese citizens as well as widen income inequality. According to an overview by the World Bank, "it is estimated that as a result of the Syrian crisis, some 200,000 additional Lebanese have been pushed into poverty, adding to the erstwhile 1 million poor. An additional 250,000 to 300,000 Lebanese citizens are estimated to have become unemployed, most of them unskilled youth" (World Bank in Lebanon, 2019).

Remembering Palestinian refugee flux's destabilizing effects on Lebanese domestic politics in the second half of the 20th century, it is not difficult to anticipate that Syrian refugees will continue to be one of the crucial political issues for the immediate future. The Syrian refugees have also brought their politicized sectarian identities and distrust and fears emanating from their "others." They also sparked fears among the Lebanese who felt marginalized as either members of the already fragile Lebanese nation or

members of a religious community with their own historical repertoire of fears and threats supposedly coming from other religious communities.

The overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees are Sunni which may alter the sectarian proportions of the Lebanese confessional system. Dionigi argues that "most political groups claiming to represent the Christian Lebanese community interpret this as a risk for the integrity of the national identity of Lebanon. It is not a coincidence that Christian political leaders have been the most vociferous promoters of the restrictive policies towards Syrian presence and its protraction. Similar to the previous cases, then, religious identity plays a role in the prospect of managing Syrian presence in Lebanon in the long term, because it impacts on the status quo of its confessional politics" (Dionigi, 2017: 141).

This is the reason why it is an essential task for this paper to try to understand possible impacts of radicalisation on Lebanese confessional system. What sort of exclusionary or inclusionary mechanisms could be developed by the Lebanese state -notorious with its weak capacity-within or outside the current confessional system? Will these measures further empower sectarian compartmentalization or induce the emergence of trans-confessional and post-sectarian structures and practices?

3. State-religion relations and religious diversity governance

3.1 State-religion relations in historical perspective

Before dealing with the new and persistent challenges that confessionalism is facing especially after the Syrian Civil War, we need to provide an outline of the crucial steps in the emergence of this system within the framework of historical developments:

For many centuries the Ottomans ruled Lebanon through powerful Druze families, with semi-autonomous Druze and Maronite regions. In the mid-nineteenth century, growing rivalry between Druze and Maronites resulted in brutal conflict between the two communities in the Mount Lebanon region. After a series of bloody battles during the 1860s in which thousands of Christians were killed, the Maronites gained an autonomous status under the protection of European powers.

The Ottoman authorities attempted to to bring order in Mount Lebanon by creating a balance of power around the institution of Mutasarrifiyya between the Maronite and Druze communities (Traboulsi, 2009: 41-52). "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 politicized collective identities by labelling them as "Maronites", "Druzes", or "Sunnis" (Meier and Di Peri, 2017).

Lebanon remained nominally under Ottoman control until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War One. Following the war, France was given the mandate of the area now comprised of Lebanon and Syria by the League of Nations. Under the auspices of the French mandate, a constitution was written in 1926 while the 1932 census was realized to serve as a point of reference for the confessional partition of power over subsequent decades.

The 1926 Lebanese Constitution further attributed confessionalism a privileged place in private and public life. To cite some examples, Article 9 obliges the state "to render homage" to God, "to respect all religions and sects and guarantee the freedom to hold religious rites under its protection," and to respect each sect's "personal status laws and their religious welfare." Article 10 buttressed this constitutional defense of sectarian autonomy by guaranteeing that education should not "contravene the dignity of any religion or sect," and by granting each confessional group the right to operate its own private schools. Despite claiming to reflect the French system of laicite, 1926 Constitution recognized the need of continuing Ottoman-initiated confessional system. In this regard, it reflected a contradictory embrace of French secular model and a practice based on the improvisation of Ottoman millet system in the form of confessionalism.

The Constitution created a parliamentary regime coupled with proportional representation along confessional lines, with a Christian president and a Sunni Muslim prime minister. However, it is ironical to remember that, according to the Article 95, this proportional sharing of state offices between the main confessions was to be temporary; it was anticipated that a Lebanese national identity would strengthen over time.

