

THE EVOLUTIONARIES:
TRANSFORMING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND CULTURE IN LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

The Evolutionaries poses the question: How can grassroots activists broaden the space for political participation in a factionalized and elite-centric, as opposed to citizen-centric, polity? This question is explored through a case study of a new ‘civic’ segment of civil society in Lebanon, which after the end of the 1975-1990 civil war managed to carve a space in which to operate and established itself as a factor in Lebanese politics. This ‘civic movement’ employs an incremental change approach in order to transform their patron-dominated ‘republic’ into a *republic*, which recognizes the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship. To this end, civic activists link with political elites in time- and scope-limited campaigns. The temporary character of these coalitions reduces the risk of cooptation, and the limited scope reduces the number of stakeholders threatened by the campaign.

However, while the Lebanese state demonstrates relatively low levels of constraints to civic activists, constraints emanating from society are at times severe. The historical development of the Lebanese state, especially the construction of a confessional political system, has reinforced a political culture centered on kinship and sectarian collective identities. Consequently, in times of high tension and political polarization, the civic movement struggles to construct movement frames that resonate among the broader populace. Opportunities and constraints are traditionally sought on the level of the state, while culture and collective identities are examined as strategic tools, or invoked to explain the outcome of a movement after it has formed. However, a long-term perspective that captures the low-intensity dynamics that precede and succeed high-intensity popular mobilizations suggests that the social environment should also be

understood as permissive or restrictive to movement formation. For instance, a ‘social opportunity’ can arise when the hegemonic political culture becomes contested in broad layers of the populace, as was the case when broad popular discontent with the traditional leadership during the civil war provided Lebanon’s civic movement with a constituency. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that shifts in the way individuals understand and interpret their environment can provide opportunities for Lebanon’s ‘Evolutionaries’ to initiate a slow process of political and societal transformation.

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the opportunity to come visit Lebanon at a time when tensions were running high in the region. Similarly, when the above-mentioned son left government employment to pursue a PhD in Washington, DC, they immediately began planning their future visits, instead of lamenting the financial uncertainty that such a move would bring their son for several years to come. Finally, I want to thank Tazreena, whose friendship and immeasurable patience helped carry me through the PhD experience before, during, and after the dissertation.

There have in the past been countless attempts to understand Lebanon's political and social dynamics and, consequently, achieving some kind of "originality" when taking on this topic is a true challenge. But, to paraphrase the great Swedish poet and musician Jocke Berg, everything may have been done before, but it has never been done before by *you*. Therefore, I hope the reader will find something fresh in my approach to the topic of this dissertation, despite the multitude of studies on Lebanon's politics and society.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABA-ROLI	American Bar Association – Rule of Law Initiative
ADDL	Association pour la Defense des Droits et des Libertes
ALDHOM	Association Libanaise des Droits de l'Homme
AUB	American University of Beirut
CAMES	Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
CCER	Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform
CCNI	Civil Center for National Initiative
CDL-ONG	La Coordination des ONG en vue du Développement au Liban
CESMO	Centre d'études Stratégiques pour le Moyen-Orient
CGTL	Confédération Générale des Travailleurs au Liban
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CL	Citizen Lebanon
CLOE	Coalition Libanaise pour l'Observation d'Elections
CRTD-A	Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DPNA	Development for People and Nature Association
DRM	Democratic Renewal Movement
EIN	End Impunity Now
EMC	Egyptian Movement for Change
EMHRN	Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement

FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
HELEM	Hemaya lubnaniya lil-mithliyeen
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
ILO	International Labor Organization
ISF	Internal Security Forces
LABP	Lebanon Alternative Budget Project
LADE	Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections
LCPS	Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
LebPAC	Lebanese Parliamentarians against Corruption
LEF	Lebanese Environmental Forum
LF	Lebanese Forces
LNf	Lebanese NGO Forum
LPHU	Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union
LPM	Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor
LTA	Lebanese Transparency Association
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MSL	Mouvement Social Libanaise
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

NNAC	Nonviolence Network in the Arab Countries
NNRAI	National Network for the Right to Access to Information
NSM	New Social Movement
NCDP	National Council for Disabled People
OMSAR	Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
POS	Political Opportunity Structures
PPM	Permanent Peace Movement
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party
RCM	Rally for Civil Marriage
RME	Rally for the holding of Municipal Elections
RMT	Resource Mobilization Theory
SCEC	Supervisory Commission on the Electoral Campaign
SLA	South Lebanon Army
SSNP	Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party
SSR	Security Sector Reform
STL	Special Tribunal on Lebanon
UAR	United Arab Republic
UGTT	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

USAID

United States Agency for International Development

WRN

Women's Right to Nationality Campaign

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

[A] live frog can actually be boiled without a movement if the water is heated slowly enough; in one experiment the temperature was raised at the rate of 0.002°C per second, and the frog was found dead at the end of 2½ hours without having moved. If a frog can be crushed or boiled without any evidence that he has noticed it, it is at least an interesting question of what can be accomplished in this direction with human beings.

E.W. Scripture 1897: 300-301

Introduction

On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire after police had confiscated his wares and humiliated him in public. Perceived as a martyr of the economic and political repression exercised by the state on its people, Bouazizi's death sparked popular protests across Tunisia, forcing its president of twenty-three years to hastily leave office in early 2011. Protests spread across the region, most prominently in Egypt, where an eighteen-day popular uprising forced President Hosni Mubarak to resign after three decades in power.

Unlike the majority of revolutions the region had seen in the past (e.g. Syria 1949, Egypt 1952, Iraq 1958), the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were not orchestrated by the military. Nor were they, despite the participation of Islamic elements, the result of religious movements, as in Iran in 1979. Instead, they were movements of loosely organized networks of ordinary people, many of them youths, claiming the economic and political rights associated with citizenship. Denied access to the formal venues of political participation, informal networks through which oppositional activity could be channeled had been developing for years, making the seemingly impossible demonstrably possible. Thus, the protests across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in early 2011 represented a struggle from below to broaden the space for political

participation. Claiming the right to political participation does not begin with publicly challenging institutional constraints put in place by the state and ousting a dictator. As daunting as those tasks are, it is first a matter of constructing networks through which a movement identity based on common understandings of objectives, opportunities, and obstacles, can be forged. Through these informal venues, excluded elements of society can work to transform the public-private boundaries and attempt to renegotiate the relationship between civil society and the political sphere. In other words, short-term transformation can happen through revolution, but long-term transformation happens through *evolution*. Thus, when trying to understand the dynamics that lead to attempts to broaden the space for political participation from below, one should look beyond the drama of “episodes of contention” and engage with long-term processes of change, which begin long before reaching such a dramatic outcome as a revolution.¹

This dissertation examines the issue of grassroots-level activism in contexts where non-elites (i.e. ‘ordinary’ citizens outside of political leadership circles) have limited ability to influence policy-making. It aims to shed light on often forgotten dynamics of political struggle that occur outside of the circles of traditional political leadership and on long-term evolutionary processes of political development that can, but do not necessarily, lead to revolutionary change. In doing so, it engages not only with grassroots activists’ ‘concrete’ efforts of achieving institutional and political reform, but also with the complex interactions of collective identity and political culture that are inevitably involved when old norms and values are challenged by, for instance, claims of the economic and political rights that accompany citizenship.

¹ D. McAdam, S. Tarrow, and C. Tilly. *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Focusing on grassroots activism, this dissertation argues that temporary coalitions of actors from civil society and the political sphere, formed for the purpose of achieving a limited goal, should be seen as dissemination structures of new identities, as they facilitate social interaction between previously unconnected actors and involve the mutual ‘negotiation’ of strategies and tactics. As such, it shows how evolutionary change can happen in a ‘hostile’ environment and brings to the forefront the fluidity of boundaries between civil society and the political sphere, thus challenging traditional conceptualizations of civil society and the state. The main focus of this study is on contexts where society is stronger than the state – i.e. where state institutions are not necessarily the main loci of power, but power rather rests with individual ‘patrons,’ buttressed by their clientelist networks.

This study acknowledges the role of culture – understood as “practices of meaning-making” – in political phenomena, and argues that a political culture is produced through, for instance, institutional design and collective identity processes.² Those processes are, in turn, influenced by many factors, such as levels of social interaction across various communities and external pressures. In other words, this study does not resort to an argument rooted in cultural essentialism, depicting particular pre-existing cultures as incompatible with democracy, but rather shows that culture – albeit produced and ‘artificial’ – can still be a variable in explaining political phenomena. In that context, it argues that factors in the cultural realm – such as the existence of multiple collective identities, the emergence of new collective identities, or the rejection of old values and norms, have an impact on the ability for movements to emerge and proliferate.

² L. Wedeen, “Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4. (December 2002): 714.

The case study: Lebanon's 'Evolutionaries'

Lebanon, a small multi-confessional republic on the Eastern Mediterranean, offers an opportunity to engage with such long-term processes. Historically one of the most liberal polities in the Middle East and one of the few actual parliamentary democracies in the region, Lebanon finally saw an end to a series of devastating armed conflicts in 1990, collectively known as Lebanon's fifteen-year civil war (1975-1990). But the ensuing decade also ushered in an era of a more restrictive political environment, as neighboring Syria gained control over most Lebanese territory and enforced an increasingly heavy-handed security regime, which would last until 2005.

Yet, in this environment of restrictions on political freedoms and the re-assertion of a political system structured around patron-client structures within communal boundaries, Lebanon experienced the development of social movements led by loosely organized cross-communal grassroots networks with political participation and "good governance" on their agendas.³ Arguably, the modes of action developed by these groups were gradually becoming a significant venue of political participation in Lebanon. This became especially notable after the Syrian departure from Lebanon in 2005, as issue-specific networks connecting a broad variety of civil society actors and stakeholders in the political sphere were formed in fields such as electoral law reform, transparency

³ K. Karam, "Civil Associations, Social Movements, and Political Participation in Lebanon in the 1990s," in S. Ben Nefissa et al. (eds.), *NGOs and Governance in the Arab World* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 311-336. K. Karam, *Le Mouvement Civil au Liban: Revendications, protestations et mobilisations associatives dans l'après-guerre* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2006); P. Kingston, "Promoting Civil Society Advocacy in the Middle East and at Home: Non-Governmental Organizations, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Middle East Working Group, 1991-2001," in Paul Heinbecker and Bessma Momani (eds.), *Canada and the Middle East: In Theory and Practice* (Waterloo, ON, Canada: The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 117-144.

legislation, and budget planning. Compared to the state of Lebanese civil society before the early 1990s, networks of organizations that collectively could be labeled a “civic movement” appeared to have succeeded in carving out a new space for political participation. In effect, they were simultaneously engaging in a transformation of civil society itself while renegotiating the role of civil society in the Lebanese civil society-political sphere formula. At the center of these activities were secular-liberal grassroots organizations, which, although individual organizations that can be considered their predecessors can be found throughout Lebanon’s history, proliferated in the 1990s, particularly in the latter half of the decade.

These “civic” organizations differed in character from Lebanon’s pre-civil war pan-Arab and socialist movements, which similarly could claim cross-communal agendas and membership, in their *ad hoc* and network-based organization (in some ways akin to the anti-globalization movement), and in that they coalesced around principles such as good governance, transparency, human rights, and participatory democracy, rather than political ideologies along a left-right continuum. Indeed, these are the characteristics of the ‘New Social Movements’ (NSM) that became a prominent subject of study in social movement literature in the 1980s.⁴ Secular and non-violent, they were open for citizens of varying political and communal denominations, employing targeted single-issue campaigns instead of comprehensive programs of political reform. The emergence of

⁴ See, for instance, J. Cohen, “Strategy of Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements,” *Social Research*, 52 (Winter 1985); K. Eder, “The ‘New Social Movements’: Moral Crusades, Political Pressure Groups, or Social Movements?” *Social Research*, 52 (Winter 1985); J. Habermas, “New Social Movements,” *Telos*, 49 (Fall 1981); H. Kitschelt, “New Social Movements in West Germany and the United States,” *Political Power and Social Theory*, 5 (1981); A. Melucci, “The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach,” *Social Science Information*, 19 (1980); C. Offe, “New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics,” *Social Research*, 52 (Winter 1985).

such groups was not exclusive to Lebanon; it happened in a global context of increased civic activity, particularly in Eastern Europe, where similar groups took the lead in ending several Soviet supported authoritarian regimes. Revolution, however, was not initially at the top of the civic organizations' agenda in the Middle East. Instead, the key theme that emerged among reformists in the 1990s, both in Lebanon and regionally was "evolution" rather than "revolution." This refrain of incremental change is still central to civic activists in Lebanon today, which is why the anecdote of "boiling the frog" came up in conversations I had with Lebanese civic activists in 2008 and 2009. This metaphor is based on the popular myth claiming that if a frog is tossed into a pot of hot water, it will jump out, whereas if the frog is placed in a pot of cold water, and the temperature is slowly raised, it will calmly await its demise, oblivious to the threat caused by the heat from below.

