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Ecclesia Triunfans? Sectarianism and the Maronite Community, 1943-1975

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ECCLESIA TRIUNFANS?

Sectarianism and the Maronite Community

1943-1975

ABSTRACT

During the Second Lebanese Republic (1943-1975) the Maronite Community was perceived as the country's leading sect, holding an almost hegemonic role within the state's confessional framework. By analyzing three key historical events (the 1952 "Rosewater Revolution", the 1958 Crisis and the 1970 presidential elections), this essay will try to prove that neither the Maronite Community held a disproportionate control over Lebanon's politics, nor sectarianism was the predominant factor defining its political system, but one among other traditional ties, whose influence was even bigger.

Keywords: Maronites, Sectarianism, Confessionalism, Traditionalism.

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*“A Rose among thorns, an impregnable rock in the sea,
unshaken by the waves and fury of the thundering tempest”*
Pope Leo X, on the Maronites.

“ونبقى”
“And we stay”
Written on the walls of Beirut, 1982.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1988 and 1990, the Lebanese Army, under the command of General Michel Aoun, and the strongest of the remaining Christian militias, the Lebanese Forces (*al-quwwāt al-lubnāniyyah*), fought a highly destructive, fratricide, intra-Christian war which brought the Civil War (1975-1990) to an end, ruining any chance of organized resistance against the Syrian invasion. However sad this episode might be, at least it gave a true picture of the internal divisions affecting all Lebanese communities, in spite of the Western press’ tiresome – even misleading – insistence in presenting the conflict as a Muslim-Christian war, a kind of ‘clash of civilizations’ produced long before Huntington wrote his famous book.

This insistence, both journalistic and academic, on the confessional aspect of the Civil War is but a logic consequence of the peculiar structure of the Lebanese political system, where public office is distributed following a strict sectarian apportionment, which allows only certain communities to occupy certain positions; therefore, the President is always a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker of the National Assembly, a Shiite and so forth. The Legislative Chamber itself was – and still is – confessionally structured, following a 6:5 proportion favourable to Christians before 1990 and now, divided by half for each religion. The origins of this system are widely known to hark back to the disturbances which ravaged the Mountain in the 19th century, with the principle of confessional representation being firstly enshrined in the institution of the double *Qaimaqamiyyah*, the Northern one being put under a Maronite chief, the Southern one, under a Druze. Thereafter, all institutional arrangements in the area currently known as Lebanon have followed this line, including the *Mutasarrifiyyah* (1861-1916), the French Mandate (1920-1943) and the independent Lebanese Republic.

The rationale behind this sectarian organization, enshrined later on in the so-called *National Pact*, obeys, in the words of Michel Chiha, father of the 1926 Lebanese Constitution and national conscience of the Second Republic (1943-1975), to the fact that Lebanon is «a country of associated confessional minorities»¹, which need to find, in the Chamber and the institutions, the necessary balance between them in order to «gather in the Lebanese community all the Lebanese communities»². In a country so divided as Lebanon, «the profound tranquility which results from an equitable policy forbidding all kinds of violence against the minority, whichever it is»³ can only be achieved, in the opinion of Chiha, by guaranteeing all confessional groups a parliamentary watchtower for the defense of their rights.

1 CHIHA, 1964, 54.

2 CHIHA, 1964, 97. Emphasis in the original.

3 Ibid.

And despite widespread criticism, the system managed to control inter-sectarian conflict for over three decades⁴. However, with so much scholarly emphasis directed at the external characteristics of the Lebanese political structure, the intra-sectarian aspect has been sorely forgotten, in spite of the recognition, by just a few authors⁵, of the importance of other loyalties beyond confessional belonging, like kinship or fealty, which in the case of the former was even considered «Lebanon's most solid and enduring tie»⁶, way ahead of confessional belonging. In the same spirit, Albert Hourani recognized that «[confessional] communities are not [...] solid bodies having a single interest or attitude, and [this] division [...] is not the only [...] which can be made of the population of Lebanon, and in some ways may not be the most significant.»⁷, therefore there is a felt need to study the inner working of the different Lebanese communities, in order to fully grasp the historical processes which took place in that country since it became an independent state.

Our essay will try to tackle this need making a contribution to the growing body of literature maintaining that confessionalism is not the dominant factor in Lebanese politics and, to do so, our attention will be focused on the Maronite community. An ethno-religious group⁸ whose role during the First Republic has been variably described as preponderant⁹, dominant¹⁰, privileged¹¹ and even hegemonic¹², which makes the understanding of its internal dynamics a must to realize why the only Arab Middle East's experiment at political and economic liberalism crashed in such a dramatic way as a 15-year-long civil war. This study will also provide us with the opportunity to demonstrate the radical falsehood of the aforementioned adjectives, and to prove that there was no Maronite dominance or hegemony in Lebanese politics in the Republic of Independence, but «a full partnership between the various Christian and Moslem sects in which no one sect alone could determine policy»¹³.

To achieve our goals, this essay is divided in three clearly differentiated parts. Apart from a thorough review of the available literature on Maronite History and Lebanese politics, we will examine Maronite politics in three periods: the Crises of 1952 and 1958 and the Legislative Election of 1970. In so doing, we will focus our attention in vital moments for Lebanon, emphasizing the inner working of the community, which will provide us with more information about it than a mere overview of Lebanese History during the studied period. After this second part, of an essentially descriptive nature, the third and last part of this essay will analyze the historical facts to give appropriate answers to the proposed questions.

4 HUDSON, 1977, 6.

5 Let us mention Arnold Hottinger, Samir Khalaf and Albert Hourani.

6 KHALAF, 1968, 246.

7 HOURANI, 1976, 34.

8 ENTELIS, 1973, 148.

9 LABAKI, 2008, 106

10 AULAS, 1985, 14.

11 HUDSON, 1977, 8 ; TRABOULSI, 2007, 110.

12 ZISSER, 1995, 889.

13 SALIBI, 1965, 188.

FIRST SECTION: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is almost a tradition in Middle East scholarship to begin any essay on Lebanon by stating that primordial ties dominate that country's politics. The widely accepted importance of sect, kin, fealty and family in the development of political life in the country of the Cedar overwhelms the literature, and this paper does not pretend to break away from this tradition, but to question the assumption that many authors make about the predominance of the sectarian factor over other considerations (Michael Hudson, Fawwaz Traboulsi, Camille Habib, Jihad Nammour). Curiously, most of these "anti-confessional" scholars have also the tendency to underline what they label as Christian dominance over Lebanese politics, that is the case, for instance, of Fawwaz Traboulsi, who goes as far as to affirm that «sectarian pluralism barely concealed Maronite political primacy»¹⁴.

For most of the mentioned authors, confessionalism in particular, and the survival in general, of these traditional ties prevented the modernization of the Lebanese political system, this being the opinion of Michael Hudson, for whom «the proportional representation solution for sectarian tensions aggravated other problems because of the policy immobilism that it engendered [preventing] the Lebanese state to modernize itself»¹⁵, whereas Camille Habib thinks that «[c]onsociation is a system that contradicts the rules of Western democracy [and] defies the modern spirit of individual endeavour and social change»¹⁶. In his opinion, the «confessional political system breeds nothing but crises»¹⁷. Even some of the authors recognizing the prominent role played by other traditional ties, alongside confessionalism, in the political life of Lebanon, characterize their persistence as having negative consequences, Nizar Hamzeh, for example, considers that the former have had «a constraining effect on the enactment of universalistic policies and [have] discouraged the development of citizen participation»¹⁸.