On 13 March 1936, the French High Commissioner Damien de Martel promulgated Decree No. 60 L.R. The Decree recognized 18 official sects in Lebanon—12 Christian, five Muslim, and one Jewish—and their right to create and manage their own religious courts and to follow their own personal status and family laws (Meier and Di Peri, 2017). The officially recognized sects possessing their own personal status laws are the Maronite, Melkite, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Nestorian, Protestant, Sunni, Shi'a, Ja'fari, Druze, and Jewish sects. The 'Alawis, Isma'ilis, and Orthodox Copts are recognized by the state but do not have their own personal status laws and follow, respectively, the personal status laws of the Ja'fari and Orthodox laws.

Next and perhaps more crucial step towards confessionalism came with the 1943 National Pact when the independence officially arrived in. This unwritten pact between the Maronite and Sunni leaders was a supplement to the 1926 Constitution and carried equal weight. The pact asserted that neither Christians nor Muslims would seek foreign protection: not Christians from the West, nor Muslims from the East.

The National Pact distributed executive, legislative, and judicial powers based on a corporate confessional power-sharing arrangement. The power-sharing was based on the 1932 census (The last official census for political reasons to be explained below) and accordingly affixed a 5:6 ratio of Muslims to Christians in the state bureaucracy. It reserved the presidency to the Maronites. The Constitution deposited in the presidency substantial executive prerogatives, elevating it to the single most powerful office in the pre-civil war state. The post of prime minister was given to the Sunni community while the speaker of parliament was to be elected by the Shi'a community.

As the Table I clearly illustrates, this was a system biased towards Christian population which also disproportionally empowered the president. However, demographic and political realities and developments which fueled the Civil War (1975-1990) made it imperative to work out another deal: Ta'if Accord (1989).

Following World War II, Lebanon was hailed as one of the most stable countries of the region. Until the 60s the National Pact seemed to have channeled existing conflicts into political avenues rather than violence as the competing communities had a stake in national stability (Traboulsi, 2009: 100-128). The rise of Nasser's pan-Arabism had also de-stabilized Lebanese politics by reviving old tension in the new forms. In fact, the initial rivalry between Lebanism and Arabism had gained a new character during the Cold War between pro-Western Christian Maronites and Pro-Nasser Arabists.

The Palestinian refugee influx intensified in the 70s and their increasing assertiveness in Lebanese politics posed serious threats to the confessional system worked around 1943 National Pact. Christians set up armed militias against what they saw as an attempt by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to seize Lebanon. In this strained climate, the Sunni groups attempted to use the PLO's presence as leverage to increase their status in the government. These groups also divided into armed factions, competing among one another and against Christians.

In order to avoid a PLO takeover in Lebanon, Syria entered the conflict in 1976 which led to the division of Lebanon into zones controlled by Syria, the PLO, and Maronite militias. The spiral of violence involved the minority Shi'a population as well, which set up its own militia, Amal, in the late 1970s. Inspired from the Iranian revolution in 1979, some Shi'a militants created a more religious militia named "Hizbullah" (The Party of God). During the Israeli invasion of 1982, Hizbollah became the main resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.

Syria assumed the leadership in bringing an end to the civil war (1975-1990) with the Ta'if Accord (1989). As a result of the war, at least 100,000 Lebanese were dead, tens of thousands had emigrated abroad, and an estimated 900,000 civilians were internally displaced.

3.2. Current institutional structure for governing religion and religious diversity

The Ta'if, also known as the Document of National Reconciliation, was more than a political settlement between warring parties; it was rather a constitutional remaking of the sectarian order under the supervision of regional and international mediators. In fact, the regulations introduced by the Ta'if Accord were also integrated into Lebanon Constitution in 1990.