Frequently used in the political context to describe the effects of incremental change (today especially popular in the context of climate change), this myth does, in broad terms, illustrate the general strategy employed by civic grassroots activists in Lebanon, who work to reform a confessional political system, socialize the population into proactive citizens, and transform political patrons into public servants. However, the task of Lebanon's civic movement is not so simple as to slowly turn up the heat; the reality behind the myth is that a frog would almost certainly detect the danger at a certain point and promptly jump out of the pot. Indeed, as countless examples of attempted reforms of autocratic systems would suggest, so too do the beneficiaries of a particular political system; reformist forces are regularly co-opted, infiltrated, and even terminated when they are perceived as an existential threat to the regime.

In the Middle East at large, the main challenge to civic movements aiming to strengthen citizen influence and enhance transparency of state institutions is an authoritative political environment and the ability of regimes to nurture splits among potential challengers, especially exploiting ideological divides between confessional and secular groups.⁵ In Lebanon, however, where a political system based on confessional power sharing weakens the state and makes the emergence of a truly authoritarian political system difficult, the main challenge to civic movements is instead the vertical social structures of Lebanese society, where several *'asabiyyah* – group identities – coexist within one national framework, and political elites act as patrons with clients rather than as mass oriented public servants.⁶

Consequently, Lebanon's complex political scene with multiple power centers and communal social divisions presents an especially challenging environment to any organization interested in promoting a sense of "civicness," an adherence to the concept of citizenship, with all the rights and responsibilities that follow. Thus, the civic activists' reality is much more complex than the 'boiling the frog' analogy may suggest; they must devise tactics to carve a space to operate, avoid cooption or termination by powerful political interests, and persuade the frog to stay in a pot of increasingly hot water –

⁵ E. Bellin, "Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders," in M. Pripstein Posusney and M. Penner Angrist (eds.) *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); R. A. Norton, *Civil society in the Middle East* (New York: Brill, 1995); S. Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

⁶ S. Khalaf, "On Roots and Routes: The Reassertion of Primordial Loyalties," in Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (eds.), *Lebanon in Limbo: Postwar Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003) 107-142; H. Khashan, *Inside the Lebanese Confessional Mind* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1992). The Arabic term "*'asabiyyah*" is a concept developed by fourteenth century scholar Ibn Khaldun in his seminal work the *Muqaddimah*. The English translation "group identity" does not quite capture the full meaning of Khaldun's concept, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

essentially convincing it to commit suicide. This is no small task in a context where actors from across the political spectrum benefit from the status quo. In fact, the role of civic activists continued to be marginal compared to that of political patrons, whose influence is derived from clientelist networks, often within communally organized political parties. Indeed, despite broad support among the Lebanese population for its core aims and values, the civic movement struggled to maintain a stable constituency, especially in times of crisis. As Lebanon experienced war with Israel in 2006 and internal strife in 2008, the popular mobilizations in the streets were not those of a civic social movement challenging the existing political system, but represented the machineries of political patrons and their parties, returning to the pre-*Pax Syriana* extra-institutional mode of action in order to achieve their political objectives.

Lebanon's problems are frequently understood in terms of the country's unstable political environment and factionalized society. As such, analyses of Lebanon's political dynamics usually focus on political elites and political parties (which usually coincide with sectarian boundaries) and any significant changes to the status quo have been viewed as the result of regional power dynamics and elite maneuvering. While all these factors are no doubt significant, there is a lack of grounded examinations of the processes by which a civic movement managed to claim a new space for political participation, and how the above micro and macro factors combined to at times facilitate and at other times hamper the development of Lebanon into a citizen-centric civic state. To the extent dynamics from "below" have been considered, Lebanon's informal venues of participation – that is, civil society networks and organizational structures outside of the formal structures of the state – have been examined from the perspective of specific

popular mobilizations, from the perspective of patron-clientelist networks, and from the perspective of dependency on external funding.⁷ This study will serve to incorporate these perspectives within one broad framework, and demonstrate how a multitude of factors on the macro- and micro-levels combine to either aid grassroots groups working toward the establishment of a civic state or hamper them in their struggle, through applying a social movement framework to the oft-forgotten dynamics “below.” Lebanon is often characterized as an exceptional case and therefore of limited comparative value. Indeed, the peculiarities of the political system and the multi-confessional character of society render it, on the surface, unique in comparison with the rest of the Arab world.

However, this study will demonstrate that the processes at work in social movement formation in Lebanon offer valuable insights on the issue of grassroots-level activism that can travel beyond the specific case, and be applied in other contexts where the space for political participation is narrow, especially where a patrimonial logic permeates state structures. Lebanon presents an opportunity to study both successes and failures of civic social movement formation in a highly complex environment, characterized by societal polarization and elite maneuvering. Thus, this study aims to shed light on the dynamics of social movement formation in a factionalized polity by asking the overarching question: *How can grassroots activists broaden the space for*

⁷ On specific popular mobilizations, see, for instance, R. Jaafar and M. J. Stephan, “Lebanon’s Independence Intifada: How an Unarmed Insurrection Expelled Syrian Forces,” in M. J. Stephan (ed.) *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 169-182; Karam 2005; 2006; and K. Karam, “An Analysis of Political Change in Lebanon in the Light of Recent Mobilization Cycles,” in L. Guazzone and D. Pioppi (eds.) *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2009). On the problem of clientelism in civil society, see Kingston 2001. On dependency on external funding, see F. Cavatorta and A. Elananza, “Show Me the Money! Opposition, Western Funding, and Civil Society in Jordan and Lebanon,” in H. Albrecht (ed.) *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

political participation in a factionalized and elite-centric, as opposed to citizen-centric, polity? Employing a social movement framework, I explore this question through a case study of a segment of civil society working from “below,” that is, from outside the traditional class of political leaders, to carve a new space for political participation and transform the political system and culture in Lebanon. By “elite-centric polity,” I mean a polity where policy-making takes place within a traditional class of political leaders and voting, to the extent that it occurs, takes place based on ties of family loyalty or patron-client dependency. Conversely, by “citizen-centric polity,” I mean a polity where citizens enjoy a level of influence over policy-makers’ decisions through, for instance, high levels of transparency and accountability in the policy-making process. In other words, it refers to an ideal-typical situation where elected officials are held accountable for their decisions and voted out of office if they do not deliver as promised.

However, beyond the need for institutional mechanisms of transparency and accountability, such a situation implies the existence of an active and informed citizenry who vote based on their standing on particular issues rather than loyalty to specific patrons or kinship bonds. Consequently, answering the question of how activists from outside the traditional class of political leaders can broaden the space for political participation requires attention to, first, the realm of institutional reform and how activists can entice policy-makers to design institutional mechanisms that essentially go against their own interests by circumscribing their freedom of action. Second, attention must also be paid to the realm of cultural production and the processes by which individuals understand themselves as a collective. The first level of institutional design and effecting political reform is a fairly straightforward matter of civic activists seizing political

opportunities and employing a strategy of incremental change; a step-by-step approach to legislative reform. I argue that civic activists have been able to carve a space for themselves in the Lebanese political landscape through employing time- and scope-limited campaign coalitions. By making a coalition time-limited, activists reduce the risk of cooptation and limit friction and fractionalization within the coalition. By limiting the scope of a particular campaign, that is, focusing on a limited aim, such as a specific piece of legislation, activists are better able to forge elite alliances and limit the number of stakeholders who perceive them as a direct threat. These are tactics civic activists in Lebanon employ in order to effect incremental change that will in the long run lead to a polity more closely approximating the ideal-typical citizen-centric polity.

There are, of course, downsides to such an evolutionary approach. Activists run the risk of only achieving limited successes and never reaching the level of ‘significant’ reform. Furthermore, in the process of building networks and elite alliances, activists may become an elite group themselves – becoming more institutionalized, professionalized, and less rooted in the broader layers of society, whose interest they claim to represent. The second level – that of cultural production – leads into a thorny terrain for political scientists: What is culture and how can it be incorporated into the analysis of political phenomena? In Lebanon, where democratic institutions do exist and regular elections are held, the issue of broadening the space for political participation is first and foremost one of societal transition from a situation of political and communal fractionalization, where patron-client relationships within vertical communal networks dominate the agenda, to a civic state framework with horizontal (cross-communal) allegiances, where elected officials act as public servants and can be held accountable for their actions. Thus, this

study does not only engage with the practical realm of creating a democratic infrastructure, such as legislatively strengthening the rule of law and enhancing institutional transparency, but also with collective identity processes within and outside a democratic infrastructure and the struggle to transform political culture.⁸ In other words, this study delves into issues pertaining to the role of culture and collective identity in political phenomena, the relationship with civil society and the state, and the possibilities of long-term evolutionary change.

Key concepts and theoretical framework

In engaging with the issues described above, certain key concepts are central to the analysis. While these concepts will be discussed at length throughout the study, this section will offer a brief clarification my understandings of recurring concepts such as civil society, sectarianism, political culture, and social capital. It will then map out how these concepts can be used within a theoretical framework derived from social movement theory.

Civil society and the state

The analytical site for this study is the realm of non-governmental organizations and voluntary associations – civil society. To Antonio Gramsci, civil society was the space where the state imposed hegemony, but also the space where this hegemony could be challenged.⁹ In line with Gramsci, civil society, most commonly understood as the

⁸ For a discussion on the importance of political institutions and civil society in democratization processes, see L. Diamond, “Toward Democratic Consolidation,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (1994): 4-17.

⁹ A. Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

territory of non-governmental institutions and agencies that carry out social activity and restrain the state from arbitrary exercises of power, is in this dissertation assumed to be a crucial space where oppositional politics can take place in order to broaden the space for political participation.¹⁰ This, however, should not be taken as a subscription to the Western-centric assumption that a vital civil society is a litmus test of national democratic potential.¹¹ In fact, civil society is not in clear opposition to the state, nor is it necessarily a democratic realm in itself. Indeed, civil society in Lebanon, broadly defined, includes confessional and patron-founded organizations, family associations, militias, and political movements with no vested interest in democracy or the emergence of a civic state.

In other words, civic organizations, defined as associations working for a citizen-centric state with high levels of transparency and accountability, can be expected to face challenges from within the realm of civil society itself, not only from the realm of the state or the traditional political leadership. Rather than constructing a normative argument regarding civil society's positive or negative role in democratization, this dissertation engages with the contradictory dynamics both within civil society and in the areas of overlap between civil society and the political sphere. Beyond the issue of democratic versus non-democratic civil society organizations, Lebanon's relatively vibrant civil society to a great extent suffers from compartmentalization along the same social lines as

¹⁰ Y. Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," *Middle East Report*, No. 183, Political Islam (Jul. – Aug. 1993), 14-21+40: 15.

¹¹ Ibid.; S. Joseph, "Civil Society, the Public/Private, and Gender in Lebanon." In F. M. Göçek, *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 167-189).

political society.¹² Historically, Lebanon's civil society has been socially rooted in the various religious sects that share the territory, and taken on the role as service provider in lieu of a functioning state, thus complementing rather than challenging the political sphere.¹³ Even in the non-confessional segment of civil society, organizations have frequently been affiliated with specific political camps and powerful patrons, reinforcing, rather than challenging, the power structures that limit citizen influence and hamper the development of a civic state. Perhaps, as some scholars have argued, this state of affairs only serves to provide a patron-client dominated system with a democratic veneer.¹⁴

In following pages, I conceive of "civil society" as the realm of non-governmental social institutions and agencies that operate both outside and within the framework of the state (i.e. they sometimes work through institutional channels, but are also capable of extra-institutional popular mobilization), but are not controlled by the state; professional associations, trade unions, interest organizations, charity organizations, civic organizations, and political parties are all part of this realm.

¹² There are two terms for "civil society" in Arabic: *al-mujtama al-ahli* and *al-mujtama al-madani*. The term "*ahli*" implies "kinship," which historically to a great extent has reflected the state of civil society in Lebanon, while "*madani*" is derived from the word "*medina*" (city), implying a civic orientation. See M. L. Browsers, *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006); A. Filali-Ansary, "State, Society and Creed: Reflections on the Maghreb." In A. B. Sajoo (ed.), *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*, 294-318 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

¹³ Twenty-one percent of Lebanese NGOs self-identify as religiously affiliated, while the remaining seventy-nine percent claim to be "non-sectarian." UNDP HDR 2008-2009: 246.

¹⁴ P. Kingston, 2001. "Patrons, Clients, and Civil Society: Environmental Politics in Postwar Lebanon." *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2001): 55-72. According to a CIVICUS report on the state of civil society in Lebanon, over 5,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) are formally registered and 36% of the Lebanese are members of at least one CSO. However, the report excludes political parties, labor unions, and cooperatives from its definition of civil society, which it identifies as "an intermediary between the individual and the state." K. Abou Assi, "Lebanese Civil Society: A Long History of Achievements Facing Decisive Challenges ahead of an Uncertain Future," CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Lebanon. International Management and Training Institute (IMTI), 2006: 8.

Sectarianism and culture

As has already been pointed out, Lebanon is a multi-confessional polity. Reflecting that social reality, Lebanon employs a consociational political system in which power is formally shared among the eighteen officially recognized religious sects.¹⁵ Because Lebanon is socially and politically organized along sectarian denomination, conflict often takes the guise of ethnic or sectarian violence. Indeed, in such a context, any kind of conflict, from large-scale civil strife to the most mundane, such as a fight over a parking space, can come to be depicted or understood as a consequence of that mysterious force known as ‘sectarianism.’