However, as has already been mentioned, we will maintain throughout this study – together with authors the like of Farid el-Khazen, Samir Khalaf, Caroline E.A. Knight or Oren Barak, that confessionalism was neither the foremost factor conditioning Lebanese life during the Second Republic nor a factor preventing its political modernization because, as Samir Khalaf states, «political modernization and the persistence of traditions need not be incompatible»¹⁹. Moreover, we fully coincide with Caroline E. A. Knight, when she says that «confessionalism has been used as a scapegoat for many problems whose true roots lie somewhere»²⁰.

In order to do so, our attention will be concentrated on the evolution of the Maronite community, trying to prove that this *ta'ifah* did not hold a hegemonic domination over Lebanon during the period under study, being instead participant in a consociational arrangement that «functioned relatively well [until] it was subjected to [...] externally-generated pressure»²¹. By putting the focus over this community, we are also trying to pay our modest contribution to a sector

14 TRABOULSI, 2007, 109.

15 HUDSON, 1977, 6.

16 HABIB, 2009, 65.

17 HABIB, 2009, 64.

18 HAMZEH, 2001, 167.

19 KHALAF, 1968, 245.

20 KNIGHT, 1992, 341.

21 KHAZEN, 2000, 32.

of scholarship which has been, until now, utterly neglected: that of Maronite History in independent Lebanon. It is truly surprising that, leaving aside a couple of PhD or MPhil thesis²² and the not very scientific *The Maronites in History* by Matti Moosa (who uses more than half of the book to attack what he considers as the weak points of Maronite doctrine), almost no author has dealt in depth with the contemporary history of the Middle East's only Christian compact minority. This neglect contrasts vividly with the interest that the medieval and modern History of the Maronites has aroused in the scholar community, with such examples as the encyclopaedic *Histoire des Maronites* by Mgr. Boutros Dib, or Kamal Salibi's *Maronite Historians of Mediaeval Lebanon*, not to mention hundreds of academic articles published in dozens of journals, first and foremost among them *Parole d'Orient*, the Arab Christian and Syriac Studies journal of the Maronite Université du Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK).

To achieve our goals, attention will be given first to the historical evolution of the Lebanese State between its independence and the outbreak of the Civil war, by centering on three fundamental events: the 1952 "Rosewater Revolution", the 1958 Crisis and the 1970 presidential elections, which will be followed by an analysis where the hypothesis presented in this section will be confirmed.

22 DREXLER, 2012 and SPENCER, 1963.

SECOND SECTION: HISTORICAL STUDY

I. Béchara el-Khoury and the 1952 Crisis

On September 21st 1943, Béchara el-Khoury was elected President of the Lebanese Republic, receiving the overwhelming support of the National Assembly, with 44 votes in his favour and three abstentions²³. His ascension to the First Magistracy represented a triumph for British interests at a time of intense rivalry between that country and France for the control of the Levant²⁴, and French apprehensions about Khoury's triumph were indeed justified for, as soon as he took office, he made clear his aim to lead Lebanon towards full independence, by amending the 1926 Constitution and eliminating the prerogatives it reserved for the mandatory authorities²⁵.

Khoury was elected on the common Islamo-Christian platform represented by the Constitutional Bloc, which called for full Lebanese independence and cooperation with the rest of the Arab world²⁶. Such an arrangement, which was on the basis of the future National Pact, was read differently by Muslims and Christians²⁷ but, as Kamal Salibi reminds, «neither side insisted on [their] point»²⁸. The National Pact would be confirmed as a quasi-constitutional document, in spite of its oral character, by way of the Ministerial Declaration of October 7th, inaugurating an era of «virtual partnership in the running of the affairs of the state between [the] President [...] and [the] Prime Minister [...]»²⁹.

However, things were soon to get sour for, as soon as the National Assembly approved the bill of Constitutional Reform on November 8th 1943 despite General de Gaulle's opposition³⁰, the High Commission proceeded to suspend the Fundamental Law, imprison President Khoury and most of his Cabinet and appoint Emile Eddé – the longtime ally of the French and paramount representative of the Maronist current which promoted the idea of a smaller, Christian-homogeneous *Petit Liban*³¹ in alliance with France or even the Zionist movement³² – as the new president.

However, France's move went wrong. The whole of Lebanon mobilized in support of their incarcerated leaders and refused to pay heed to Eddé's Government, in spite of his popularity within the Maronite Community (in fact, the Maronite areas of Mount Lebanon had been the only area where Khoury's Constitutional Bloc did not win the legislative elections in the Summer of 1943), and supported the rump Government constituted by the two members of Khoury's Cabinet who had not been detained: Habib Abu Chahla and Majid Arslan. Even the Maronite Church, which had maintained an ambivalent position towards full independence, expressed its full support for the

23 AMMOUN, 1997, 440. Kamal Salibi (1965, 188) gives a different result: 44 votes in favour and 11 abstentions.

24 WINSLOW, 1996, 78-79.

25 WINSLOW, 1996, 79.

26 Ibid.

27 KHAZEN, 1991, 16-17.

28 SALIBI, 1965, 187.

29 TRABOULSI, 2007, 110.

30 WINSLOW, 1996, 79.

31 ZAMIR, 1978, 232-235.

32 MALSAGNE, 2011, 113-114; ZISSER, 1995, 889-918.

imprisoned Government³³, joining the voices which called for complete independence and French withdrawal. Under strong British and American pressure – even threats³⁴, the French finally gave in and released Khoury and his Government on November 22nd, effectively putting an end to their Mandate over Lebanon.

Free to rule without French interference (which would be definitely erased by the transfer of the *Services d'Intérêts Communs*³⁵ on December 23rd 1943 and the handover of the commandment of the *Troupes Spéciales*, on August 1st 1945, soon to become the embryo of the Lebanese Army), Khoury and his partner in the fight for independence, Riad el-Solh, gave birth, as was advanced before, to the tradition of partnership at the helm of the State between the Maronite President and the Sunni Prime Minister, counterbalancing the constitutional omnipotence enjoyed by the President with the popular support that strong Sunni leaders like Solh or Karamé commanded among their correligionists³⁶. Together, Khoury and Solh undertook the task of building the institutions of independent Lebanon and managed to do so with a considerable degree of success, particularly in the international arena, where Lebanon joined the UN as a founding member, at the same time that regional threats to the country's independence were finally suffocated with the signing of the founding document of the Arab League, the Alexandria Protocol (October 7th 1944), whose article 4 «emphasize[s the Arab States] respect of the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon in its present frontiers»³⁷.