The outbreak of the 1975 civil war underscored the failure of the 1943 National Pact to manage the inherent contradictions of Lebanon's confessional politics which were also exacerbated by domestic and external contests. Mirroring the domestic and regional balance of power, Ta'if shifted the balance of executive power away from the Maronite president, placing it instead in the Council of Ministers' collective capacity. The Council of Ministers, which is made up of a grand coalition of sects, became the real custodian of executive authority. The constitutional supremacy of the Maronites was finally and formally abolished and replaced by what has been called the rule of "three presidents" or the Troika. In this new arrangement, the Maronite President of the Republic, the Sunni Prime Minister, and the Shi'i Speaker of the House were all placed at the same level of power. According to the new Constitution, none of the three leaders is able to unseat either of the other two (Reinkowski and Saadeh, 2006: 102)

This naturally empowered the Sunni prime minister's office, which now became an institution independent from the once all-powerful presidency. The Ta'if Accord also embodied the political and military rise of the Shi'a community and Syria's position as the postwar umpire of Lebanese affairs (Salloukh et al, 2015). The Ta'if Accord applied the principle of equitable confessional division of seats to parliament and all other primary posts throughout state institutions. As Table II shows, Muslims and Christians are now represented equally in parliament:

Table 2: Sectarian Composition of Post-Ta'if Parliament

Christians	Seats	Muslims	Seats
Maronites	34	Shi'a	27
Greek Orthodox	14	Sunnis	27
Greek Catholic	8	Druze	8
Armenian Orthodox	5	'Alawi	2
Armenian Catholic	1	---	---
Protestants	1	---	---
Christian Minorities	1	---	
Total Christians	64	Total Muslims	64

Source: (Salloukh et al, 2015)

There is an irony that 1920 Constitution, 1943 National Pact and Ta'if Accord (Thus the 1990 Constitution) all committed themselves to the abolition of confessionalism as a

"temporary solution." The Ta'if Accord and 1990 Constitution went further and envisioned an institution to be installed by the parliament that would consider ways to achieve deconfessionalization (Reinkowski and Saadeh, 2006: 103). However, entrusting the religio-political elites -who have vested interest in the confessional life- the task of abolishing their life source is quite contradictory.

Even the most ardent religious critics of the system have made some invaluable gains from the confessional system that they may not easily give up. Beyond material concerns, there are some minority sects reluctant to any significant change in the current system as they are afraid to lose what they have now. Despite them being not very happy with the current confessional system, the fear to lose even more makes them reluctantly support the status quo.

Moreover, not all proponents of de-confessionalization defend a complete secularization of the system. According to Reinkowski and Saadeh, there are roughly two different groups here. "The first group…argues for a political deconfessionalization, as is also stipulated in the Ta'if accord. Deconfessionalization would thus concern only matters in the national political arena, while personal status law would be left to the rule of the respective confessional groups. The major objection to the idea of "political" deconfessionalization, however, is that the proposed separation between a confessional and a non-confessional zone would not work. Laws and institutions in the confessional realm would easily breed a sectarian culture in all other areas of the body politic. Hence, the second group… advocates a complete secularization of the political system and society" (Reinkowski and Saadeh, 2006: 104)

Perhaps difficulties the supporters of civil law and civil marriage have faced since independence can give us some ideas about the entrenched nature of the confessionalism in Lebanon. Indeed, one of the most significant struggles in Lebanon is related to the calls for a civil law and civil marriage independent from the religious authorities. In fact, the 1926 Lebanese constitution envisioned the separation of state and religion in line with the French notion of Laicite and introduction of a secular civil law as well. Yet religious authorities fiercely opposed to the any steps towards the realization of this goal as a direct infringement on their authorities and, in many occasions, forced the state to retreat. The emerging practice further empowered the sectarian autonomy in family matters and education as well.

In the end, only citizens who did not belong to any of the 18 state-recognized sects, such as the Baha'is, were allowed civil marriage in Lebanon. The 2 April 1951 law relegated all personal status matters to sectarian courts. It also stipulated that all sects should submit their personal status laws to the Lebanese state for ratification. However, most sects did not even submit their personal status laws for state ratification and continued to manage them autonomously.

These practices encouraged intra-sectarian marriages and hindered intermarriages among different sects, forcing citizens to be dependent on their sectarian institutions for

personal status matters. As there is no alternative civil personal status law, there is no option outside the sectarian identities. Conversion to another sect was recognized within the logic of confessionalism yet there was no lay option outside the religious authorities empowered by the confessional structure.

Consequently, in the Lebanese political system rights and entitlements have been allocated according to an individual's confessional affiliation; and personal status laws, as well as the institutions through which these laws are applied, have been under the exclusive control of the religious authorities of Lebanon's officially recognized confessional groups. The main problem here is the denial of citizenship and caging individuals to sectarian identities. Despite several attempts to introduce civil law, there has not emerged a secular alternative due to the apparent state inefficacy and unwillingness of religio-political elites.