The phenomenon of sectarianism is usually understood as the (re-)emergence of “primordial” identities, so deeply engrained in the consciousness of the populace that communal identities will always trump a citizen-centered national identity.¹⁶ In this study, sectarianism is instead understood as both a political system and as an infrastructure for identity mobilization utilized by patrons for political ends. In this regard, I follow Ussama Makdisi’s understanding of sectarianism as “politics organized along sectarian lines” and “a process through which a kind of religious identity is politicized, even secularized, as part of an obvious struggle for power.”¹⁷ Operating in a

¹⁵ See A. Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy,” *World Politics* Vol. 21, No 2 (January 1969), 207-225. R. A. Norton, “Lebanon After Ta’if: Is the Civil War Over?” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Summer 1991).; P. Salem (translation). “The New Constitution of Lebanon and the Ta’if Agreement,” *The Beirut Review*, No. 1 (Spring 1991); Farid el-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact* (Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies, 1991).

¹⁶ See, for instance, R. Patai, *The Arab Mind* (Long Island City, NY: Hatherleigh Press, 2007 [1973]); P. C. Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (Amherst, NY: Humanities Books, 2008).

¹⁷ U. Makdisi, “Pensee 4: Moving Beyond Orientalist Fantasy, Sectarian Polemic, and Nationalist Denial,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2008: 559.

regional context where identity politics are frequently used as means to an end (e.g. Iranian support for Lebanon's Shi'a community in order to weaken the position of Saudi Arabia, the United States, or Israel), civic activists in Lebanon are in direct confrontation with sectarianism, both as a political system and as a mobilization infrastructure. Therefore, a study of civic movements becomes, at the same time, a study of the flipside of the coin – the use of religious identities in politics. As such, this study builds on and, hopefully, adds to, the work of other scholars involved in attempts to “demystify” religion in politics.¹⁸

Political culture and social capital

Ever since Weber's classical study on the 'Protestant ethic' in relation to the rise of capitalism, the cultural framework within which politics is carried out has fascinated scholars.¹⁹ This is what the concept political culture refers to: the set of historically grounded norms and common understandings on how politics are carried out in a society. In other words, an important aspect of the political culture approach is the acknowledgment that values and beliefs need to be included in political analysis. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, for instance, have argued that a “civic culture,” a political culture that promotes a vibrant civil society, is crucial to a functioning democracy.²⁰ In such a culture, civil society organizations provide information structures, which lead to a

¹⁸ S. Joseph and B. Pillsbury (eds.), *Muslim-Christian Conflicts: Economic, Political, and Social Origins* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); S. Joseph, “Elite Strategies for State Building: Women, Family, Religion and State in Iraq and Lebanon,” in D. Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 186-187.

¹⁹ M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003).

²⁰ G. A. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1965).

well-informed citizenry, with high levels of political activism and high demands of political accountability as a result. Several scholars have translated anthropologist Clifford Geertz's ideas on the function of culture as "symbol systems" in society to political science.²¹ David Laitin, for instance, argues that symbol systems set the framework, so to speak, for politics.²² A common culture, then, does not have to mean a harmonious understanding on issues, but rather an understanding on what issues to disagree on and how contention should be displayed. This is a 'systemic' view of culture, in which culture is external to the movement (in fact, the movement itself would signify a break with the dominant culture), but nevertheless shapes and restricts the movement.

A more 'performative' understanding of culture would suggest the utility of cultural symbols and norms in mobilizing a movement.²³ Furthermore, in this schema, civil society can facilitate the development of social capital, through high levels of interpersonal trust that arises in crosscutting networks. However, political culture approaches that try to explain the lack of democratic practices in different parts of the world, not least the Middle East, have been criticized and derided for falling back on unverifiable categorical statements about cultural peculiarities that make democratization impossible.²⁴ The remedy to such cultural essentialism would be, in the extreme interpretation, relying entirely on 'materialist' factors when analyzing political

²¹ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1973).

²² D. D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

²³ See, for instance, A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51 (1986): 273-286.

²⁴ See, for instance, L. Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach." In R. Brynen, B. Korany, and P. Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Volume 1, Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995); Wedeen 2002.

phenomena. Yet, such an approach would fail to capture the kind of ‘purpose-oriented’ activism examined in this study. Moreover, in a context where society is stronger than the state, the main challenges to the broadening of the space for political participation do not emanate from an authoritarian state, but from society itself in the form of a political culture characterized by patron-client bonds of loyalty and sectarian divisions. While temporary campaign coalitions demonstrate that there are ways to bypass some of the institutional obstacles in order to erode the influence of Lebanese political patrons, long-term change is dependent on a dual-track strategy that not only targets institutional reform, but also the way in which the broader populace understand their environment and how they place themselves as a collective in that environment.

Culture fulfills a function and comes from somewhere – it is produced by processes found in the interactions of structural factors on the macro level and individual interactions on the micro level. Political cultures are not static, pre-existing ‘conditions’ of societies, but rather dynamic and evolving “practices of meaning-making.”²⁵ In that regard, Lisa Wedeen’s understanding of culture as “semiotic practices” is helpful in moving beyond cultural essentialism:

First, culture as semiotic practices refers to what language and symbols do – how they are inscribed in concrete actions and how they operate to produce observable political effects. In this sense, culture can be used as a causal or explanatory variable. At the same time, insofar as semiotic practices are also the effects of institutional arrangements, of structures of domination, and of strategic interests, activities of meaning-making can also be studied as effects or dependent variables. Second, culture as semiotic practices is also a lens. It offers a view of political phenomena by focusing attention on how and why actors invest them with meaning.”²⁶

²⁵ Wedeen 2002: 714.

²⁶ Ibid.

Thus, incorporating culture in political analysis need not be a matter of ‘resorting’ to cultural essentialism, but can rather serve to deepen the analysis, provided we also pay attention to *how* a political culture is produced. From a social movement perspective, I argue, culture should be examined in three capacities. First, the dominant norms and values in the society at large (external to a movement) do indeed shape a movement and do, to some extent, circumscribe what a movement is able to do. This is because in order to attract members, a movement needs to at least partially tap into existing norms and values. Second, culture is also produced within the movement and can have an impact on the external society. In other words, norms and values produced through the movement may be incorporated in society at large over time.²⁷

However, in this study I wish to emphasize a third capacity of culture – as a permissive or restrictive structure for movement formation. That is, the cultural context presents nascent movements with opportunities and constraints that can shift relatively rapidly, much like political opportunities and constraints can. This, I argue, is particularly the case in the context of fractionalized societies where society is stronger than the state, and the state does not embody a hegemonic society. Thus, in this study, the Lebanese ‘culture of sectarianism’ and the logic of patrimonialism on which it is based are understood as producing both social constraints and, somewhat counter-intuitively, opportunities. In short, culture, understood as a system of meaning, which organizes social life and filters individuals’ perceptions of their surroundings, is as much a dynamic and evolving factor as individual collective identities.

²⁷ H. Johnston and B. Klandemans, “The Cultural Analysis of Social Movements.” In H. Johnston and B. Klandemans (eds.) *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 3-24.

Social Movement Framework

Applying a social movement framework on the Lebanese case requires a clarification of the terms used and a delineation of the characteristics of the actors involved. Indeed, there are epistemological and ontological issues to be taken into account when employing a social movement framework to study the type of organizations under investigation in this study. First, do the groups studied here constitute a “social movement” in the traditional sense? Melucci’s three characteristics of a social movement would suggest they do not:

First, a social movement is a form of collective action which involves *solidarity*, that is, actors’ mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit. A second characteristic of a social movement is its engagement in *conflict*, and thus in opposition to an adversary who lays claim to the same goods or values. Conflict is analytically distinct from the idea of contradiction as used, for instance, within the Marxist tradition. Conflict presupposes adversaries who struggle for something which they recognize as lying between them. Third, a social movement *breaks the limits of compatibility of a system*. Its actions violate the boundaries or tolerance limits of a system, thereby pushing the system beyond the range of variations that it can tolerate without altering its structure.²⁸

While a sense of solidarity – a sense of forming a community of likeminded civil society activists – appears to exist in the Lebanese case, this particular “empirical form of collective action” is not always engaged in conflict, at least not according to their own definition of “conflict.” They would certainly admit to being involved in *claim making*, but the level of contention is not constant – claim making can also happen through collaborative forms of collective action, which can include “adversaries,” such as state actors. Furthermore, civic activists have certainly been forced to reassert themselves in the face of challenges from authorities and rivals, such as political parties, but they would

²⁸ A. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 29-30.

scarcely identify with the notion of being in a perpetual state of conflict. And while they do try to negotiate the “boundaries or tolerance limits of a system,” very few of their actions would be considered a *violation* of such boundaries. Melucci’s definition appears to limit the label of “social movement” to contentious episodes, temporary popular mobilizations that are highly public in making their claims. However, this study is first and foremost interested in capturing low-intensity dynamics that precede and succeed such high-intensity popular mobilizations. In Lebanon, there is clearly a community of civil society activists who perceive themselves as part of something greater beyond their immediate organization. Furthermore, Lebanon’s civic activists regularly engage in claim making towards an adversary (e.g. the state or local patrons), and effectively compete with other vehicles of collective action for constituents (e.g. other organizations, political parties/patrons).

They are indeed pushing the system to change its structures – attempting to renegotiate the role for civil society in the civil society-political sphere formula. Tarrow’s definition of a social movement as being “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” de-emphasizes the conflict aspects and is much more amenable to application on longer term processes.²⁹ Relying on this definition, I suggest that the activities of individuals working collectively to transform Lebanon into a civic citizen-centric state, as opposed to a confessional elite-centric state, are best conceptualized as a social movement, which has been shaped by its local context. Limiting the scope to episodes of contention, whether the immediate objective of the social movement is achieved or not,

²⁹ S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 4).

fails to capture the sustainability and long-term ability of grassroots action to be a transformative force in society. Since the interest of this study is the ability of grassroots to broaden the space for political participation, not simply be a determining factor in specific events, it is necessary to widen the scope of inquiry to include long-term dynamics of lower intensity. In this regard, Tarrow once again comes to our aid with his notion of “cycles of contention.”³⁰ Tarrow defines a cycle of contention as “a phase of heightened conflict across the social system: with a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors: a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention; the creation of new or transformed collective action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities.”³¹

These cycles do not occur in a vacuum – networks and organizational structures are constantly under development. To examine these dynamics, this study employs an approach that captures long-term processes within amorphous networks on both the macro- and micro-levels. Thus, it avoids examinations of particular “episodes of contention,” and instead provides in-depth analysis of low-intensity processes occurring over a longer period of time. This approach is essentially a synthesis of structural and behavioral models, combining analysis of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing.³² I am interested in capturing structural constraints and opportunities, but

³⁰ Tarrow 1998.

³¹ Ibid., 142.

³² D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, M.N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

also how actors collectively perceive these opportunities and constraints, forge collective identities, manage resources and develop tactics and strategies in order to achieve their objectives. Clearly, there are significant factors involved on the macro level, as proponents of an approach emphasizing political opportunity structures (or POS) would suggest. According to a POS framework, the opportunities and constraints on the structural level (e.g. high/low risk of political repression, probability of success, or ability to freely assemble) determine the likelihood of social movement formation.³³ On the other hand, unless there are micro-level processes of individuals “discovering” common grievances and developing relationships, no collective action would happen, regardless of how permissive the surrounding structure may be.

The social movement framework employed here therefore operates on two levels of analysis: macro and micro. On the macro-level, it examines the structural potential of social movement activity. This includes examining the nature of the political system, the formula that regulates civil society-political sphere interaction (level of co-dependency, infiltration, etc.), and changes in political opportunities and constraints. However, I argue, macro-level collective identity processes by which individuals conceive of themselves as part of a collective, such as hegemonic perceptions of *self* and understandings of the surrounding environment – we can call this “hegemonic narratives

³³ H. Kitschelt, “Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16 (1986): 57-85; S. Tarrow, “Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest.” Western Studies Program Occasional Paper no. 21 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Center for international Studies, 1991). H. Kriesi, “The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on their Mobilization” pp. 167-98 in J. C. Jenkins and B. Klandermans (eds.) *The Politics of Social Protest* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press; London: UCL Press, 1995).

and frames” – must also be addressed.³⁴ On the micro-level, it examines resource management, strategies and tactics, recruitment processes, motivational frames, and the nature of networks. Indeed, the micro processes of individual interaction and the forging of common understandings of objectives and perceptions of the environment in which they are active must be included in a comprehensive study of social movements. In this regard, the concept of framing is useful. This concept emphasizes the role of the social construction and portrayal of reality as movements develop and attempt to broaden their base of support.³⁵

In addition to capturing dynamics on both the macro- and micro-levels, the framework employed here also needs to capture dynamics that do not necessarily take place within clear organizational boundaries. The type of social movement of interest to this study is an amorphous entity with fluid membership. Indeed, “a movement is a form of collective organization with no formal boundaries, which allows participants to feel part of broad collective efforts while retaining their distinctive identities as individuals and/or as specific organizations.”³⁶ To this end, we borrow from social network analysis

³⁴ This issue is further discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

³⁵ See, for instance, D. E. Snow, B. Rochford, S. Worden, and R. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51 (1986), 464-481; D. E. Snow and R. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” in Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds.) *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research across Cultures* (International Social Movement Research, vol. 1, 1988, Greenwich: JAI Press), 197-217; D. E. Snow and R. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest,” in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 133-155; S. Tarrow, “Mentalities, Political Cultures and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meaning through Action,” in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 174-202; R. Benford, “Frame Disputes within the Disarmament Movement,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 71 (1993), 677-701; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996.