In the internal scene, Khoury's mandate is considered the golden age of the “Merchant Republic”, an era of unbridled capitalism and economic flourishing, which Kamal Salibi defines as a time of «phenomenal prosperity»³⁸. Long before the advent of oil money from the Gulf, Lebanon had already become an international trading center³⁹, which was judiciously spending its wartime savings in the development of massive infrastructure projects, like the construction of a new airport. «In no time», Samir Khalaf reminds, «Beirut evolved into the main financial center of the Middle East and one of the leading centers in the world»⁴⁰. The Lebanese economy benefited even from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which provided the country with a huge pool of unskilled and inexpensive labor, but also with the investments and training brought in by the Palestinian middle classes⁴¹ (one of them, Youssef Beidas, popularly known as «*monsieur cent milliards*»⁴², founded what was to become Lebanon's largest bank, the *Intra*, and also its biggest financial scandal, when the Bank collapsed in 1966). Moreover, the Arab boycott against Israel did also redound to the benefit of Beirut's role as a trading center, for most firms settled in Palestine relocated to its northern neighbor.

However brilliant the macro-economic framework could seem, prosperity did not benefit all elements of the Lebanese society equally. In fact, the service-oriented economy was under the

33 ZISSER, 1995, 900.

34 WINSLOW, 1996, 79.

35 Denise Ammoun (AMMOUN, 2004, 19) describes these services as follows: «*Les “services d'intérêts communs” comprennent un large éventail d'organismes dont la France, en sa qualité de mandataire, assurait jusque-là la direction pour le compte des gouvernements libanais et syrien. Il suffit de citer les douanes et la gestion des recettes douanières, les travaux publics, les PTT, les poudres et explosifs, la Sûreté générale, le contrôle des sociétés concessionnaires et le séquestre des biens ennemis, le service relatif à la propriété industrielle, commerciale, littéraire et artistique, etc. Et, bien sûr, le commandement des Troupes Spéciales.*».

36 ZISSER, 1994, 493 ; KHAZEN, 2000, 241-242.

37 The Avalon Project. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/alex.asp

38 SALIBI, 1966, 214-215.

39 KHALAF, 2002, 160.

40 Ibid.

41 WINSLOW, 1996, 93.

42 AMMOUN, 2004, 390.

control of an extremely reduced number of families – mostly Christian⁴³, known as “the consortium” which held «monopolistic control over the main axes of the country’s economy»⁴⁴, including two-thirds of all foreign imports⁴⁵, and around 40% of the GNP for 1948⁴⁶. At the same time, lower-income strata, which represented about 78% of the total population, controlled less than a fourth of national income⁴⁷.

Together with such an unequal income distribution, Bechara el-Khoury’s mandate was also plagued by corruption and nepotism⁴⁸, as well as by scandalous electoral fraud, both in the legislative elections of 1947 and 1951, the former being vividly described by Denise Ammoun in the following terms:

Dans certains villages, même les morts ont voté. Dans plusieurs villes, les fonctionnaires ont ajouté des urnes gonflées de bulletins factices, et le nombre de voix obtenues par le vainqueur a atteint le double, sinon le triple, de celui des électeurs inscrits [...] Parfois aussi [...] un candidat est élu sans avoir le nombre minimum de voix requises...⁴⁹

The reasons behind such an electoral fraud stemmed not only from the President’s willingness to control the Legislative Chamber, but also from his desire to be reelected, in spite of the express constitutional provision preventing the President to serve more than one consecutive mandate. His goal achieved by the favorable vote of the National Assembly on May 22nd 1947, this provoked, nonetheless, the apparition of a growing, nation-wide and inter-sectarian opposition⁵⁰ to his rule, which was further fed by the economic discontent extended among the middle and lower classes⁵¹, and ended up by exploding after the legislative elections of 1951, which being cleaner than those of 1947⁵², gave the opposition more visibility. Moreover, the death of Riad el-Solh, killed in Amman on July 17th 1951, dealt a severe blow to Khoury, who lost one of the mainstays of his power. The Sunni leader, whose prestige both among his coreligionists and around the Arab world, was intact, and his Maronite counterpart had been masters in «the art of Levantine patronage»⁵³; without him and his ability «to control the Moslem populace in times of crisis»⁵⁴, Khoury started to find increasingly difficult to reshuffle the cabinet in order to ensure his permanence in power.

Meanwhile, the Opposition was organized under a common platform calling for social and political reform⁵⁵, which was variously labeled as the “Socialist Front”⁵⁶ or the “Patriotic Socialist Front”⁵⁷, joining together figures as diverse as Camile Chamoun, Kamal Joumblatt, the Eddé brothers or Pierre Gemayel’s Kataëb party⁵⁸. Even higher Maronite prelates, not least among them,

43 Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007, 115) counts a total of 30 families, 24 Christian and 6 Muslim.

44 TRABOULSI, 2007, 115.

45 KHALAF, 2002, 163.

46 TRABOULSI, 2007, 117.

47 LABAKI, 1988, 172.

48 BRITT, 1953, 3-5; WINSLOW, 1996, 95-96; ZISSER, 1994, 496-497; AMMOUN, 2004, 109.

49 AMMOUN, 2004, 110.

50 ZISSER, 1994, 497.

51 BRITT, 1953, 4, 8-9; TRABOULSI, 2007, 124.

52 WINSLOW, 1996, 96.

53 WINSLOW, 1996, 82.

54 SALIBI, 1966, 195.

55 TRABOULSI, 2007, 125.

56 BRITT, 1953, 11; WINSLOW, 1996, 96.

57 TRABOULSI, 2007, 125.

58 Founded in 1936 «as a paramilitary youth movement» (STOAKES, 1975, 215), the Lebanese Kataëb Party evolved into one of the biggest mass parties of the Arab world. Inspired by Maronite nationalism in its origins, the party evolved towards more moderate positions before the Civil War (ENTELIS, 1973, 151), but always with the aim of building a strong state «commanding power, efficiency and respect» (STOAKES, 1975, 222).

the Patriarch himself⁵⁹ and the Archbishop of Beirut, Mgr. Mubarak⁶⁰, joined the choir of voices demanding the President's resignation.

Khoury's last attempts at reform did not manage to convince anyone⁶¹, despite his nomination of prestigious members of the Sunni Community to the Premiership, like Sami el-Solh and Abdallah al-Yafi. Not even Khoury's sacrifice of his unpopular brother Salim, in the Summer of 1952, by forcing him to resign from his responsibilities in the Police and the *Gendarmerie*⁶², managed to calm down the popular reaction that, by then, had already set Lebanon on fire, with a wave of strikes that paralyzed the country⁶³, and the huge Opposition rally in Deir el-Qamar (August 17th 1952), which gathered over forty thousand people calling for the President's resignation⁶⁴. Unable to recompose the governmental coalition, without army support⁶⁵ nor any possible ally to turn to, Béchara el-Khoury resigned on September 18th 1952, leaving General Chéhab as provisional Head of Government until the election of a new President.

II. "The Revolt of the Pashas" or the 1958 Crisis

On September 23rd 1952, less than a week after Béchara el-Khoury's resignation, the National Assembly elected Camille Chamoun as the second President of independent Lebanon. In his nomination speech, the President «promised to fight corruption, talked about the 'modesty and ascetism' of the president's post and promised to abolish the privileges and formalities attached to it»⁶⁶, and in consonance with the platform of the anti-Khoury Opposition, he also promised to foster a reformist agenda to end the abuses that had characterized the former Administration⁶⁷. This initial reformist impulse, embodied by Khaled Chéhab's "Cabinet of Decrees", manifested itself in a number of far-reaching reforms affecting both the public and the private sectors⁶⁸ (including granting voting rights to women, or establishing civil service examinations). However, the precarious alliance that had brought Chamoun to power started soon to decompose, due to its members' different positions on the extent of such reforms⁶⁹, and the President started to rely on the Consortium and on President Khoury's former allies in the Constitutional Bloc⁷⁰.