Yet those struggles to overcome the impositions of sectarianism have also made significant legal and political gains. In 2007 Talal El-Husseini started an initiative to remove the religious denomination from registry records based on the Article 11 of Decree No. 60 L.R. which states that any citizen who has reached legal age and does not suffer from any mental disability may exit or embrace a state-recognized sect and change her or his personal status (Salloukh et al, 2015: 36). Some others followed El-Husseini's precedent and in 2009 the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities accepted these applications by keeping as blank the box identifying a citizen's sectarian affiliation.

Another common practice against sectarian straitjacket is to get married abroad to have civil marriage and register in a foreign country's civil law. When the married couple adheres to the civil law of another country, Lebanese civil courts must adjudicate marriage-related matters in line with the rules of the foreign country's civil law. This is an increasingly popular practice of bypassing sectarian imposition. In fact, some Christians opt for it to escape restrictions on divorce imposed by their individual sects.

Finally, Kholoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish were the first couple in Lebanon to have a civil marriage. They first followed El-Husseini's precedent and deleted their sectarian affiliations. Then the couple requested to register their civil marriage in the Lebanese civil courts (Merhi 2012).

However, this marriage started a heated debate simply because it directly challenged the sectarian monopoly in marriage matters. Some prominent members of the political establishment such as Saad al-Hariri, Michel Aun and then President Michel Suleiman expressed their support for adopting a civil marriage law. The Council of Maronite Bishops argued that religious and civil marriages may coexist, while the Higher Islamic Shi'a Council and Hizbullah denounced civil marriage as did the Sunni Mufti Mohammad Rashid Qabbani (Salloukh et al, 2015: 38).

Despite significant de facto gains were realized by those who are willing to opt for non-sectarian and citizenship-based alternatives, there is still no recognition of an optional

or compulsory civil personal status law.   In fact, the sectarian elite seem to be determined in impeding access by Lebanese to a basic civic right. Nevertheless, all these legal and political struggles have significantly weakened the hegemony of the sectarian system.

4. Radicalisation Challenges

Despite the accomplishment of the Ta'if Accords in ending the civil war in 1990, Lebanon has remained an insecure and occasionally violent place. Hezbollah's prominent place on the national scene, the continued influence of Syria and Iran, emergence of a Saudi-US supported political bloc, frustrations of the Christian sects due to their increasing sense of loss of power and Israel's demonstrated willingness to intervene militarily continue to complicate domestic tensions. All these tensions have also prepared a fertile ground for religious radicalisation. Yet the outbreak of Syrian civil war in 2011 was perhaps the most severe crisis that Lebanon has to face after the end of the civil war in 1990.

Ta'if Accord also recognized the increasing Syrian domination (1990-2005) in Lebanon Which had also significantly changed de facto and de jure balance of power between Christians and Muslims on behalf of the latter. Once Maronite-dominated Lebanon gave way to Muslim-dominated Lebanon during the Syrian domination. Since then the country has been locked in a fierce Sunni–Shi'a power struggle over the control of the post-Syrian Lebanese state. Within this context, the Christians have increasingly felt marginalized and resented Syrian suzerainty and Sunni Muslim domination in particular. Syrian domination indirectly contributed to the empowerment of the confessional system since Syrian authorities found it easier to rule with divide and rule tactics by playing off the Muslims against Christians.

The domestic, regional, and international struggle for Syria divided the Lebanese between proponents and opponents of regime change in Damascus around roughly a Sunni– Shi'a fault line. With the increasing involvement of Hizbullah in Syrian Civil War, regional Sunni-Shia rivalry spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and Iran has inevitably led to a de-stabilizing effect on the Lebanese politics.

Sunni community's fear of "Syrian-Iranian tutelage" over Lebanon as well as the prevailing notion of the "Sunnis as victims of Shi'i power" seem to have empowered the legitimacy of radical Sunni groups. For instance, 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 Sunni radicalism claiming to defend the Sunnis' pride and honor in Lebanon.