³⁶ M. Diani, “A relational View of the Social Movement Organisation vs. Interest Group Distinction.” Paper for the ECPR 2001 General Conference, Canterbury, 6-8 September.

a focus on interaction and communication in processes of forging collective identities. Using this social movement framework, I explore the broader research question through posing four sub questions. First, the temporal starting point for this study is the time when a “new” type of Lebanese civil society organizations (CSOs) emerged following the end of Lebanon’s civil war in the 1990s.³⁷ Their emergence and proliferation came at a time when Lebanon’s civil society was subject to higher levels of constraints than previously, due to Syria’s implementation of a security regime. Understanding why and how this happened during this particular era of Lebanon’s history would yield important lessons about the ability for grassroots to navigate political constraints and opportunities in a difficult environment. Thus, the first question to be explored reads: How can we explain the emergence and proliferation of independent civic organizations in Lebanon in the mid-1990s?

Second, beyond emerging and surviving, a viable movement needs to find ways to organize for the effective articulation of claims toward the authorities. In order to map how this can happen in a factionalized and elite-centric context, I ask: How do civic activists organize to effectively make their claims? Third, in order to attract members and mobilize for collective action, civic organizations need to cement a sense of community amongst its ranks. Thus, I pose the question: How do civic organizations construct a crosscutting movement identity in a context of societal fragmentation? Fourth, broadening the space for political participation requires a renegotiation of the formula on

³⁷ Karam (2005; 2006; 2009) and Kingston (2001; 2007) have discussed the emergence of a “new” segment of civil society. This is not to suggest Lebanon’s civil society was entirely confessional in character before the 1990s, but that there was a clear proliferation of loosely organized, secular-liberal groups in this decade. A prominent pioneer organization that pre-dates this time-period is *Mouvement Social Libanaise* (MSL), discussed in Chapter 4.

which the civil society-political sphere relationship is based. In other words, the way in which the political sphere interacts with civil society must shift from, for instance, dictation and dominance to consultation and partnership. Thus, the final sub-question reads: To what extent do civic organizations reflect a broader social movement community and what is their relationship to the political sphere? Addressing these questions, I argue, will yield a number of important insights into the dynamics of associational life in a context where public access to the political sphere is limited and intra-elite bargaining dominates the agenda.

Methodology and Research Design

Lebanon has been of central interest to me ever since I first arrived at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the fall of 2000. Thus, while the data collection specifically for this project spanned across approximately two years, my analysis and understanding of Lebanese politics is informed by countless interactions and observations in Lebanon over the last ten years. This includes my experiences in Lebanon during the 2006 war, when I could observe first-hand what I had until then only read about in history books, such as the galvanization of the population in the face of external threat, manifesting itself in cross-communal relief efforts and shows of solidarity among the various communities; the weakness of the state in relation to forces in society; the suffering of the ‘ordinary’ population whose main objective was not to win a war, but to survive and provide for their families for one more day; the marginalization of civic groups in times of heightened tension and the accompanying sense of powerlessness among the broader population. Over the past ten years, I had also seen significant shifts

in societal dynamics; when I first arrived in Lebanon, Hezbollah was at its height of popularity, broadly hailed as a national resistance that succeeded in ousting Israel from southern Lebanon in the spring of 2000. In contrast, after 2006, the issue of Hezbollah's arms had become a significant source of friction and polarization in society. Another significant development was the increased focus on citizenship as a source of rights and responsibilities. In 2000, the student activists of the Free Patriotic Movement, led by the exiled General Michel Aoun, were enthusiastically arguing for a new kind of politics in Lebanon, based on a civic state and centered around citizenship (see chapter 3).

By 2008, the Free Patriotic Movement had become a formal political party, in many ways hardly distinguishable from the traditional, sect-based, political parties. Grassroots organizations focused on civic issues were also becoming increasingly visible and active on the political scene, especially after the ousting of Syria in 2005. But their ability to make themselves heard clearly shifted depending on the shifts in the environment; not so much because of an oppressive state, but because of societal polarization. To capture processes occurring in such a dynamic context, I employed a grounded theory approach in order to inductively generate knowledge about the relationship between a vertically organized political system/culture and horizontally organized grassroots organizations. This exploration was based on the fundamental assumption that collective identities are dynamic and constantly under construction, disclosing my starting point in a constructivist epistemology.³⁸ The grounded theory

³⁸ See A. Bryant, "Re-grounding Grounded Theory," *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2002): 25-42; A. Bryant, "A Constructive/ist Response to Glaser," *FQS: Forum for Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 4, No 1 (2003); K. Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods," in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 509-535; K. Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," in R. M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001):

approach I adopted is based in Kathy Charmaz's development of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's "evolved grounded theory."³⁹ Charmaz's constructivist approach "takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism...assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings."⁴⁰ To adopt this approach means accepting that the researcher can never be a fully neutral observer and recognizing the inter-subjective character of data collected.

A constructivist grounded theory approach is well suited for this study for several reasons. First, Lebanon's complex collective identity dynamics do not easily lend themselves to deductive hypothesis testing. Based on my previous experiences in Lebanon, I believed an approach that acknowledged the constructed nature of collective identities, while at the same time not disregarding their potency – no one familiar with Lebanon could claim communal identities are unimportant – would be the most suited to capture the dynamics at hand. Thus, I conducted ethnographic research, consisting of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, using snowball sampling to gain access to organizations and interview subjects. In focusing on cross-communal associations on the grassroots level, I was not so much interested in how many activists were Sunni, Shi'a, Maronite, Druze, etc., but rather what kind of inter-subjective understandings they had of their challenges and obstacles, and how they as a collective

335-360; K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006); W. A. Hall and P. Callery, "Enhancing the Rigor of Grounded Theory: Incorporating Reflexivity and Relationality," *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 11, (2001): 257-272.

³⁹ A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

⁴⁰ Charmaz 2000: 517.

develop a group identity and movement frames. Acknowledging from the outset the constructed nature of collective identities gave me liberty from the impulse to be blinded by communal labels, and eliminated any risk of falling in line with the common tendency of treating communal groups as static, homogenous entities. Instead, it allowed me to focus on the dynamics of grassroots action, and isolate the factors involved in movements for bottom-up change in an environment of vertical power relationships, regardless of whether those are within, say, Sunni or Maronite communal frameworks. Consequently, while the communal 'home' of interview subjects was recorded for the purposes of gaining as full a background image of each activist as possible, I was not searching for variations between or across communal groups, but instead allowed the emerging data tell me what factors were significant in terms of civic activism.

Second, if one is to attempt hypothesis testing, it is necessary to have access to ample data in order to develop viable hypotheses. However, it was clear from the outset that there was a lack of existing data on the activities of grassroots movements in Lebanon; analyses of Lebanese politics often tend to focus on political elites and the role of major regional players, such as Syria, Iran, and Israel, while neglecting domestic grassroots dynamics. Therefore, an appropriate approach to study the phenomenon of civic grassroots organizations in Lebanon would rely on extensive data collection and contain elements of action research, which addresses both the practical concerns of people and at the same time contribute to social science.⁴¹ Employing a constructivist grounded theory approach when studying civic grassroots activism in Lebanon thus had the dual advantage of building empirical knowledge about practical concerns for activists,

⁴¹ T. Gilmore, J. Krantz, and R. Ramirez, "Action Based Modes of Inquiry and the Host-Researcher Relationship," *Consultation*, Vol. 5, No 3 (1986).

which could provide policymakers with important guidance when evaluating civil society projects, and simultaneously informing social science on an academic level through generating knowledge of theoretical significance.

Data collection

This study argues for studying grassroots network development and social movement formation in a long-term perspective. Consequently, when entering the field, I needed to access data on a relatively long time span. In order to construct a plausible account of the emergence of civic organizations, it was necessary to interview activists who were involved in the development of civil society in the 1990s as well as scholars and journalists who had studied the campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, data was collected on two major time periods; roughly from the end of the civil war in 1990 to the end of *Pax Syriana* in 2005, and the troubled time period of 2006-2008, when Lebanon's civic movement found itself overshadowed by violent conflict and societal polarization.

The fieldwork for this project was carried out in two stages: July – September 2008 and April – June 2009. When I first arrived in Lebanon in 2008 to conduct preliminary fieldwork for this dissertation I cast a wide net, interviewing several local and international CSOs of varying type and focus. This included everything from large established NGO's with international ties, salaried staff, and large budgets, such as the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), and small volunteer based grassroots organizations with limited budgets, such as 05AMAM and *Nahwa al-Muwatiniya* (Na-am). I interviewed activists, heads of organizations, international funders, and scholars

working on civil society related topics. Starting out broadly in order to narrow the focus down in time was a conscious choice I made in order to let the data tell me in which direction to go. In accordance with the inductive approach I had adopted, I moved back and forth between the macro, which meant reviewing the bigger picture in which Lebanese civic engagement was situated and trying to find a proper theoretical “home” for the observations in the field, and the micro, which I accessed through interviews and observations on site in Lebanon. Upon my return to Lebanon in April 2009, I immersed myself with civic activists, primarily individuals affiliated with Nahwa al-Muwatiniya. I carried out interviews with employees and volunteer for various campaigns, engaged in participant observation (attended fundraisers, press conferences, and social events), visited the offices of several organizations, and observed the activities of civic activists whenever I had the chance.

In particular, Nahwa al-Muwatiniya became my window into the networks of civic organizations in Lebanon; during my last fieldwork trip they were very much involved in an election monitoring campaign headed by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE). Consequently, my interactions with Na-am activists led me to volunteers and activists for other organizations. This snowball sampling technique is particularly useful when studying a specific segment of a community – accessing interview subjects through random sampling would not allow for targeting the segment of interest. At the same time, this clearly leads to a sampling bias, since I mainly gained access to organizations involved in similar activities. This would be a problem if the study had a different objective, such as assessing what percentage of Lebanon’s civil society organizations are ‘civic oriented,’ or developing an argument on which

organizations are the most ‘important’ in Lebanese politics. For the purposes of this study, however, where the objective is to understand the ability of this particular segment of civil society to operate in a hostile environment, trace the outlines of a particular movement community, and examine the processes by which they construct meaning of their surroundings and develop new collective identities, snowball sampling was an ideal way of accessing the data I needed. Therefore, the data I collected in Lebanon centered on a sample from a specific segment of civil society. The following section spells out the main activities and characteristics of the organizations at the center of this study.

Selection of organizations and interview subjects

For this study, I carried out over 60 semi-structured interviews and attended numerous events and gatherings organized by civic organizations. I initially consciously focused on grassroots *driven* organizations, as opposed to organizations simply utilizing grassroots volunteers. For instance, the Civil Center for National Initiative (CCNI), an organization propagating for a civic state in Lebanon, certainly has activists contributing on a volunteer basis, but politicians and intellectuals founded it and were the driving force behind the initiative. Indeed, the raised eyebrows I met when discussing my preference for grassroots organizations were quite telling of the attitude among many observers of Lebanon’s political life; I was told more than once to forget about them and instead focus on the “bottom-up” approach of the CCNI. This tendency to dismiss grassroots initiatives, which I encountered on several occasions during the research period, is symptomatic of the strong elite focus that dominates most studies of Lebanese politics. However, as would become clear, the reality is that there are no watertight

compartments among these different organizations. Indeed, in the interviews and interactions that form the basis of the following discussion it became clear that there was a fluid pool of volunteers who were mobilized for “civic causes.” Nahwa al-Muwatiniya’s volunteers will collaborate with CCNI on some projects, or with confessional relief organizations on others, such as Caritas Lebanon, and with politically affiliated organizations on others. Therefore, while compartmentalization into “grassroots,” “elite,” or “professional” NGOs can be analytically useful in some studies, for this study a more useful analytical distinction is one based on nature of their activities.

The reason for this, beyond the fluidity of the volunteer pool, is that the long-term perspective adopted in this study also means that the organizational dynamic have changed within organizations over time; organizations that began as informally structured grassroots networks have now evolved into “institutionalized” organizations, the leaders of which are often well-established in society – the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections is a clear example of such an organization. For the purposes of this study, then, a classification of the various organizations based on their range of activities would tell me more about how their activities overlap and how they ‘negotiate’ key common understandings of the environment in which they are active. Thus, while only organizations that engage grassroots are included in this study, the main distinction of the organizations studied here is made based on their ‘civic’ activities in the fields of policy research, lobbying, advocacy, conflict resolution, and awareness raising. Furthermore, also owing to the long-term perspective of the study, I wanted examples of organizations founded during different time-periods. Therefore, in conducting research for this study, fourteen organizations came to represent the civic-oriented segment of Lebanese civil

society (see table 1.1). Out of these, four were founded in the 1980s, three in the 1990s, and seven in the 2000s (out of which five were founded after the Independence Intifada of 2005). Though of varying main focus, these organizations were all involved in various campaigns and coalitions working towards the strengthening of citizenship and a civic state. This section offers a brief presentation of these fourteen organizations in chronological order, based on when they were founded.