Chamoun's halfhearted reforms⁷¹ were not enough to alter the socio-economic foundations of the Republic, which continued maintaining a *laissez-faire* outlook excluding most of the population from the benefits of an economic growth which continued unabated, in spite of the political turmoil affecting both the country and the region⁷². The passing of a banking secrecy law, in 1957, the growing gold coverage of the Lebanese pound (which attained a 95% by the end of

59 ZISSER, 1995, 900.

60 AMMOUN, 2004, 112.

61 ZISSER, 1994, 501.

62 ZISSER, 1994, 504.

63 BRITT, 1953, 13.

64 AMMOUN, 2004, 120.

65 SALIBI, 1966, 195.

66 TRABOULSI, 2007, 129.

67 Ibid.

68 ATTIE, 2004, 51.

69 AMMOUN, 2004, 132-134.

70 TRABOULSI, 2007, 128.

71 WINSLOW, 1996, 99.

72 SALIBI, 1966, 197.

1955⁷³) and the arrival of Arab capitals fleeing from the nationalizing policies then *en vogue* in most Middle East countries, only served to consolidate the country's outward-looking, service-oriented economic outlook.

However, Chamoun's presidency is best remembered for the exorbitant role Lebanon came to play in Middle East politics⁷⁴. The president's impeccable Pan-Arab credentials⁷⁵ led him to pose as a mediator between conflicting Arab States⁷⁶, and so he tried to broker a settlement between the Iraqi Hashemites and Saudi Arabia's royal family⁷⁷ and, later on, between Egypt and Iraq⁷⁸. However, the international scene Chamoun had to deal with was not the same as that of Khoury and Solh's era, for the old nationalist politics of the independence age, with its foreign-educated, liberal-prone *hommes politiques*, was about to set, to be substituted by a new epoch, wherein the charismatic leaderships of strongmen, like Nasser, was to alter forever the face of Middle East politics.

Fearing the influence Nasser came to exert on Lebanon's Muslims⁷⁹, Chamoun started to shift away from Lebanon's traditional neutralist position and to rely more intensely on the West, especially on Great Britain and the United States⁸⁰.

The signature, on January 13th 1955 of the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact, by Iraq and Turkey, not only provoked «violent student and popular demonstrations across Lebanon»⁸¹, but also, and more importantly, excited inter-Arab passions beyond reason as Nasser triggered a vicious media campaign against his Iraqi counterparts⁸². Despite Lebanon's attempt at mediation during the Arab League Cairo Conference⁸³ (January 22nd 1955), Iraq ratified the Pact in February, and Nasser responded by signing a Pact with Saudi Arabia and Syria (known as the "Arab Defence Pact"), which specifically refused any alliance with a non-Arab power, and called for a closer cooperation between those countries.

Even though Chamoun refused to join either of the Pacts, in spite of strong pressure coming from both sides⁸⁴, he appeared to support the anti-communist Treaty when, in the midst of the Iraqi-Egyptian storm, he visited Turkey (March 1955) where he signed a number of cooperation agreements with the Turkish leader, Adnan Mendéres, and both presidents proclaimed «the identity of views and policies of the two countries»⁸⁵, thus linking Lebanon, to a certain extent, to the Baghdad Pact. The visit, widely considered a diplomatic *faux pas* even by staunch Westernists, like the owner and editor of *L'Orient*, Alfred Naccache⁸⁶, compromised Lebanon's position in the Arab world and eroded Chamoun's popularity among his country's Muslim population, which was to be further undermined by the country's reaction to the Suez Crisis.

The Suez War, triggered after Nasser's Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26th 1956,

73 Ibid.

74 ROMERO, 2012, 568.

75 ATTIE, 2004, 45.

76 ATTIE, 2004, 71.

77 AMMOUN, 2004, 152.

78 AMMOUN, 2004, 184.

79 TRABOULSI, 2007, 130; WINSLOW, 1996, 103, 105; SALIBI, 1966, 198.

80 ATTIE, 2004, 83.

81 TRABOULSI, 2007, 131.

82 AMMOUN, 2004, 177-178.

83 AMMOUN, 2004, 184.

84 ATTIE, 2004, 100.

85 TRABOULSI, 2007, 132.

86 Vid. "*Taurus, notre souci... Lettre ouverte au Président Chamoun*, published in *L'Orient* on March 20th 1955.

had the double effect of polarizing even further inter-Arab rivalries and elevating Nasser to quasi-divine stature among the Arab masses, putting Chamoun on the difficult position of having to choose between the growing wave of Nasser-sponsored Arab nationalism and his own Western-oriented Lebanism⁸⁷. In order to avoid taking sides, the Lebanese President convened an Arab League meeting in Beirut, on November 1956, which severely condemned the tripartite (French, British and Israeli) aggression against Egypt and resolved to break off relations with both European powers. Chamoun, however, refused to do so⁸⁸ – like Jordan and Iraq which maintained their diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom⁸⁹ – arguing that «it was more advantageous for the Arabs to maintain direct relations with the West, particularly during a crisis, rather than have to resort to third party mediators»⁹⁰. However, and in spite of the apparent success of the conference⁹¹, Chamoun's reasons for not breaking relations with France and Great Britain did not manage to convince neither a large part of the Lebanese public, including Sunni ministers Salam and Yafi, who resigned in protest⁹², nor the Egyptian president, who affirmed that «the rulers of Lebanon stabbed us in the back during our time of stress, at the time when Britain, France and Israel were attacking us»⁹³, and began an intense propaganda war against the Lebanese president via his foremost tool: the radio broadcaster “The Voice of the Arabs”.

The international situation became even more complex with the announcement, January 5th 1957, of the Eisenhower Doctrine by that US President. The Doctrine's purpose was, according to the President's speech, to «preserve the integrity and independence of nations of the Middle East [...] against armed aggression from any country controlled by International Communism»⁹⁴, committing American assistance whenever it would be necessary to avoid such an outcome. The Lebanese acceptance of the Doctrine, formally subscribed on March 14th 1957, had to do with Chamoun's perception of Nasser as a threat for Lebanese independence as well as his belief that «only close cooperation with the western powers could guarantee [the country's] national security»⁹⁵. The establishment of the United Arab Republic (joining Egypt and Syria in a unitary Republic under Nasser's leadership) only served to confirm Chamoun's fears, for as soon as it was created, throngs of Lebanese poured into the road of Damascus to greet the Egyptian *rais*⁹⁶, while at the same time, violent demonstrations hailing Nasser and demanding the incorporation of Lebanon to the UAR⁹⁷ (the mob chanted: «*al-sha'b al-lubnani al-tha'ir badduh al-wihdah 'ajil 'ajil* [meaning] The Lebanese people in revolt want the union right away!»⁹⁸) took place throughout the country.