Remembering the history of Hizbullah which evolved from being a challenging and uncompromising political outsider to the gradual integration into the Lebanese national political field is very important to truly assess the claims of Shi'a radicalisation. Inspired

from the Iranian revolution in 1979, some Shi'a militants created a more religious militia named "Hizbullah" (The Party of God). Initially two significant principles of Hizbullah was its unwavering rejection of Israel and loyalty to the doctrine of wilayat al-faqih (guardianship of the jurisconsult) (Nasr, 2007).

In fact, Hizbullah became the main resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon during the Israeli invasion of 1982 and during the 2006 war. Initially there was a serious problem of divided loyalties as the Hizbullah clearly rejected the Lebanese confessional political system due to its commitment to the idea of an Islamic state. In fact, Hizbullah opted to largely stay out the Lebanese civil war.

Unlike today's seeming rapprochement between Syria and Iran, there was a long history of struggle between the two countries regarding the Lebanese politics and Sh'ia population there. Pro-Syrian Amal and pro-Iranian Hizbullah had a fierce competition over Beirut's southern suburbs and in the south. Due to the significant achievement of Syrian regime in bringing peace through the Ta'if Accord, Iran took a pragmatic step by deferring its interests in Lebanon to the priorities of the Syrian regime. Only after this crucial tactical move, Hizbullah changed its outlook to accept Syrian domination.

Many critics argued that Hizbullah's loyalty was not to Lebanon but to a foreign state, Iran. Yet this uncompromising ideological standing had gradually softened on behalf of involvement in the Lebanese political field based on rapid shift of alliances. In fact, Hizbullah released a document in 2009 which embraced Lebanese identity and rejected those attempts to divide Lebanon under guise of federalism, and calls for a strong, indivisible Lebanon. There was no mention of Hizbullah's initial principle to establish an Islamic state. The document identified political confessionalism as the central problem without mentioning religious dimension (Salloukh et al, 2015: 161-162).

This was the beginning of the birth of the Hizbullah as a quite pragmatic political actor benefiting from the opportunities of confessional political system while continuing to call for reforming it. This policy shift brought a moderation of its rhetoric and gradual integration into the Lebanese political system including its participation in parliamentary elections.

Yet Hizbullah's leading role in the Resistance against Israel and its militia force creates a significant challenge to the Lebanese army's monopoly of violence. Due to the bitter memories of the civil war, Hizbullah's insistence to keep its militia armed intimidates members of other sects including Maronites and Sunnis. In a domestic political crisis in 2008, Hizbullah used its militia to briefly occupy parts of Beirut. This act was mainly motivated by political considerations and alarmed Hizbullah's political rivals. Nevertheless, Hizbullah was supposed to have disarmed under the UN resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 war with Israel. Not only has it failed do that but it is also reported to have replenished its arsenal with rockets delivered from Iran via Syria. Hizbullah's use of its militia in Syria, in an Arab state, also significantly contradicted with its pretext for using its militia for the sole purpose of Lebanon's national defense.

In fact, the Syrian civil war has posed a serious challenge to Hizbullah's national and regional priorities. The sectarianization of the Syrian conflict around a Sunni-Alawi civil war have rapidly displayed its de-stabilizing influences in Lebanon. Hizbullah helped Asad regime to regain control over parts of Damascus and Homs. It also sent units to defend the Sayidah Zaynab shrine in southern Damascus and provided support to Shi'a villages along both sides of the Lebanese–Syrian border in the Hermel region against attacks by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Salafi-Jihadi groups (Salloukh et al, 2015: 168). Hizbullah's decision to actively involve in the Syrian civil war has significantly tarnished its image as a Lebanese national actor that the party has managed to build in the recent decade.

Just like Sunni fears from what they consider as Shi'i radicalisation, Shi'i Lebanese are also increasingly intimidated by what they perceive as "the Sunni Salafism" and its domestic ramifications. The fear of DAESH and other takfiri groups is seen as the factor welding many Shi'i men and women to Hizbullah, which does not seem to face recruitment problems for its military operations in the war in Syria.