1) *The Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU)*. Founded during the civil war in 1981, the LPHU is an advocacy organization for the physically disabled in Lebanon. While the LPHU's main focus is on advocating the rights of persons with disabilities, the organizations engages in a wide range of campaigns that aim at strengthening the role of citizenship in Lebanon. For instance, the LPHU has been a central actor in the Lebanon Alternative Budget Project (LABP), which aims at making the budget process more transparent and consultative (see chapter 6).

2) *The Permanent Peace Movement (PPM)*. Weary of the seemingly never-ending conflict, students founded the PPM in 1986. The PPM focuses on fostering a 'culture of peace' through a wide range of conflict resolution tools. The PPM seeks to "promote principles of human solidarity beyond existing boundaries and stereotypes" and "empower groups and individuals by emphasizing their agency and equipping them with skills to change the world they live in, in constructive and nonviolent manner." (PPM website). In that endeavor, the PPM frequently allies with other organizations in civic oriented projects.

3) *The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)*. The LCPS was established in 1989 and is mainly focused on policy research and publication. However, the LCPS has

also been involved in civic campaigns, most notably the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER), launched in 2006 (see chapter 4).

4) *Centre d'études Stratégiques pour le Moyen-Orient (CESMO)*. CESMO is a think-tank founded in 1989 based in France and Lebanon. CESMO focuses on analysis of geo-strategy and geopolitics, but also takes part in democracy projects, such as the Citizen Lebanon project (see chapter 4).

5) *The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE)*. LADE was founded in 1996 and works on improving the Lebanese electoral system. LADE was a key actor in the Rally to holding Municipal Elections (RME) in the 1990s. Since the 1990s, LADE has established itself as a central actor in the civic oriented segment of Lebanon's civil society. They maintain a leadership role in many campaigns, most recently in the local election-monitoring project in the 2009 parliamentary elections (see chapters 3 and 6).

6) *The Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA)*. The LTA, founded in 1999, is the Lebanese chapter of Transparency International. The key focus of the LTA is anti-corruption and 'good governance'. The LTA is a driving force behind the NNRAI campaign (see chapter 4), which aims at making official information available to the Lebanese public. The LTA also provides legal services for citizens who have been subjected to corruption through the Lebanese Advocacy and Legal Advice Center (LALAC).

7) *The Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (CRTD-A)*. The CRTD-A carries out research on such issues as gender and development or poverty and exclusion. The CRTD-A works across the Arab world, and in Lebanon it heads the

Women's Right to Nationality Campaign (WRN), which pushes for legislation that will allow Lebanese women to pass nationality to their child (see chapter 6).

8) *The Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA)*. The DPNA was founded in 2003 and is an outspokenly secular organization working toward a “civic society that motivates the participation of citizens in decision making,” and encourages “the participation of citizens in the public concern and civil society organizations.”⁴² Mainly focused on community building and civic education, the DPNA was a central actor in the Citizen Lebanon project (see chapter 6), but has also been involved in campaigns to push for legislative issues, such as the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (see chapter 4).

9) *HELEM (Hemaya lubnaniya lil-mithliyeen – Lebanese protection for homosexuals)* Founded in 2004, HELEM's direct objective is the annulment of the article in the Lebanese penal code that punishes “unnatural” sexual acts, which has been used to target the LGBT community in Lebanon. However, HELEM takes part in rights-based campaigns not directly related to sexual orientation, such as the Women's Right to Nationality campaign (see chapter 6).

10) *05AMAM (al-Mujtamah al-Madani – “civil society”)*. A number of professionals from all walks of life founded 05AMAM shortly after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005. 05AMAM's main objective is a “modern, sovereign state built on non-feudalism, non-confessionalism, and non-clientelism,” by being an “effective link between citizens and governmental institutions.”⁴³

⁴² www.dpna-lb.org (accessed May 25, 2010).

⁴³ www.05amam.org (accessed July 24, 2008).

11) *Hayya Bina* (Lebanese Association for Inclusive Citizenship). Hayya Bina, founded in 2005, focuses on promoting citizenship involvement in political and social issues. They seek to “unite Lebanese on the basis of citizenship values that transcend sectarian belonging.”⁴⁴ Hayya Bina was a central actor in the Citizen Lebanon project (see chapter 6).

12) *Baldati* (“My Village”). Founded in 2005, Baldati’s main area of interest is development, environment, and community building among Lebanese villages. Baldati frequently joins forces with other organizations in various civic projects.

13) *Nahwa al-Muwatiniya (Na-am)*. Na-am was founded in 2006 and employs a wide range of civic-oriented projects. The central theme of Na-am is strengthened citizenship (*Nahwa al-Muwatiniya* means “Towards Citizenship”). Na-am was particularly significant to this study as an entry point to the civic movement community (see below).

14) *The Civil Center for National Initiative (CCNI)*. The CCNI, founded in 2008, presents itself as a think-tank that works to promote secularism in Lebanese politics. The CCNI was instrumental in pushing for legislation that would remove the sectarian denomination in the civil registry (see chapter 6).

As the brief introductions above suggest, these fourteen organizations are all focused on issues surrounding citizenship and ‘civicness.’ However, their *main* objectives vary from advocating for specific groups in society (e.g. LPHU or HELEM), to a broader concern with the strengthening of the institutional structures and rule of law (e.g. LADE

⁴⁴ www.hayyabina.org (accessed October 15, 2010).

or CCNI). Table 1.1 schematically illustrates the varying fields of activity and main interests of these fourteen organizations.

Table 1.1 Key organizations and their main focus

<i>Name/year founded</i>	<i>Policy research</i>	<i>Lobbying</i>	<i>Advocacy</i>	<i>Conflict Resolution</i>	<i>Awareness raising</i>
LPHU (1981)	X	X	X		X
PPM (1986)		X		X	X
LCPS (1989)	X	X			X
CESMO (1989)	X			X	X
LADE (1996)		X			X
CRTD-A (1999)	X		X		X
LTA (1999)		X	X		X
DPNA (2003)		X	X	X	X
HELEM (2004)		X	X	X	X
05AMAM (2005)		X			X
Hayya Bina (2005)			X		X
Baldati (2005)				X	X
Na-am (2006)		X	X	X	X
CCNI (2008)	X	X			X

Though the chart in Table 1.1 is limited to organizations studied here and by no means represents an exhaustive list of organizations engaging in civic activities in Lebanon, it illustrates the breadth and overlap in activities between organizations. These areas of overlap represents the spaces where activists of different key interests meet and develop common strategies, thus building social networks that, I argue, facilitate the emergence of a common collective identity. The strategies employed by activists are based on how they perceive and understand the world around them, rendering their inter-subjective understanding of reality crucial to understanding how they function, rationalize, and strategize. Therefore, examining who the activists were and what they believed had shaped their worldviews, in terms of social background, family attitudes, and educational and geographical environment, was a natural starting point when

designing the research agenda. Furthermore, their experiences would disclose what obstacles and challenges are posed to the development of a civic state in Lebanon. Hence, the natural next step was to learn about the strategies they employ in order to counter these obstacles and challenges, and whether they can point to tangible progress in achieving their goals. Accordingly, in semi-structured interviews with civic grassroots activists, I explored themes that had emerged as significant in the preliminary research: Who are the activists? Why are they active? How do they recruit? How do they coordinate with likeminded organizations? To what are they posing a challenge? What are their goals? What kind of frustrations do they face from the political system? What strategies do they employ in order to reach their goals? What impact do they perceive themselves having? What are examples of tangible achievements of their activism?

By posing these open-ended questions, I was able to explore and identify iterations in the data, factors that could be categorized within a theoretical framework. I could map out similarities among the interview subjects with respect to age group, educational background, horizontal social networks, and identify iterations of factors in the institutional realm as well as in political culture frequently referred to as obstacles to achieving the organization's goals. During the first stage of fieldwork, most interview subjects were permanent or semi-permanent staff with organizations concerned with civic issues, such as the Lebanese Transparency Association and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, or think tanks such as the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and Civil Center for National Initiative, and members of the board of grassroots organizations like 05AMAM and Nahwa al-Muwatiniya. I also interviewed representatives of older organizations, such as the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union and Permanent Peace

Movement (both founded in the 1980s). In order to gain some perspective from outside the civil society circles, I also interviewed political party actors, particularly from the FPM and Hezbollah. The insights from these interviews were mainly on the issue of the reasons for political party activism as opposed to civil society activism. As I mentioned above, FPM activists in particular share, at least rhetorically, many of the objectives of civic organizations. Thus, these interviews provided insight in their reasons for choosing a political party as a vehicle of influence instead of a civil society organization. Furthermore, I interviewed local representatives of foreign organizations and donors; representatives of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, USAID-Office of Transition Initiatives, and National Democratic Institute (NDI) were especially gracious and generous with their time and material.

The interviews at this stage were open-ended and covered a broad range of topics: foreign funding, political sensitivities, and the fragmentation of Lebanese civil society. From this first round of interviews, I gained a good overview of Lebanese civil society, the linkages between organizations, their different levels of institutionalization, and to what degree they reflected the fragmentation of political society. In the second stage interview subjects were mainly volunteer-level activists, but also members of the board and staff of Na-am, LADE, the LPHU, the PPM, and the CCNI. Why, one might ask, choose this particular segment of civil society to study attempts to broaden the space for political participation? Indeed, in recent years, the main focus of grassroots activism in the Middle East has been on Islamic activism, which by all accounts has been much more successful than secular-liberal groups in proliferating and maintaining a constituency. Their success has been attributed to their ability to capitalize on oppressive political

systems and constructing movement frames around a border-transcending Islamic identity, and this focus has yielded many important insights on the dynamics of informal channels of political participation.⁴⁵ Whether explicitly or implicitly, studies of Islamic social movements all in some way engage with the potency of collective identities built on a reinvented Islamic past, in clear opposition to the Western colonial project, the agents of which are at the helm of many of the region's authoritarian regimes. This study, in contrast, takes a closer look at a segment of civil society often dismissed as a foreign implant – Western-modeled secular-liberal groups, assumed to have “shallow roots at home.”⁴⁶

However, dismissing this segment of civil society as a Western implant, I argue, fails to acknowledge the diversity of actors themselves and their often-critical stance towards the neoliberal agendas of ‘the West.’ In such a context, I argue, it is important to study these alternative segments of civil society, whose challenges and failures may yield just as important insights as do the achievements of Islamic movements. Furthermore, it allows for an engagement with the problematic characterization of Middle Eastern societies as somehow reform-resistant, primordial environments, where only a “return to Islam” can produce dynamic social movements, a view reinforced by the heavy scholarly focus on Islamic movements in the region, but made problematic by the limited role of Islamic movements in recent uprisings in the region. By shedding light on a less

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Q. Wiktorowicz and S. T. Farouki, “Islamic NGOs and Muslim Politics: A Case from Jordan.” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4, NGO Futures: Beyond Aid (August 2000): 685-699; Q. Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ V. Langohr, “Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics? Egypt and Other Liberalizing Arab Regimes.” In Posusney, Marsha Pripstein and Angrist, Michelle Penner. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005): 193-218.

prominent segment of the region's civil society, divisions within civil society itself become clearly visible and a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of culture and politics emerges. Of course, in the process, one must be careful not to over-emphasize the importance of this segment of civil society or ignore its limitations. Indeed, outside of academia, in the international donor community in particular, Western-styled secular-liberal groups have long been heralded as a panacea for democratization of the region.⁴⁷ In my interviews it soon became clear that civil society in Lebanon in many ways reflected the divisions in political society; organizations presenting themselves as "independent" either clearly sympathized with one particular side of the prevalent political divide of the time, or were financially backed by a powerful patron.

Only protracted ethnographic research could provide me with an understanding of which organizations were 'leaning' towards one or the other side, or could be said to genuinely be 'above the fray.' This ethnographic approach also allowed me to go deeper into their motivations for activism; I found that many civil society actors felt impotent and helpless in the face of what is perceived as a rigid patron-client political system, where civil society perhaps had been the flavor of 2005, but had now been cast aside. To be sure, the violent events of May 2008, when armed opposition elements overtook Majority-controlled parts of Beirut, seemed to indicate that the only way to change the status quo in Lebanon was by force.⁴⁸ Though the immediate crisis had been defused by an agreement in Doha and the election of Michel Suleiman as President of the Republic, the summer of 2008 was a time of polarization and bitter resentment, not one of national

⁴⁷ For a critique of such tendencies see, for instance, N. Kasfir, "The conventional notion of civil society: A critique," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1998a) 1 – 20.

⁴⁸ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

unity. The majority of civic activists I interviewed during this polarizing time-period were guided by principles and ideals, and at the same time they were, as Lebanese tend to be, borderline cynical with regards to their ability to have an immediate impact on the political sphere. Instead, their energy and their commitment came from a belief in long-term, incremental change.