Meanwhile, in the internal arena, the growing polarization of the public opinion regarding the external allegiances of the Lebanese Republic was further exacerbated by the Government's apparent intention to secure Chamoun's reelection⁹⁹ by amending the electoral law. The bill, finally enacted as law in April 1957, and presented as a victory over political feudalism¹⁰⁰, increased the number of seats from 44 to 66, while at the same time reduced the number of electoral districts from

87 WINSLOW, 1996, 104.

88 KHALAF, 2002, 108.

89 AMMOUN, 2004, 223.

90 ATTIE, 2004, 104.

91 WINSLOW, 1996, 105.

92 SALIBI, 1966, 199; TRABOULSI, 2007, 131; WINSLOW, 1996, 105.

93 AGWANI, Cit. en ATTIE, 2004, 104.

94 ATTIE, 2004, 109.

95 ROMERO, 2012, 568.

96 AMMOUN, 2004, 249-250.

97 SALIBI, 1966, 201.

98 ATTIE, 2004, 155.

99 MALSAGNE, 2011, 166.

100 HOTTINGER, 1961, 131.

33 to 27. Whether gerrymandering was the Executive's true intention or not, the electoral results gave an overwhelming victory for Chamoun's supporters, who managed to secure 58 seats in the Assembly. Samir Khalaf reminds how «[v]irtually all the veteran politicians and prominent leaders of the opposition [...] were displaced in favour of pro-government candidates»¹⁰¹, which precipitated the organization of the – mostly Muslim – opposition under a common umbrella, soon to be known as National Union Front, calling for «cooperation with the Arab states; rejection of military aid which compromised Lebanese neutrality; and opposition to a constitutional amendment that would allow Chamoun to seek re-election»¹⁰².

However, Chamoun's policies did not only manage to alienate the Muslim street – by opposing Nasserism – and the Muslim élites – by preventing their election to the Assembly in 1957 – but also divided the Christian ranks¹⁰³, with several relevant leaders, like Raymond Eddé, Henri Pharaon, Charles Hérou and Georges Naccache, creating an alternative force to the Opposition and the Government that became known, perhaps not very originally, as the “Third Force”. The Third Force opposed Chamoun's reelection¹⁰⁴ and called for «a return to Lebanon's traditional neutralist foreign policy»¹⁰⁵.

Even more important than the existence of the Third Force was the position of the Maronite Patriarch (who was to become the first Maronite Cardinal in 1965), Mgr. Méouchy, who had acceded to the Patriarchal throne in 1955. From the beginning of his reign, the Patriarch maintained a warm approach to Arab Nationalism, for he «believed that support for Arab causes was an effective means to maintain the loyalty of the Lebanese Muslims for the Republic»¹⁰⁶, and consequently opposed both the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine. Méouchy's stance not only earned him the appreciation of the Egyptian leadership¹⁰⁷, but also that of Lebanon's Muslim population¹⁰⁸. However, Méouchy's political position was not shared by all in the Maronite hierarchy; in fact, most of the lower clergy supported the presidential stand, with

*funeral bells [being] tolled in Deir el-Qamar [...] in protest to an [...] statement by the patriarch that 'the Maronites were a drop in the sea of Muslims and must therefore support Muslim Arab Nationalism or pack up and leave'*¹⁰⁹.

The Maronite League, a lay organization of Maronite notables, went as far as to present a formal complaint to Pope Pius XII protesting against the Patriarch's political activities¹¹⁰, and a number of bishops followed on the steps of the League by cabling the Holy See to criticize his stance during the crisis¹¹¹. Nonetheless, the Vatican remained silent preferring not to interfere within the internal affairs of the Maronite Church¹¹².

In this tense atmosphere, the murder, on May 8th 1958, of Nassib el-Matni, owner of the opposition journal *Al-Teleghraf*, served as a pretext for the beginning of hostilities between the Opposition and the Government. For the following two months, both parties strove for the control

101 KHALAF, 2002, 109
102 WINSLOW, 1996, 106.
103 TRABOULSI, 2007, 132.
104 MALSAGNE, 2011, 172.
105 ROMERO, 2012, 573.
106 BAROUDI, 2006, 10.
107 ROMERO, 2012, 576.
108 BAROUDI, 2006, 12.
109 ATTIE, 2004, 171.
110 ATTIE, 2004, 215
111 BAROUDI, 2006, 23.
112 BAROUDI, 2006, 22-23.

of the country, though the fighting reached different levels of intensity, depending on the area – with the Chouf, Beirut and Tripoli being particularly affected¹¹³ – and normal life continued with just minimal disruptions (e.g.: in Beirut, fighting normally «took place in the afternoons and at night, also in several instances over the weekend»¹¹⁴).

In order to put an end to the conflict, and given the fact that the Opposition was receiving arms smuggled from the Syrian province of the UAR¹¹⁵, the Lebanese Government, which feared a coup d'état, requested US intervention¹¹⁶ and presented an official complaint against the UAR before the United Nations¹¹⁷. However, none of these requests bear fruit until the Iraqi Revolution of July 14th, which threatening to knock down the entire web of American alliances in the Middle East, triggered a coordinated Anglo-American operation to protect both the Lebanese and the Jordanian regimes, the remaining Arab Allies of the West in the region.

Despite the initial tension between American and Lebanese troops¹¹⁸, the US intervention paved the way for a solution to the crisis, leading to presidential elections on July 31st, which brought a neutral and respected figure, the commander of the Army, General Chéhab to the presidency. The General's election «brought about a perceptible relaxation in the level of hostility»¹¹⁹, although Chamoun, who insisted in serving his full term¹²⁰, did not step down until September 23rd. Thereafter, Chéhab assumed the presidential powers and entrusted Rachid Karamé, one of the leaders of the insurrection in Tripoli, with the task of forming a new government, which he duly did presenting a cabinet fully composed of sympathizers of the rebellion, to the exclusion of the former majority. His subsequent declaration, that the Cabinet had come to “harvest the fruits of revolution”¹²¹, as well as the kidnapping and murder of Fouad Haddad, editor of *al-Amal*, the official press organ of the Kataëb, led to a violent wave of protests, a true «counterrevolution»¹²² affecting mainly the Christian areas¹²³, which did not cease until October 14th when a new, four-man cabinet was formed, including an equal number of representatives from both sides, under a formula which was soon to become famous: *la gālib wa la maglūb* (“no victor and no vanquished”).

III. The 1970 Elections

If the presidencies of Khoury and Chamoun had been the golden age of *laissez-faire*, an era of unrestricted economic liberalism and prodigious economic growth, Fouad Chéhab and his heir in the Presidency, Charles Hélou, are remembered for their Keynesian economic orientation (more pronounced in the case of the General¹²⁴) and their attempt «to introduce comprehensive reforms in [Lebanon's] political and administrative system». Both presidents achieved an immense success in reducing the inequalities that had plagued the country, so that by 1974 the middle class represented

113 HOTTINGER, 1961, 132-134.

114 HOTTINGER, 1961, 132.

115 KHALAF, 2002, 115-116; ATTIE, 2004, 218.

116 TRABOULSI, 2007, 134.

117 AMMOUN, 2004, 256.

118 MALSAGNE, 2011, 190-195.

119 KHALAF, 2002, 137.

120 WINSLOW, 1996, 122.

121 SALIBI, 1966, 203; AMMOUN, 2004, 274.

122 KHALAF, 2002, 139.

123 WINSLOW, 1996, 124.

124 HUDSON, 1968, 328.

two-thirds of the population¹²⁵. However, the rule of Chéhab had also its dark side, for the development of socio-economic projects could not mask the growing influence of the Military Intelligence Service, known as the *Deuxième Bureau*, which overstepped its mission to control the country's external and internal security¹²⁶, becoming an authentic political police that «interfered in domestic political life, the administration, legislative and municipal elections, distributed licences for carrying firearms and engaged in arbitrary arrests»¹²⁷.