Apparently, the fear of Sunni Salafism further empowers Hizbullah among the Lebanese Shi'a community while eroding its "Lebanese" national image and legitimacy among the other religious and lay communities. When members of a community feel threatened, it is an expected response to prioritize the core values in an uncompromising manner. This process is sometimes interpreted as a "community reflex" sparked by the sectarianisation of the war in Syria and the perception of an existential threat posed by Sunni Islamist groups based in both Syria and Lebanon (Mazzucotelli, 2017: 64).

Despite a significant re-radicalisation in Hizbullah's discourse and practice, the memories of their apparent flexibility and pragmatism for adaptation to the changing political realities especially in the 2000s could help the party to readjust itself to the Lebanese political field after a shocking de-stabilization brought by the Syrian civil war.

Ironically, the mechanisms which seem to have triggered Sunni radicalism tends to mirror the Shi'a experience in the recent years: Fear strengthens exclusionary discourse within the religious identity.

In the 1990s Sunni Lebanese felt themselves as the most powerful and optimistic group especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Refik Hariri. In fact, "Harirism" as a moderate socio-political phenomenon turned to be the most significant bastion against the calls for Sunni radicalism. Yet in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination in 2005, Sunnism inexorably started to face an erosion regarding its weight in Lebanese politics. The new status of the Sunni community in Lebanon became one of political, social, and economic marginalization vis a vis the unexpected rise of Shi'a community under the flagship of Hizbullah.

Refik Hariri's son and political heir Saad Hariri failed to turn the wave of protests ('Cedar Revolution') that followed his father's assassination in 2005 into a national movement by seizing the opportunity of turning his al-mustaqbal (Future Party) into a trans-confessional entity. Saad Hariri's 14 March Coalition has increasingly sided itself with the Saudi American bloc vis a vis the Hizbullah-led political bloc. Thus, Saad Hariri failed to reproduce his father's aura of moderation and political pragmatism that promoted an apolitical developmentalism in Lebanon as a unifying element. In sum, the Sunnis have failed to promote themselves as the stabilizing national element between the disgruntled Christians and the rising tide of Shi'a under Hizbullah. Of course, this failure involves the risk of deepening sectarian compartmentalization that Refik Hariri had once partially softened or cancelled.

When one considers the tradition of Sunni Islamism in Lebanon, one should start the list with Jamaa al-Islamiyya, the Lebanese version of Ikhwan. Despite an interesting history of tactical collaboration with Hizbullah-led Resistance under the influential general secretary Fathi Yakan, the movement's mainstream has gradually moved towards Said Hariri's 14 March coalition (Rabil: 2011: 31-41, 116). The movement has indeed moments of periodical radicalisation and moderation dependent on the external and internal conditions. In addition to the impact of sectarianization of the Syrian civil war, the changes experienced with the rapid upsurge and fall of Ihwanism with the outbreak of the Arab Spring should be carefully observed as some younger elements might be willing to opt for more radical Salafi movements

It is important to note that regional developments in Syria, Iraq and Egypt and initial successes of radical Salafis have led to the mushrooming of Salafi groups elsewhere in the MENA region including Lebanon. (Pall 2018). It is very difficult to study a phenomenon in its upsurge moments. We need more time to have a more distanced and objective understanding of the issue.

Despite these limits a brief elaboration on the discourse and practice of Sheikh Ahmad al-Asîr as a recent Salafi challenge to the Lebanese establishment could give us some reflections about similar groupings. This movement targeted Shi'a and Hizbullah with a discourse strikingly reflecting violent Jihadism in Syria. The movement's sudden upsurge and decline in 2015 needs to be elaborated to understand the constraints and opportunity spaces for such radicalisation.

According to Meier and Di Peri, "Following the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri, the Sunni community seems to live in limbo, unable to fill the political vacuum created by Hariri's death. The Doha Agreement signed in 2008 clearly recognized the continuation of Syrian influence over Lebanon, manned by Hizbullah and its allies in the March 8 coalition. This weakness paved the way for the rise of radical Sunni movements such as that of Sheikh Ahmad al-'Asîr between 2011 and 2013." (Meier and Di Peri, 2017: 35).

Especially the failure of Saad Hariri in perpetuating Rafic Hariri's moderate and unifying Sunni posture and related self-confidence paved the ground for Sunni radicalisation mainly in the area of Tripoli. "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" (Meier and Di Peri, 2017: 35).