Interaction – Language and Access

Clearly, language was an issue in all stages of the research. I have had formal training in Arabic but, more importantly, I have enough familiarity with Lebanese dialect and social norms to be able to interact casually with those I interview – a condition I believe is crucial to the type of interviews I undertook in this project. As it were, all interviews were carried out in English, albeit with occasional interjections of Lebanese dialect, as is common when conversing with Lebanese. I have in the past conducted hundreds of interviews over a period of three years for the Swedish Migration Board, and I found that the interview style I developed during that time suited my purposes here perfectly. Instead of taking the form of straightforward question and answer sessions, the interviews were structured as discussions around certain key themes. I strove to carry out the interviews in a comfortable and informal setting, allowing the interview subject to speak freely for as long as possible in order to accumulate enough data to find patterns and iterations in the various narratives. In terms of gaining the trust of interview subjects, it was helpful that the research spanned across a couple of years, as this meant that the interview subjects either already knew who I was and what I was working on at the time I approached them for interviews, or one of their friends could vouch for me. It was also

helpful that I could refer to an affiliation with the American University of Beirut's (AUB) Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES), as this provided me with a formal institutional home away from home for my research. In addition to formal interviews with a script and recorder, my main venue for social interaction during this time was in the circles of Nahwa al-Muwatiniya. I took extensive field notes, writing down ethnographic narratives of what I had seen, heard, and felt in all social interactions. In other words, data collection was a constant activity. Clearly, as mentioned above, my own perceptions and biases become a factor in the data collection process. Rather than trying to "control" for researcher bias, and put up a pretense of full neutrality, my approach is instead based on full disclosure of preconceived notions and starting assumptions.

There is no question that I both identified and sympathized with these activists, who seemed to have limitless energy in the face of serious challenges. Far from being the naïve idealists some would have me believe, they were realistic, strategic, and methodic in their efforts to transform the society and political structure in which they live. As close as I became with some of these activists, alas, my Scandinavian appearance is impossible to hide, and I remained the *ajnabi* (foreigner), which was the label the street kids on Bliss outside AUB had awarded me already in 2000. In other words, I was an outsider and though I became close to individuals in the activist circles, I cannot pretend they saw me as "one of them." Although my ties to Lebanon go back a decade and I have been a frequent visitor, I was still just another foreigner who flew in and existed in their world temporarily. Consequently, while the organizations I studied are open and transparent by nature, in some instances my access was limited. For instance, I could not sit in on

official board meetings and strategy sessions with Na-am. Nevertheless, I believe I had enough access to construct a reasonably acceptable version of their reality. After all, by adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, this study aims not to unequivocally *prove* a particular narrative of Lebanese grassroots-elite dynamics, but to produce *plausible accounts* of how grassroots actors organize and interact with elites and institutions in an elite-centric and socially fragmented environment.

Contributions of the study

This dissertation aims to contribute to both academia and the policy-world. First, *The Evolutionaries* will increase the breadth and depth of knowledge about developments in Lebanon through turning the attention away from the macro-level of regional politics, and focus the spotlight on the micro-level of grassroots movements. Analyses of Lebanese politics often tend to focus on political elites and the role of major regional players, such as Syria, Iran, and Israel, while neglecting domestic grassroots dynamics. To be sure, a macro-focus is well warranted; Lebanon's fluid political system is especially vulnerable to external pressures, and domestic actors certainly have a tendency to seek external allies, but as events since the 1990s have shown, not least the protests in the spring of 2005, there are nevertheless important dynamics at work with regards to "bottom-up" pressures that are deserving of more attention. Second, by recognizing that there are polarizing forces that impact associational life as much as political life, *The Evolutionaries* contributes to a nuanced understanding of civil society, rejecting the notion of civil society as a whole as a panacea for democratization. Instead, it acknowledges the reinforcing role civil society can have to the status quo, and attempts to

systematically map the strategies and tactics of organizations that seem able to avoid cooption or termination, offering a true challenge to the dominant power structures. In that regard, this dissertation aims to contribute to a guiding framework for how to promote the emergence of independent associational life in hostile environments, and how to streamline policy with regards to civil society support. Third, this dissertation will de-mystify the concept of “sectarianism,” which is often invoked as a primordial cause of conflict, but rarely fully defined or sufficiently questioned as a causal factor. *The Evolutionaries* understands communal identities as collective identities parallel to others and turns the focus to civic groups and their cross-communal agenda, thereby revealing “sectarianism” to be a vertical mobilizing structure, utilized by political elites to reinforce and sustain their power.

Accordingly, this dissertation hopes to provide a more nuanced understanding of “sectarian” conflict. Finally, on the theoretical level, this study aims to contribute to a social movement framework, which combines macro processes of structural approaches with the micro processes of behavioral approaches. As such, it is a call for a shift of focus to a long-term perspective that recognizes the social, or cultural, environment as an enabling or disabling structure for movement formation, and such a focus requires attention to low-intensity dynamics that are lost in the contentious politics approach.⁴⁹ A study about attempts from below to broaden the space for political participation is essentially an examination of the processes of collective identity negotiation and transformation of political culture. As such, this study links micro-processes of collective identity production with macro-processes of structural constraints and opportunities. This

⁴⁹ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001.

study identifies three crucial and interrelated issue areas which cut across the micro- and macro-levels: the pervasiveness of a patrimonial logic in Lebanon's institutions and the "familism" so central to society; the simultaneous struggle to transform civil society itself and renegotiating the civil society-political sphere formula; and the identity processes through which civic activists try to construct a movement identity but also the sectarian/communal identity processes that resist such efforts. First, the pervasiveness of a patrimonial logic in Lebanon's institutions constitutes a significant challenge to grassroots activists because it renders the target for their claims indistinct. For instance, the state in Lebanon is not a clear unitary actor. The label "opposition" in Lebanon is a complicated concept. While not entirely void of meaning – it does represent an opposition to whatever alliance gained majority in parliament – the opposition frequently participates in the government, that is, it is awarded ministerial posts.

This is because of Lebanon's consociational political system, which requires the cooperation of all of the country's sects. Consequently, the formal opposition is more accurately described as an alliance of political elites, who as a collective have little incentive to reform the system, at least as long as they are in a position of power.⁵⁰ Instead of offering representation of the citizenry, Lebanon's political system centers on managing relations among elites, each with their own patrimonial network. Thus, in effect, the Lebanese civic movement's efforts to broaden the space for political participation represent oppositional politics in a political context where the formal opposition is part of the system. This leads to the second issue-area, namely the attempts to transform civil society itself and renegotiate the civil society-political sphere formula.

⁵⁰ The consequences of Lebanon's political system for oppositional politics are discussed at length in Chapter 6.

As such, the efforts of civic activists represent an attempt to renegotiate the formula by which the boundaries between public and private are regulated – in other words, the relationship between civil society (private) and the political sphere/state (public). To this end, various types of civic grassroots organizations in Lebanon come together to form a strategic civic movement. However, depending on how ‘civil society’ is defined, it is also an *internal* struggle. For instance, if militias, political parties, and religious institutions are understood as part of civil society, the neat compartmentalization between civil society and the political sphere becomes problematic. Third, in light of the complex dynamics of civil society and the political sphere interaction, this study identifies collective identity production and framing as essential for social movement formation, but also as a significant obstacle when there are more potent dissemination structures and more resonant frames in competition with civic frames.

Thus, it argues that beyond understanding them as mobilizing factors during episodes of contention, collective identity processes must be understood as enabling or disabling factors to movement formation. Put differently, it suggests that the cultural context must be understood as structures of opportunities or constraints. Evolutionaries, rather than revolutionaries, the grassroots-level activists this dissertation engages with employ tactics and strategies adapted to their local cultural context in order to navigate political and religious sensitivities. In order to avoid cooption or termination, civic organizations essentially combine a strategy of “boiling the frog,” slowly raising the temperature on the political system through incremental change of the political system and culture, with a strategy of elite cooperation and careful navigation of sensitive issues. In other words, as they fan the flames under the pot they try to convince the frog to stay

in the water, occasionally asking it to throw a log on the fire. Astonishingly, many of the activists I spoke to did not expect to live to see the results of their efforts – not because they expected an imminent demise, but because they believed their impact would be near imperceptible in the short-term. Adopting a long-term perspective in the extreme, these activists hoped that incremental change would lead to the quiet demise of the current political system, perhaps not in their time but in the lifetime of their children and grandchildren. Indeed, revolution may bring about *institutional* change, but *cultural* change happens through evolution.

Conclusion and chapter summary

Social movements are shaped by the local context in which they develop – and so are the obstacles they encounter. For the purpose of gaining a clear understanding of the environment in which Lebanon’s civic movement emerged and operates, Chapter two provides a historical background of Lebanon’s societal and political development. The focus here is on the historical development of patron-client networks within a sectarian framework, multiple *‘asabiyyah* within one polity, the weakness of the state vis-à-vis society, and the emergence of civic movements. Lebanon was built as an elite-centric polity, focused on managing *Zu’ama* relations, rather than facilitating the stated goal of a unified nation-state, free of sectarianism. This is important for social movement formation not only because it makes their target diffuse – the state is not a unitary actor – but also because their ability to construct and disseminate a viable movement identity is hampered by the resultant reinforcement of embedded identities structure around family and sect. Chapter three examines the emergence of Lebanese civic organizations in the

post-civil war era, sometimes referred to as *Pax Syriana* because of the Syrian military and political influence in Lebanon during the first fifteen years of Lebanon's post-civil war period (1990-2005). Here, I trace the roots of Lebanon's civic movement in the context of political constraints/opportunities, the awakening of an "insurgent consciousness," and the ability of associations in Lebanon to organize and mobilize resources for action. In Chapter four I discuss organizational modes of civic activists in the post-Pax Syriana (after 2005) period. This was a time when many institutional constraints, in terms of the security regime instituted by Syria, had been removed, but a re-alignment of elite alliances brought new obstacles to the grassroots organizations emerging in the wake of the 2005 Independence Intifada. It addresses the ways in which civic grassroots organizations navigate a polarized environment, i.e. how they avoid cooption or termination and the strategies they employ to achieve their goals.

Chapter five engages with the activists themselves; who they are, what motivates them, how they are recruited, and how they construct their own movement identity. The role of collective identities in social movement formation is discussed and the difficulties civic activists face because of the use of identity politics in the Lebanese context. Chapter six discusses the existence of a broader civic movement community and its shifting relationship to the political sphere. Here, the issues arising from Lebanon's national identity debate and how they impact the civic movement are examined. I engage with the problem of parallel structures of power and the difficulties of not dealing with a unitary adversary. Finally, Chapter seven concludes this study by revisiting the overarching research question and identifying the key lessons learned in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

CREATING A “PRECARIOUS REPUBLIC”*

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made.

Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, 1918

Introduction

The eastern Mediterranean coastline was once the home of the Phoenicians – the first society to use an organized alphabet. Flourishing from 1550 BC to 300 BC, this civilization of seafaring traders founded the coastal towns of Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre in modern day Lebanon, which also boasts of ancient ruins from the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires. In the years following the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the former imperial territories were divided up between the Great Powers through the League of Nations mandate system, leaving France to rule Syria and Lebanon.⁵¹ In 1920, France, in collusion with local actors, created *le Grand Liban*, or “Greater Lebanon,” through merging the *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon (*Jabal Loubnan*), which since 1861 had enjoyed a privileged status under a Christian governor though still an administrative district (*Sanjaq*) of the Ottoman Empire, with the surrounding districts of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, and the plains of the Beqa’a valley.⁵² The result was a polity where no religious or ethnic group could claim single majority. In 1926, *le Grand Liban* received a constitution and was transformed into the Lebanese

* The term “Precarious Republic” is borrowed from Michael C. Hudson. *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁵¹ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002 [1991]).

⁵² Kamal Salibi. *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

Republic, but remained under French control until 1943, when it gained independence. However, the story of the construction of Lebanon amounts to more than the drawing of lines on a map by French colonialists – the development of Lebanon’s social fabric and a national mythology of coexistence (*tay’yush*) did not begin with the creation of *le Grand Liban*. In this chapter, Lebanon’s history is examined with special attention to the processes by which nations are constructed, and, as is the case here, how the social and institutional forces hampering Lebanon’s civic movement today materialized. The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the environment in which Lebanon’s civic movement operates, and highlight the constructed (albeit durable) nature of communalism in the social and political system. If there is an argument to be made here, it is that while all nation-states are man-made entities (as opposed to created by God or nature), the trajectories of their conception differ depending on the cultural context in which they emerge.