On the eve of the 1970 presidential elections, the country was facing several challenges to its very survival, in spite of the economic prosperity it still enjoyed (although the *Intra Bank* crash had dealt a harsh blow to the international prestige of the Lebanese financial system¹²⁸), the gravest of them being the armed presence of Palestinian guerrillas, whose attacks against Israel from Southern Lebanon triggered Israeli retaliations which struck vital infrastructures (like the bombing of Beirut Airport on December 28th 1968). The Palestinian presence became rapidly an extremely divisive issue in Lebanese political life, for, whereas most Muslims supported it and demanded the government to «give a free hand to Palestinian organization»¹²⁹, a majority of Christians feared that the guerrillas were being used as a tool «to subvert the Lebanese system»¹³⁰. The signature of the Cairo Agreement, on November 8th 1969, giving legal recognition to the presence of armed *fedai-s* on Lebanese territory¹³¹, aroused even further the already existing Christian fears of a Palestinian takeover of Lebanon.

By then, the main leaders of the Christian community: Camille Chamoun, Raymond Eddé and Pierre Gemayel had already formed an alliance (the Triple Alliance, more known under its Arab name: *al-Hilf al-thulāthi*, henceforth the *Hilf*) rallying together against what they perceived as «the increasing threat from the Palestinians and radical forces in Lebanon»¹³². The new coalition profited from the thirst for a change that existed in the population after more than a decade of Chéhabist rule¹³³ and, together with the Central Bloc, score a victory over the establishment candidates in the 1968 legislative elections. However small – only one seat – might have been the difference between the *Hilf* and the *Nahj* (as were known the Chéhabist deputies), the *Hilf* won by landslide in Mount Lebanon¹³⁴, revealing thus the growing opposition of the Christian communities to the continuation of Chéhabism, which many of them regarded as «a threat to their own positions and to the Christian character of Lebanon»¹³⁵.

Knowing how difficult it would be to elect a president of their choice with both blocs in the Assembly commanding an almost equal number of MPs, relevant members of the *Nahj* pressured General Chéhab to run as candidate for another mandate, which was constitutionally possible, as six years had passed since he had left the Presidency. Even though Chéhab toyed with the idea of making a comeback, he finally dropped it, not only because his candidacy was opposed by most Maronite leaders, including the Patriarch¹³⁶, but also because he could not obtain the unanimous

125 TRABOULSI, 2007, 162.

126 AMMOUN, 2004, 343.

127 TRABOULSI, 2007, 142.

128 WINSLOW, 1996, 148-149.

129 NAOR, 2013, 993.

130 WINSLOW, 1996, 152.

131 TRABOULSI, 2007, 154.

132 ZAMIR, 1980, 54.

133 AMMOUN, 2004, 412.

134 MALSAGNE, 2011, 449.

135 ZAMIR, 1980, 52.

136 DREXLER, 2012, 94; ZAMIR, 1980, 52.

support of the Muslim leaders for his plan to militarily cripple the Palestinian guerillas¹³⁷. The General expressed clearly the reasons for his refusal when he said:

*Les libanais attendent de mon action beaucoup plus qu'ils en réclameraient à un autre président et je ne peux pas faire de miracles. Si je suis élu, les libanais et les hommes politiques jugeront leur mission terminée, ils diront qu'il incombe à Chéhab de résoudre le problème. Par la suite, si l'on voit un seul fedai en tenue de combat place des Canons, et cela ne manquera pas de se produire, le problème reviendra à son point de départ. La réputation de Chéhab en souffrira. Les solutions magiques n'existent pas.*¹³⁸

With Chéhab out of the scene, the *Nahj* rushed to select a candidate, and the choice finally fell on Élias Sarkis, Chéhab's appointee¹³⁹. An efficient administrator, who had served as director of the National Bank, Sarkis, who lacked a political base of his own¹⁴⁰, was nonetheless a much weaker candidate than the former President, being opposed even by a significant section of the *Nahj*¹⁴¹. On the Opposition side, the three leaders of the *Hilf*, coveted the presidency, but being unable to muster all the votes required to reach their goal, they decided to block Sarkis' candidacy by supporting a consensus candidate¹⁴². The designation of such a candidate was not to be, however, an easy task, and it was not until twenty four hours before the electoral *séance*¹⁴³ that the coalition agreed on a candidate: Sleiman Frangié.

The choice of Frangié, a Mountain *zaim* from Northern Lebanon, who had been involved in the infamous *Tuerie de Miziara*¹⁴⁴, responded to his appearance as a strong man, who would be able to impose his authority over the country after Hélou's weak presidency¹⁴⁵. Moreover, his opposition to Chamoun during the 1958 uprising, as well as his belonging to a political coalition (the "Central Bloc", also known by its Arabic name as *al-Wasat*) whose other leaders were Muslims (the Sunni Saëb Salam and the Shiite Kamel el-Assaad), made him appear as «a Maronite notable who [did] not [confine] his loyalties to the Christian community»¹⁴⁶. Frangié was, thus, the perfect consensus candidate.

The election took place on August 17th 1970 and was a hectic event. Three ballots were needed before the President was finally chosen, and even then, Frangié was elected by only a vote of difference over Sarkis. Paradoxically, a man so representative of the feudal class ascended to the presidency thanks to the votes of a man who wanted to completely modify the Lebanese system¹⁴⁷: Kamal Joumblatt, who, together with three other members of his group¹⁴⁸, voted for Frangié, giving him thus the necessary advantage to win the election.

Frangié's election was a fateful choice. Lacking ability and tact, the new President was soon unable, in spite of a promising beginning with the appointment of a Youth Cabinet under the

137 MALSAGNE, 2011, 464.

138 AMMOUN, 2004, 458.

139 MALSAGNE, 2011, 464.

140 ZAMIR, 1980, 54.

141 WINSLOW, 1996, 159; ZAMIR, 1980, 53; AMMOUN, 2004, 460-461.

142 WINSLOW, 1996, 159.

143 ZAMIR, 1980, 58.

144 As a consequence of rivalries before the 1957 parliamentary elections, the Frangié-Moawad clan of Zgharta attacked their rival clan, the Doueihy-Karam, in the church of Miziara, where a funeral service was taking place, killing 24 and injuring 30. This event, having taken place in a place of worship, shook the whole country.

145 ZAMIR, 1980, 58.

146 WINSLOW, 1996, 160.

147 HAZRAN, 2010, 157.

148 ZAMIR, 1980, 59.

leadership of his partner Saëb Salam¹⁴⁹, to control the situation of a country suffering of serious internal and international problems. Focused on hoarding power by stretching to the limit the wide constitutional faculties of the President¹⁵⁰, he alienated the whole Sunni establishment. With the positions on both sides of the political divide progressively radicalized, the war seemed inevitable.