Al-'Asîr was able to play on sectarian honor and transform a political weakness into a sectarian threat. It is interesting to see how he portrayed the Sunnis as victims of Shi'i power. In this environment, radicalisation of the al-'Asîr movement and its use of violence gave voice to a deep frustration of some fringes of the Sunni community. Al-'Asîr's men actually clashed with the military in Abra near Saida in June 2013 where 18 soldiers were killed. On August 15, 2015, Sheikh Ahmad al-'Asîr was arrested at the Beirut International Airport while trying to flee to Nigeria with a fake passport.

Despite he was able to exploit the increasing sense of Sunni frustrations, it should not be forgotten that as an outsider he also challenged religio-political establishment having vested interest in the status quo. Sunni establishment well-integrated into the confessional mechanisms have significant advantages compared to the political outsiders. It is not just the power coming from clientelist mechanisms they control but also their status as the recognized defenders of the religious community vis a vis the others. At the end of the day, they are expected to protect the community in a multi-confessional environment which bestow upon them significant legitimacy.

5. **Policies and practices addressing and preventing religious radicalisation**

Those circles having concerns about the prospects for radicalisation generally point out one million Syrian refugees who arrived at Lebanon with an intense polarization and feel frustrated and disempowered. Lebanese state's choice of no camp policy, reflecting its weak state capacity to deal with macro-problems, seems to leave Syrians' fate mostly to the hands of international and regional NGOs. Some of these NGOS could be politically motivated in line with their "dawa" while the others with humanitarian concerns could only produce short term relief.

This is the reason why there is an urgent need for planning social programs aiming at gradual integration of these refugees into Lebanese social, economic and political life. From the past experiences it can be generalized that there will emerge significant hierarchies in terms of economic and social integration in the coming decades. Those at the top of these hierarchies could gradually integrate themselves to the hardest corridor to enter: The confessional political system.

In his study titled "Statehood and Refugees: Patterns of Integration and Segregation of Refugee Populations in Lebanon from a Comparative Perspective", Dionigi argues that "integration or partial integration occur when refugees' politicization is adaptive.

Conversely, segregation, expulsion, and sometimes the attempt to physically eliminate refugees, have recurred when their politicization has been highly contentious… the case of Lebanon shows that politicization is a crucial determinant of the dynamics of inclusion or segregation; religious identity and socio-economic status play an influential role but – differently from politicization – they are not necessary conditions for integration or a sufficient cause for segregation (Dionigi 2017: 115-117).

When the case of Armenian refugees is considered, Dionigi's study found their politicization factor adaptive, role of religious identity strong and their socio-economic status as poor. Eventually they were integrated as citizens. Palestinian refugees were found, however, politically contentious, the role of their religious identity was weak while their socio-economic status was poor. They were not integrated but segregated (116). Of course, one cannot easily conclude whether Syrians will be integrated or segregated. What we know from Dionigi's study is that if they are permitted to be players in the national political field, their politicization can create a positive environment of adaptation.

Remembering Lebanese state's three characteristics --Confessionalism, Geopolitical Uncertainty and Exclusive political class—one can anticipate only a small portion's likelihood of integration with better socio-economic opportunities and political connections via established religious networks. What about the rest of the Syrian refugees? If their emerging political elites can sit around the table of confessional distribution of power, Syrian refugee majority could follow their elite's political directives just like other sects of Lebanon do. However, there is significant likelihood that majority of Syrian refugees could be excluded just like the Palestinians and opt for more radical and contentious politics.

Of course, their contentious politics may also follow the route of Salafi radicalisation. Nevertheless, easy and alarmist generalizations about the prospects of Salafism could be misleading. There is a considerable need for sociological and ethnographic studies to assess the future of the Salafi movements mostly manned by the frustrated youngsters. Alarmist and intimidating analyses of Salafism could only contribute to its perception from a perspective of over-securitization.

The reasons for the emergence of frustrated youth in the MENA after the Arab Spring and ramifications of the Syrian civil war in giving a sectarian discourse to these frustrations must be carefully analyzed. With the apparent end of the Syrian Civil war, a significant factor destabilizing the region would be expected to disappear soon. Yet the reasons alienating the youth will remain as potential factors for political alienation and radicalisation.