Indeed, the centrality of communal identities in Lebanon, which is a major impediment to the emerging civic movement, is a result of the specific nation building trajectory of Lebanon, rather than a primordial “fact” or unalterable reality. This chapter begins by presenting a dynamic understanding of nation building, followed by an overview of the various narratives on Lebanon’s origin. In light of this background, the chapter turns to a discussion on the reorganization of Lebanon’s patron-client networks into a sectarian framework during the late Ottoman era (ca. 1840-1918). This is followed by an examination of the institutionalization of such power structures through the designing of Lebanon’s political system during the French Mandate (1920-1943). I then turn to the cross-communal movements of the post-Independence era (1943-1975), when

pan-Arab and socialist currents placed secular ideologies at the top of their agendas. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section on the rise of “uncivil” civil society and the civic counter reaction during Lebanon’s protracted civil war (1975-1990). This foray into Lebanon’s history will demonstrate the development of patron-client networks within a sectarian framework, emphasize how institutional design has produced multiple group identities within one polity, and explain how state structures came to be weaker than informal power structures in society. These are all key elements of my argument on the emergence of a civic movement in Lebanon and the challenges to grassroots efforts of broadening the space of political participation.

Creating a Nation

When traveling in the Middle East, it is not unusual to encounter the argument that the many problems of the region can be ascribed to the artificial nature of the states that inhabit it. Indeed, the understanding of conflict in ethnically and religiously fragmented states in the Middle East and Africa as “sectarian” in nature has spawned arguments on “artificial” or “fake” states, in contrast to the “natural” states supposedly found in the West.⁵³ While there is little doubt that the colonial legacy has weighed heavily on the trajectory of nation-state development in post-colonial societies, this study rejects the notion of pre-existing collective identities and instead understands communal identities as dynamic collective identities under constant transformation. Indeed, to suggest that such a thing as a “natural” nation-state exists is to assume there are pre-existing collectives of peoples called “nations,” who prior to the emergence of the nation-

⁵³ See, for instance, A. Alesina, W. Easterly, and J. Matuszeski, “Artificial States,” *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, Working Paper No. 12328 (June 2006).

state as an organizing entity were deprived of a proper vehicle through which to protect their collective interests. Nation-states in the Middle East and Africa are certainly artificial – but so are nation-states everywhere. Indeed, the historical development of nation-states, in the West and elsewhere, has involved processes of homogenization of heterogeneous populations, frequently through forceful means.⁵⁴ Consequently, it is important to be critical of the fundamental assumptions employed when attempting to study ethnically and religiously fragmented societies and focus attention on the processes by which specific collective identities have been forged.

However, to say that communal identities are constructed is not the same as saying they are not durable. Indeed, in the case of Lebanon, communal fractionalization is a serious impediment to civic activists as they aim to construct a political culture where the citizenship serves as a key marker of *self*. In order to understand the environment in which civic activists operate, it is crucial to examine the nation-building trajectory of Lebanon. Since the processes by which individuals understand themselves as part of a collective are at the heart of this study, it is critical to take the constructed nature of the nation-state as a starting point when trying to understand the complexities of Lebanese society and state. Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, views the nation as being a product of modernity and claims its symbols and mythology serve specific materialist purposes.⁵⁵ The nation, Anderson argues, is a political entity *imagined*

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (What is a Nation?), lectured delivered at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882 [1990]; Homi Bhabha. *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); M. Thom, "Tribes within nations: the ancient Germans and the history of modern France," in H. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

⁵⁵ Anderson here distinguishes himself from other modernist scholars such as Ernest Gellner, who seeks the key to nationalism in the transition from agrarian to industrial society, and Eric Hobsbawm (1990), who

as both limited and sovereign. The nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁵⁶ In Anderson’s view, the mass printing of books in the vernacular language rather than Latin, which could only be read by learned elites, made possible the emergence of common discourses among the masses. Thus, the bonds between members of a nation were not so much a question of blood or genetics, but rather the product of technological advances that allowed individuals in various regions to perceive themselves as members of the same expanded community.

According to Anderson, nationalism must be understood by aligning it with cultural systems, rather than with self-consciously held political ideologies.⁵⁷ Nationalism, then, is not a political ideology or the natural expression of pre-existing collectives, but a dynamic cultural system. While Anderson’s approach suggests an almost “organic” growth of a sense of community, albeit through modern technology, Ernest Gellner seeks the key to nationalism in the transition from agrarian to industrial society. To Gellner, the nation-state is the construction of a certain elite or segment of society, who succeed in “becoming an effective force under modern circumstances.”⁵⁸

views nationalism as an initially progressive force unifying the bourgeoisie in an effort to break up the feudal power structures and creating a mass-consciousness that could promise a progressive move toward socialist revolution. Eventually, according to Hobsbawm, nationalism became a preservative force used to justify war and unifying the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), and E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ Anderson 1991, 6.

⁵⁷ Ibid. See also B. Anderson, “Western Nationalism and East Asian Nationalism: Is there a Difference that Matters?” *New Left Review*, No. 9 (May/June 2001): 31-42.

⁵⁸ Gellner 1983, 87.

Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm views nationalism as an initially progressive force unifying the bourgeoisie in an effort to break up the feudal power structures and creating a mass-consciousness that could promise a progressive move toward socialist revolution. Eventually, however, according to Hobsbawm, nationalism became a preservative force used to justify war and unifying the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.⁵⁹ In Hobsbawm's view, sub-national collective identities based on ethnicity, language, religion, shared territory etc., are "proto-nationalisms," because only when there is a nation-state, according to Hobsbawm, can there be nations and nationalism.⁶⁰ In other words, both Gellner and Hobsbawm view the nation-state as preceding the nation, and argue that the nation-state is constructed to forward the interests of a certain segment of society.

With an argument reminiscent of the concept of "frame resonance" in social movement theory, Anthony Smith disagrees with the notion of modern nationalism having nothing in common with pre-modern ethnicity (or Hobsbawm's proto-nationalisms): "the 'inventions' of modern nationalists must resonate with large numbers of the designated 'co-nationals,' otherwise the project will fail."⁶¹ According to Smith, documented history and folk tradition sets the framework for which nationalist mythology and symbolism can be employed. In other words, Smith believes there is something more at work than simply the construction of a new unit called "the nation."

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm 1990.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 198). The argument on frame resonance, or "resonant action frames," holds that social movements must tap into existing beliefs and understandings among the populace in order to gain support for their cause. See, for instance, W. A. Gamson, "The Social Psychology of Collective Action," in A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller (eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-76; Snow & Benford 1992. Chapter 5 of this study will discuss this concept in depth.

Smith sees an “ethno-history” at the center of nationalist mythology; it is a matter of deeply felt sentiments that exist within the people, an ideational realm that modernist accounts fail to take into account. Smith’s “historical ethno-symbolic” approach differs from primordial approaches in the sense that it is “the sense of cultural affinities, rather than physical kinship ties, embodied in a *myth* of descent, shared historical memories and ethnic symbolism, that defines the structure of ethnic communities.”⁶² Thus, Smith argues that there are relatively recent “nations-in-the-making,” but that there are pre-modern foundations for many nations.⁶³ In other words, according to Smith, the nation is not purely primordial, nor purely modern; it is a modern creature with an ancient heart.

Consequently, collective identity processes, whether they center on ethnic, religious, or other factors, are at the center of nation-building enterprises, rendering nation-states dynamic entities. In an increasingly globalized world with transnational connections on the non-state level, all nation-states face serious challenges in terms of negotiating national identity, as territorial borders cannot contain perceived religious and ethnic ties. The state may give the nation its name and demarcate its territorial borders, but its identity must be arrived at by its members through what can be assumed is a sometimes contentious negotiation. In other words, nationalism, understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, involves an active negotiation of the boundaries that define the

⁶² Smith 1998: 192. Ethnicity as a concept is problematic because there are varying understandings of what it actually means. To some, ethnicity implies a shared biological history and is equated with “race.” To others, it simply indicates a shared collective history, but not necessarily “blood ties.” In Lebanon, there are groups who consider themselves a separate ethnicity (for instance, many Lebanese with Armenian heritage), and others who do not consider themselves a separate ethnicity, but perceive ties through religion and cultural history. For this reason, this study finds “communal identity” more useful as an analytical concept.

⁶³ Ibid.

national community.⁶⁴ While all nation-states are artificial, the artificiality of territorial borders becomes especially striking in post-colonial states where external actors determined borders, frequently, but not always, in collusion with one or more local actors. Consequently, in such contexts it is expedient for both local and external actors to resort to the “artificial” versus “natural” argument, utilizing identity politics towards their respective ends. Arguably, the structures of social institutions have an impact on the negotiations on the borders of a national community; Lebanon’s communal social system as it functions today did not appear in a vacuum, but, as we shall see, was significantly shaped by institutional developments in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the institutional developments of a nation-state can be expected to impact the process of negotiating collective identities, in which some groups, meanings, and practices are included while others are excluded, creating a community of shared myths, cultural symbols, and characteristics.⁶⁵ Against the backdrop of a dynamic understanding of the birth of nations, the following section examines the nation building experience of the modern state of Lebanon through a discussion on the various narratives of its birth.

Sources of nationhood: narratives on Lebanon’s origins

The mythology regarding the birth of any sovereign nation-state will normally highlight three main themes: the kinship between its people through blood and common

⁶⁴ Bhabha 1990; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1993).

⁶⁵ Fatma Müge Göçek. *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002): 4.

culture, the historical territorial claim of its people, and its ancient roots.⁶⁶ In other words, the proponents of a nation-state will frame it as the physical incarnation of a metaphysical community forged through ancient ties of blood and shared territory – *the nation*. The nation-state becomes the ultimate polity to legitimately represent its inhabitants who, in the ideal-typical case, will form a natural nation with a high level of homogeneity. The ideal-typical nation-state, then, is a polity with clear territorial boundaries, within which a people, bound by blood and culture, has resided since ancient times. Consequently, nationalists construct mythical “pasts” in order to legitimize the territorial claim of a particular nation.

In 2008, the results of a genetics project involving the eastern Mediterranean region were published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*.⁶⁷ The purpose of the study was to search for “Phoenician genetic traces within modern populations” by examining the Y chromosome within males.⁶⁸ The project gained widespread attention in Lebanon and a large number of Lebanese males lined up to offer their genetic material as data. In Lebanon, the issue of a Phoenician heritage is not without political sensitivities, since historically it was predominantly Christian nationalists who emphasized a Phoenician identity for Lebanon, wishing to distinguish their “nation” from a largely Islamic Arab nation. This tendency was at once an effort to find ancient roots to the Lebanese nation, and, for Christians, a way to emphasize its pre-Islamic character. Moreover, the Phoenicians were settled along the entire coastline, thus providing a rough

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Smith 1998.

⁶⁷ P. A. Zalloua et al. “Identifying Genetic Traces of Historical Expansions: Phoenician Footprints in the Mediterranean,” *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, Vol. 83 (November 7, 2008): 633–642.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 633.

notion of the territorial claims the Lebanese nation could ‘legitimately’ make. Indeed, in constructing *le Grand Liban*, its proponents frequently forwarded the Phoenician heritage as a rationale for expanding the borders of the new state beyond Mount Lebanon. Kahlil Gibran,⁶⁹ a poet and philosopher viewed by many as one of Lebanon’s greatest sons, created a highly romanticized Lebanon with his tales set almost exclusively in the villages of Mount Lebanon.⁷⁰ While centered on Mount Lebanon, his themes of liberation, the sacred beauty of Lebanon and emphasis on a Phoenician heritage clearly echoed the Maronite vision of Lebanon.

Though Gibran’s “reminiscing” about Mount Lebanon dominated the Lebanese consciousness during the pre-independence era, other writers, such as Sa’id ‘Akl, Ilyas Abu Shabaka, Maroun Abboud, and Anis Freiha, were instrumental in reinforcing the Phoenician, Christian, and Mediterranean image of Lebanon. The Lebanese nationalist Shukri Ghanem, writing in 1920, considered *le Grand Liban* synonymous with the ancient Phoenicia, “which should comprise almost the entire coastal area,” a territory inhabited by many different Muslim and Christian sects.⁷¹ However, some of these inhabitants, particularly Muslims, viewed the modern state of Lebanon as a creation of the Maronite Christian community with the help of the French Mandate power (1920-

⁶⁹ Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) lived in the United States from the age of twelve, only to be buried in Lebanon after his death, and in an apt reflection of the life of the man who is deemed so imperative to the development of a Lebanese national consciousness, the contemporary Lebanese nation has more sons and daughters living outside its territorial borders than inside of them. The common transcription of his name is “Khalil.” Gibran spelled his name “Kahlil” upon the advice of his English teacher when he arrived in the US. For reasons unknown he believed this spelling would make the youngster’s name seem less foreign and help his assimilation in American society.

⁷⁰ E. Salem, *Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

⁷¹ K. M. Firro, “Lebanese Nationalism versus Arabism: From Bulus Nujaym to Michel Chiha,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (September 2004): 1-27.