149 NAOR, 2013, 991.

150 SALAM, 1989, 71.

THIRD SECTION: ANALYSIS

When, after fifteen years of Civil War, the remnants of the Lebanese Parliament met in Saudi city of Taëf to reach a peace agreement, the participating deputies addressed what was widely believed to be Lebanon's foremost problem: that of confessionalism and sectarian imbalance. Therefore, presidential powers were severely curtailed to the benefit of the Sunni Prime Minister, and confessionalism was mostly abolished throughout the Administration¹⁵¹ (except at the level of Director-General). Moreover, Lebanon's identity was constitutionally defined as "Arab" and the country was put under Syrian overlordship¹⁵². However, when a quarter of century has passed since the ratification of the Agreement, Lebanon remains a hotspot in the Middle East; sectarian infighting, administrative corruption and financial misdemeanors have been plaguing the country ever since, making its Second Republic (1943-1975) appear as a cherished memory of an era of economic growth and inter-religious harmony.

How is it possible, then, that if confessionalism and "Maronite primacy" were the main reasons behind the war's outbreak, its collapse has not brought peace and stability? The answer is obvious, because neither Maronite "hegemony" existed nor confessionalism was the main engine driving the Lebanese political machine. Beginning by the latter, it is obvious that Lebanon was a State organized under confessional lines, for positions in its political and administrative apparatuses were distributed following sectarian criteria, however, «guaranteeing equity and amity by a proportional representation of the different confessional groups»¹⁵³ not only did not prevent the formation of inter-sectarian groupings, but even worked to «[ensure] that electoral alliances and programmes [cut] across communal divisions»¹⁵⁴, as deputies represented the whole nation and not only their sect.

The examples provided above underline this trans-communalism of Lebanese politics, as in the three studied periods, alliances crossed confessional boundaries and were forged over ideological, economic or social interests. In 1952, opposition to Béchara el-Khoury's corrupt regime came from both sides of the religious divide, and its main leaders, making an intelligent use of the media to mobilize a dissatisfied power opinion against the Government¹⁵⁵, joined together in an *ad-hoc* political movement, the Socialist Front, to overthrow a President whose growing accumulation of power threatened their position in the political game¹⁵⁶.

The "Revolt of the Pashas", in 1958, followed a similar scheme of wide élite resistance against a President determined to reinforce his power over other powerful political brokers (first, with the 1957 electoral reform which excluded most *zaim-s* from the Assembly, and later with Chamoun's willingness to amend the Constitution to ensure his reelection), who rapidly constituted an expedient and temporary political umbrella to advance their goals, the National Union Front, which despite all its Pan-Arabist rhetoric, did not have a true desire of breaking Lebanon's ties with the West¹⁵⁷. The establishment of the Third Force, including many Christian leaders, underlined that

151 TRABOULSI, 2007, 244.

152 LABAKI, 2008, 110.

153 KNIGHT, 1992, 341.

154 HOURANI, 1981, 138.

155 KHAZEN, 2000, 19.

156 ZISSER, 1994, 486.

157 ROMERO, 2012, 572.

Opposition to Chamoun was not based mainly based neither on his Western affiliation nor on his liberalism, but on what was perceived as his breaking the rules governing balance of power in Lebanon.

The 1970 elections constitute maybe an even better example of this inter-sectarian elite cooperation, as Chéhab's reelection was opposed not only by the mainly Christian *Hilf*, but also by wide sections of the Muslim establishment¹⁵⁸, and Frangié's election under the banner of the Islamo-Christian *Wasat* alliance, was only possible thanks to the votes of Kamal Jounblatt's Progressive Socialist Party, who legitimately maneuvered within the system to advance his own political goals¹⁵⁹.

These examples prove sufficiently the lack of basis of those explanations arguing for the primacy of sectarianism over other ties in Lebanon, and gives credence to Oren Barak's assertion about the primacy of the intra-sectarian aspect over the inter-sectarian, for that country is characterized by its «“pluralism within pluralism” [meaning that there exists a] pronounced internal diversity within each of its communities»¹⁶⁰, to the point that inter-sectarian alliances are very often needed to counter intra-sectarian feuds¹⁶¹. Instead of sectarianism, the two elements that dominated political life in Lebanon during the studied period were kinship and *zaim-ship*.

Samir Khalaf defines kinship as «Lebanon's most solid and enduring tie»¹⁶² and as an almost sovereign institution, acting as the individual's «exclusive agency of political socialization and tutelage»¹⁶³. The importance of blood relations is underlined not only by the fact that Lebanese politics during the period examined in this essay were the preserve of a reduced number of families (Eddé, Salam, Karamé, Jounblatt), who compete furiously for parliamentary and governmental appointments, but also by the fact that an individual's stand in the social and political scale was mostly defined in terms of his ancestry¹⁶⁴ (the resistance of Rachid Karamé to the appointment of Élias Sarkis as *Nahji* candidate in 1970 had to do with the latter's lack of pedigree¹⁶⁵). Episodes of intra-sectarian violence like the *Tuerie de Miziara*, or the infighting between the Tripolitan Karamé and Munla families in the 1940s, stand as good witnesses of the fierce competition between different families belonging to the same confessional group.

Rooted in the feudal traditions of the *iqta'* system¹⁶⁶, *zaim-ship* refers to the quasi-feudal, or even Roman-like¹⁶⁷, relation linking «a political leader [to a] locally circumscribed community»¹⁶⁸, involving a kind of *do ut des* compromise whereby, in exchange for the support of his clientele or *zilm*, the *zaim* had a duty to provide them with services¹⁶⁹. Although most *zaim-s* belonged to the same confessional community as their *zilm*, the patron-client relation was not based on sectarian allegiance (in fact, in confessionally-mixed areas, the *zaim-s* actively sook to gather a following belonging to all the religious groups¹⁷⁰), but on their reciprocal utilitarian obligations¹⁷¹. Within the

158 MALSAGNE, 2011, 450.

159 WINSLOW, 1996, 161; ZAMIR, 1980, 59.

160 BARAK, 2002, 622.

161 BARAK, 2002, 630.

162 KHALAF, 1968, 246.

163 KHALAF, 1968, 247.

164 KHALAF, 1968, 246.

165 AMMOUN, 2004, 459.

166 HAMZEH, 2001, 167-169.

167 Vid. CARCOPINO, 1939 (1994), 207-208

168 KNIGHT, 1992, 334.

169 HAMZEH, 2001, 172.

170 GUBSER, 1973, 175.

171 HAMZEH, 2001, 172.

zaim system, competition had mostly an intra-sectarian character as, frequently more than one *zaim* fought for the control of the same territory and used to present their feudal quarrels under a political coloring (Joumblatt and Arslan in the Chouf, Frangié and Doueihy in Zgharta or Skaf and Abou Khater in Zahlé).

Contrary to the opinion of Nizar Hamzeh or Michael Hudson, the persistence of these traditional ties did not make the Lebanese system neither innately weak¹⁷² nor unable to modernize¹⁷³. Had it been so, it is unexplainable why Lebanon's score on almost all indicators of political and social development was much better than those of other Third World countries whose political systems were organized alongside more "modern" lines¹⁷⁴. On the contrary, as Samir Khalaf states, it was precisely the persistence of such traditional bonds that led the way to a specifically Lebanese approach to modernity, based on adaptation and assimilation, not swift transformation¹⁷⁵, that could have persisted and reached new heights had it not been for the external pressures the system had to deal with from 1967 onwards, which overwhelmed its capabilities to withstand change and prevented the continuation of its natural development.