The task of the states is to provide additional social support mechanisms for the youth, for instance, to deal with the pressing youth unemployment. The political actors also face the urgent task to attract the youth to the existing channels of political

representation. Compared to the authoritarian regimes of the MENA, Lebanon possesses significant advantages due to the existence of a tradition of parliamentary democracy.

But this political system is strictly defined in line with sectarian identities and the religio-political elites are extremely exclusionary. Despite these inherent problems, Lebanese political system could survive and adapt itself to the strained conditions. This adaptive power seems to be the most significant asset as a potential mechanism for solving the problems listed above.

Since the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, Lebanese political elite have been polarized between the pro-Syrian March 8 camp and anti-Syrian March 14 factions. After Saad Hariri's 14 Marc Bloc won the 2005 elections there emerged a crisis as Hizbullah asked for one third representation in the cabinet. When their demand was rejected by Saad Hariri, Hizbullah pulled its ministers from the cabinet in late 2006. This crisis also precluded the election of president in Lebanon until 2008 when two blocs finally signed the Doha Agreement. They agreed the election of General Michel Suleiman, the commander of Lebanon's army, as president and recognized Hizbullah's veto power in the new cabinet. This agreement between the two blocs came after the worst outbreak of political violence since the 1975-1990 civil war.

After the political elite's success in charting a deal, Lebanon soon faced with one of the most destabilizing existential crises since the civil war which was sparked by beginning of a civil war in Syria in 2011. From 2009 to 2018 there were no general elections in Lebanon as the existing parliament extended its term several times due to regional crises, security concerns and political disagreements over the new election law.

However, there are some signs of exit from the severe political crisis that Lebanon experienced between 2011 and 2015. Despite all the difficulties, rival political elites continue to work within the same confessional mechanism of power sharing which has proved quite resilient. As Di Peri and Meier argued, "Instead of falling into a new cycle of violence, this small country of the Middle East showed a rare, somewhat "unexpected" flexibility and capacity to adapt, especially considering the turbulent regional environment" (Di Peri and Meier, 2017: 8). Yet, despite legitimate calls for a post-sectarian or secular Lebanon, the weak state capacity inherent in the confessional system, political crises exacerbated by geographical uncertainties and exclusionary nature of the religio-political elites make any step for reform almost impossible in the short and medium term.

The creative and dynamic initiatives in the area of civil law and civil marriage, however, can further contribute to the ongoing legal gains. There is emerging a nonignorable body acting in defense of a trans-sectarian inclusive citizenship as well as the interest-based rather than identity-based political affiliations. Empowerment of trans-sectarian interactions could also contribute to the elimination of the trust problem among the different sectors of Lebanon compartmentalized in their communities.

Indeed, without trust building among the communities intimidated by the unending crises it seems very difficult to reform any aspect of the current confessional system. For instance, the calls by Shi'i and some Sunni authorities to eliminate political sectarianism while keeping the religious sectarianism intact intimidates Christian minorities. They argue that such a move will make Muslim majority predominant with religio-political elites notorious for majoritarian political culture. This is the reason why they want to protect their privileges granted by the 1943 National Pact and the Ta'if Accord. Therefore, any reform move should recognize and maintain Christian population's veto power in significant constitutional matters. After these guarantees were clearly codified, the Christian minorities could feel empowered to participate and contribute to the reforming of the existing system.

Lebanese defending a secular state do not also find those calls for the end of political confessionalism as a sufficient solution as they see regime's sectarian nature as the fundamental problem hindering the development of trans-sectarian inclusive citizenship.

With the seeming end of the Syrian Civil War and the defeat of Salafi jihadism, there could emerge a relatively stable environment to focus on Lebanon's domestic problems. Reviving the Lebanese economy could create the conditions for market-mediated integration of refugees as the Lebanese state can be expected to continue its indifference to the daunting problems of the refugees and the Lebanese poor in the short and medium terms. Relative stability would trigger economic growth which would also contribute to the urgent need for trust building among different communities. Under such positive conditions, capacity and creativity for institutional change --that Lebanon has so far proven several times in the middle of significant political crises-would induce some reforms in the current confessional system.

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