On the question of Maronite primacy, it is important to examine the figure of the President, who was – and still is – always a member of that Church. Taking into account the dispositions of the 1926 Constitution, the Lebanese President could be defined as an «autocrat»¹⁷⁶, an heir to French colonialism¹⁷⁷ or even a corporal incarnation of the State¹⁷⁸. However, and in spite of the express provisions of the Fundamental Law, it is important to take into account that Constitutional Law goes well beyond "Law on the books" to cover customs and practices whose importance often equals that of written Law. In the Lebanese case, the National Pact not only was intended to provide for the distribution of official positions under a sectarian formula, it also established a power-sharing agreement between the President and the Prime Minister, whereby the President had to restrain his power to become something akin to an arbiter, in the words of Professor Hourani:

*it [was] expected that he [the President] should stand above the communities, that his authority should be secular, that he should express the unity of the state [and] to cut across the network of sectarian interests, and make necessary decisions in the light of the national interest.*¹⁷⁹

Whenever the President forsook his arbitral role to push for his own interests, disturbing thereby the balance and compromise that characterized Lebanon's politics¹⁸⁰, the political equilibrium has been severely perturbed, as happened in 1952 and 1958. When Khoury and Chamoun's actions went well beyond the accepted consensus, the response of the political élite was to block their action until they were forced to back out. The reverse was also true, for in the late 1970's Frangié refused to cooperate with his arch-rival Rachid Karamé, whom he had had to appoint as Premier in a desperate attempt to quell the violence which was extending throughout the country, and thus crippled the Cabinet's ability to enforce its authority. It can therefore be said that the system worked under a double-veto arrangement which effectively limited the wide Constitutional powers of the President.

172 HUDSON, 1977, 20.

173 HAMZEH, 2001, 176-177.

174 KHAZEN, 2000, 24.

175 KHALAF, 1968, 244.

176 TRABOULSI, 2007, 109.

177 WINSLOW, 1996, 75-76.

178 RABBATH, 1973, 173.

179 HOURANI, 1981, 139.

180 SALEM, 1967, 497.

The alleged supremacy of the Maronite community is also questionable when the internal divisions affecting the Church and its members are taken into account. For almost a century, between the 1820s and the inception of the French Mandate, the Church, having gotten rid of the influence of the Maronite feudal lords (mainly of the Khazen family), became the dominant influence in the Mountain¹⁸¹, and her Patriarchs the principal spokesmen for the community. The accession of powerful figures,¹⁸² like Boulos Masaad, Jean Haje or Élias Hoyek, to the Patriarchal throne only served to confirm this empowerment of the Church which came to its zenith with the travel of Mgr. Hoyek to the Paris Peace Conference where he presided one of the Lebanese Delegations, demanding the independence of the country and the extension of its borders¹⁸³. However, as soon as the Lebanese Delegation's goals were achieved, the leading role in the community passed from the Patriarch to the politicians, and thus the unity of the community under a common project was broken. Eddé and Khoury, under the French Mandate, represented the first of the long series of intra-Maronite quarrels that plagued the History of independent Lebanon.

Given the chasm dividing most Maronite leaders, their quest for political prominence had to deal on the support of other confessional groups. As has been seen throughout this essay, both Khoury and Chamoun acceded to the presidency thanks to the support of most Muslim leaders and both Presidents kept their position by building a preferential alliance with a prominent member of the Sunni community¹⁸⁴, and in spite of the opposition of the Maronite Patriarch (Mgr. Arida during Khoury's tenure and Mgr. Méouchy during Chamoun's presidency) to their respective political orientation¹⁸⁵. The influence of the Maronite political élite was thus limited and, in fact, the community's apparent advantage in the educative and professional arenas over her Muslim counterparts was progressively eroded during the Republic as more Muslims started receiving a formalized education¹⁸⁶ and acceding the professional sectors of the economy¹⁸⁷. By 1975, the Maronites were just another community within the Lebanese mosaic-like sectarian framework.

181 AKARLI, 1993, 19-20.

182 MAHFOUZ, 1985, 65-68.

183 HOYEK, 1919, 236-241.

184 SALEM, 1967, 490-491.

185 ZISSER, 1995, 900; BAROUDI, 2006, 10-27.

186 KHAZEN, 2000, 65.

187 LABAKI, 1988, 175.

CONCLUSION

On March 10th 1949, the editor-in-chief and owner of the daily *L'Orient*, Georges Naccache published an editorial which was to become famous and to put him in jail. *Deux négations ne font pas une nation* expressed a considerable distrust towards that gentleman's agreement between Béchara el-Khoury and Rachid el-Solh which was to be known as the "National Pact". «À la force de ne vouloir ni l'Ouest ni l'Est [...] nos dirigeants ont fini par nous faire perdre le nord»¹⁸⁸ deplored Mr. Naccache in his article, but despite all his mistrust towards the agreement, it managed to give Lebanon over thirty years of prosperity, only briefly broken twice until the definitive disruption of civil life in 1975.

In this essay, it has been tried to prove that the era inaugurated by the National Pact witnessed an unrivaled trend of political and social modernization, reducing the gaps between the different sectarian and regional groups the Lebanese society is composed of, and generating a level of personal and political freedom without comparison in the Middle East. The fact that this trend took place while traditional ties continued commanding the loyalty of wide sections of the population cannot, in any case, overshadow the merit of the progress achieved between 1943 and 1975. In fact, the compatibility between the persistence of traditional bonds and progress serves to destroy those radical approaches that only conceive of modernization within a Western-like framework based on individualism and secularization.

Our approach to the evolution of Lebanon during its Second Republic has also permitted us to realize how confessionalism was not the main factor driving that country's politics, but only one more amongst other ties. We have actually tried to prove how political tension used to have more an intra-communal than an inter-communal character, while at the same time, alliances and cooperation extended well beyond sectarian boundaries, defying thus, the «essentialism [of those authors who conceive] of ethnic groups as rigid, homogeneous, and unchanging entities»¹⁸⁹.

The study of confessionalism that has been undertaken throughout this pages has had the Maronite Church as its main character. Thereby it has been tried to pay a modest contribution to an area of scholarship utterly deserted by the Academia, despite the fact that the Maronite Church is not only the only Christian compact minority in the Middle East, but also one of the few of such communities conceiving of herself as nation. By focusing on this Church, we have also aspired to overcome the prejudices which defined her as a dominant, hegemonic or even racially prejudiced community¹⁹⁰, and I believe that our goals have been reached, for it has been sufficiently proved that the Maronites participated as equal partners in a power-sharing agreement with all other Lebanese communities, and were far from being a solid, united bloc, suffering instead from profound internal divisions which forced the different sectors of the community to build trans-sectarian alliances in order to reach their political goals. Under the Second Republic, the Maronite Church was not, in spite of all appearances, a *Ecclesia Triumfans*.

At present, in a time of growing exacerbation of sectarian animosities throughout the Middle East, and with Lebanon lacking a President for over two months, maybe it would be useful to remember the spirit of the National Pact, whose "live and let live" philosophy managed to propel Lebanon to its golden age.

188 NACCACHE, 2001, 67.

189 BARAK, 2002, 638.

190 AULAS, 1985, 14.

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