1943), awarding the Maronite community superiority while weakening the Muslim community.⁷² However, when Lebanese nationalism emerged as an intellectual movement, the fault lines were not always along confessional boundaries – even among Christians there were several different views on what the modern state should look like. For instance, Christian intellectuals differed on whether a sovereign Lebanon should exist outside of a Syrian state or function as a semi-autonomous entity within a secular and decentralized Syria.⁷³ Furthermore, there was disagreement on whether *le Petit Liban*, with an overwhelming Christian majority, or *le Grand Liban*, with a weaker Christian majority, was the proper scope for the new state:

There were strategic reasons for a Grand Liban with enlarged borders guaranteeing it a measure of self-sufficiency. However, the main difference between the two positions lay in outlook: a Petit Liban would have relied heavily on French support for its continued existence, while a Grand Liban would have had greater autonomy from France at the price of coming to terms with a large Muslim population.⁷⁴

The French, who assumed administration of Lebanon under the League of Nations' mandate system in 1920 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, were initially reluctant to support the Maronite demands for the larger state, but relented after years of pressure from Maronite clerical and secular leaders. Thus the flag of the new country became the French tricolor, the white section adorned with a cedar tree, which was “now hailed as the glorious symbol of the ancient country since Biblical times.”⁷⁵ According to

⁷² Salibi 1988; Raghid el-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

⁷³ Michelle Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti, “The First Boat and the First Oar’: Inventions of Lebanon in the Writings of Michel Chiha,” *Radical History Review*, Issue 86 (Spring 2002): 37-65.

⁷⁴ Hartman and Olsaretti 2003: 39.

⁷⁵ Salibi 1988: 26; E. Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

the 1932 census, in *le Grand Liban* Christians made up 54 percent (29 percent Maronite) and Muslims 46 percent (22 percent Sunni) of the population.⁷⁶ Consequently, in nationalist narratives, communal ‘balance’ became part of what defines Lebanon historically; the coexistence of various sects in the confines of a particular territory became an important mythology employed in the creation of a Lebanese national identity. However, the region’s experience of coexistence was not only a narrative pursued by the romantic nationalists of the 1920s.

In later years, the depiction of Lebanon’s birth as the result of a Christian-French conspiracy to weaken the Muslim community has been challenged by historians who have identified commonalities among Lebanon’s populations pre-dating the creation of the Lebanese state. In a lecture delivered at the University of Oxford on October 3, 1985, historian Albert Hourani argued that there were unifying factors among the religious groupings in *le Grand Liban*; the vast majority of the communities spoke the same language (Arabic),⁷⁷ there was a “similarity of popular culture, of manners, habits of life, cuisine, and even the popular religion of the countryside.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Hourani found the historical roots of the modern Lebanese state in the reign of Emir Fakhr al-Din II (1572-1635), who created a close and permanent union, within the Ottoman Empire, of a number of lordships under the Druze Ma’anid dynasty. To Hourani, this was where the foundation of the Lebanese nation-state was laid, even in terms of the principles

⁷⁶ Zisser 2000.

⁷⁷ The elevation of Arabic from the language of the people to an official language of the Lebanese nation (as opposed to Turkish or French), was a process that concerned Gibran greatly during the 1920s. For Gibran, unless there was unity in language, the Lebanese could never belong to the same nation.

⁷⁸ A. Hourani. *Political Society in Lebanon: A Historical Introduction* (Cambridge: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986): 5.

governing the coexistence between the different communities. The principedom, he argues, was based on a secular principle, namely a political tradition that the ruler should “stand above” his own community and protect the faith of others.⁷⁹ If the establishment of Fakhr al-Din’s principedom put in place the political structure of future Lebanon, the end of his Ma’anid dynasty, according to Hourani, marked the beginning of Lebanese “self-governance,” in the sense that the lords themselves chose their leader. The “symbolic date” for Lebanon’s emergence would according to this narrative be 1697, when local lords came together to choose a member of the Sunni Shihab family as their overlord.⁸⁰

Maintaining rule of their territories through the use of leaders capable of commanding the loyalty of the local populations was a common practice of the Ottomans, and this was the case in Mount Lebanon and surrounding districts as well. Due to this Ottoman practice, the Shihabs were able to extend their rule from the southern to the northern parts of present day Lebanon and created a political structure that roughly corresponds to modern day Lebanon. In other words, according to this narrative, the roots of *le Grand Liban* go deeper than the Christian-dominated *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon, frequently understood to constitute the foundation of the basic structure of Lebanon. Furthermore, the Lebanon of the Shihab family was not based on the dominance of one particular religious community; according to Hourani, agreements and alliances cut across religious lines. Social order was structured around powerful families, such as the Sunni Shihabs, the Druze Jumblats, and the Maronite Khazens, and the key

⁷⁹ A. Hourani. *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

⁸⁰ Hourani 1986. The members of this particular branch of the Shihab family were descendants of the Ma’ans through the female line. See Salibi 1988.

identity boundaries were between notables and commoners rather than between communal groups. Moreover, pragmatic conversions were not uncommon during this period and in 1758 several members of the Shihab family became Maronite Christians.⁸¹ In Hourani's view, the Lebanese nation-state was not the result of any one sectarian community's aspirations, but rather the result of an evolving historical process of coexistence and negotiation between various religious communities. This narrative of the historical coexistence of sects within the territory that today comprises Lebanon is recurring in accounts of historical Lebanon. Topography is frequently forwarded as a reason for the area becoming inhabited by so many minorities, the mountainous terrain offering persecuted groups protection from oppression.

For instance, Engin Akarli speaks of the *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon as a "haven for heterodox groups."⁸² While Akarli acknowledges the role of colonial power politics in the creation of a distinct Lebanese political entity, he emphasizes the central role of confessional coexistence, which was perceived by the French as "an innate peculiarity of Lebanese society and polity."⁸³ According to Akarli, the combination of the historical variant of coexistence between communal groups and foreign involvement led to a form of government very specific to Lebanon. Akarli is critical of the tendency of Lebanon's historiographers to view the Lebanon which emerged in 1920 as the creation of the Maronite patriarch's vision; rather, he argues, they should pay attention to

⁸¹ Zisser 2000. See also U. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁸² E. Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993: 9).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

politicians like Sa‘adallah Huwayyik, who was a grassroots politician operating within an inter-sectarian structure, and whose outlook, according to Akarli, was in light of more recent historical evidence much more conducive to the creation of a unitary nation-state than that of the patriarch.⁸⁴ From this perspective, then, the borders of the modern nation-state of Lebanon were not arbitrarily drawn. Nor was the new state a matter of imposing a new political order on unwilling communities. Rather, *le Grand Liban*, and later the Lebanese Republic, was a reasonably natural materialization of the coexistence-based collective identity of the peoples inhabiting the area. However, narratives on Lebanon’s history do not only offer examples of communal coexistence, but also instances of conflict.

The Maronite-Druze conflicts in the 1840s and 1860s are frequently used to show that Lebanon’s communities have “always” been locked in a sectarian struggle. Following Muhammad Ali’s Egyptian invasion and occupation of Mount Lebanon in 1831, which aimed at gaining access to the natural resources of the region and strengthening Muhammad Ali’s position as ruler of Egypt vis-à-vis the Ottoman Sultan, a Druze and Maronite revolt in 1840 offered Ottoman and European powers the opportunity to intervene and restore the Syrian region to Ottoman rule.⁸⁵ However, upon the return of Druze notables, exiled by the Egyptians because they, unlike Emir Bashir Shihab II, had remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire, Maronite villagers of Dayr al-Qamar revolted and sectarian clashes ensued. The departure of the Egyptians also meant

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Makdisi 2000. Egypt was technically part of the Ottoman Empire, but enjoyed a great deal of autonomy under Mohammed Ali’s rule 1805-1849. The dynasty he established would rule Egypt until the revolution of 1952.

the end of Shihabist rule in Mount Lebanon and an end to the “old regime” of the mountain; the new political landscape saw a permanent presence of European agents and the increased political involvement of the Maronite Church. Following the 1841 violence, the Ottoman Sultan ordered the division of the territory formerly ruled by the Shihabs into two “lieutenancies” (*Qaymaqamate*) – one under a Maronite lieutenant governor and one under a Druze lieutenant governor.⁸⁶ However, in 1860, massacres of Christians in the Druze *Qaymaqamate* led to a French military intervention and European involvement in the reorganization of the territory into the *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon, enjoying special standing within the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁷ These instances of sectarian violence frequently serve as examples of the age-old sectarian suspicion and the need for systems to manage communal relations in Lebanon.

For instance, Leila Fawaz analyzes the violence that erupted between Christian and Druze communities in the 1860s, and while acknowledging that the modern territorial boundaries are different from those of the double *Qaymaqamate* in the 1840s and 1850s or the *Mutasarrifiyya* of 1861-1920, she identifies a central similarity between the violence of nineteenth century Lebanon and that of the twentieth century Lebanon: “When they both did develop sectarian tensions, those tensions erupted into violence under a particular set of circumstances that revealed the special nature of the social and political structure of Lebanon and, more broadly, of the larger issue of conflicting loyalties.”⁸⁸ According to Fawaz, equilibrium in Lebanese society rested on three bases

⁸⁶ Salibi 1988.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ L. T. Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) : 218-219.

of coexistence: a balance among communities, an acceptance of the position held by each community in society, and observance of the limitations on each position.⁸⁹ This selective review of narratives on the birth of Lebanon, containing both romanticized nationalist accounts and scholarly historical accounts, serves to illustrate the various understandings of what Lebanon as a political entity represents. From the traditional Christian nationalist perspective, territorial Lebanon reflects the ancient (non-Arab) Phoenician civilization and is a homeland to all its descendents. From the pan-Arab perspective, Lebanon is a colonial product, imposed by the French colonial power in order to establish its protégé community's hegemony over other communities, necessitating a custom-made form of coexistence.

In yet other perspectives, predecessors of the modern Lebanese state have featured variants of coexistence in order to “manage” the relations between different communal groups. Consequently, providing an overview of Lebanon’s history is not a simple matter of presenting established historical facts. In order to focus our efforts to trace Lebanon’s nation-building trajectory, it may therefore be more useful to seize on the commonalities of the various narratives. Disregarding the nationalist romanticism of a “Phoenician homeland,” all the above accounts emphasize the notion of the coexistence of various communities. Indeed, even among some nationalists a mythology of coexistence became central to narratives on the birth of the Lebanese republic; poetry and art portrayed coexistence and multiculturalism as integral to the “soul of Lebanon.” Whether by choice or by force, it appears the dominance of communal identities within the territorial borders of the emerging Lebanese state was ultimately to determine the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

centrality of the mythology of coexistence to the Lebanese identity. Furthermore, historians such as Hourani, Akarli, and Fawaz all emphasize, in different ways, the roots of Lebanon's various forms of coexistence. But to speak of "coexistence" implies preexisting communities and says little of how Lebanon's social and institutional structure came into being. If the old regime of Mount Lebanon was not organized on communal basis, but rather by elite/non-elite markers, as Hourani and others suggest, when did sectarianism come to dominate the political discourse? To understand the political culture and system in modern day Lebanon, we must briefly visit with important time periods in Lebanon's history, beginning with the Ottoman reforms known as the *Tanzimat* in the nineteenth century.

Re-organizing society: constructing sectarianism (ca. 1840-1918)

The ambivalent relationship of the Lebanese to their own confessional system is a well-known issue among scholars concerned with Lebanon. For instance, Illya Harik reflects on the curious tendency of most Lebanese to decry the Lebanese Republic's political and juridical recognition of communalism while simultaneously behaving in accordance with communal social norms. According to Harik, the Lebanese "seem to have been engaged in dissimulating behavior. Each individual and group, in effect, avails itself of a secular identity veil to cover up its adherence to communal identification."⁹⁰ Harik considers the Lebanese attitude toward communalism as a form of sublimation of group preferences. In other words, each group redresses its preferences as being those of

⁹⁰ I. Harik, "Toward a New Perspective on Secularism in Multicultural Societies," in Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (eds.) *Lebanon in Limbo: Postwar Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003, 7-37): 23.

a secular, more legitimate identity, rather than the expression of sectarian preferences, since sectarian identities are not considered a “valid” currency in the modern world, of which the Lebanese surely consider themselves part.⁹¹ But why, Harik asks, are the Lebanese locked into communalism? This is a question civic activists wrestle with on a daily basis, as they work towards the construction of a civic Lebanese identity capable of superseding communal identities. A common depiction of communal identities is that they are primordial and primitive religious identity markers at odds with modernity.⁹² For instance, Edward Shils identifies the greatest threat to the Lebanese polity as the primordial identities inherent in the Lebanese society:

Because of the deeply rooted communalism of Lebanese society, it is not an integrated civil society in the modern sense of the term. It lacks that attachment to the national society as a whole, that sense of identity, the consensus that should embrace much of the population on issues that touch seriously upon the interests of the communities which make it up.⁹³

While adhering to the same view of sectarian identities as somehow being natural to the Lebanese society, Michael Hudson separates the issue of families in politics and sectarianism; he identifies two broad aspects of the traditional pluralism prevailing in Lebanon: “One...is the extraordinary pervasive influence of families and family alliances in politics; the other is the religious and sectarian fragmentation of the country...So strong are these factors that Lebanon’s political institutions, traditional and modern, have

⁹¹ Ibid., 24

⁹² See, for instance, Leonard Binder (ed.), *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1966). This anthology contains the papers of a conference on Lebanese democracy held in Chicago in 1963 and is heavily dominated by the view of sectarianism as a case of resurfacing primordial identities. The eruption of civil war in 1975 further reified the conclusions reached at the conference twelve years earlier.

⁹³ E. Shils. “The Prospects for Lebanese Civility.” In L. Binder (ed.) *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: Wiley, 1966): 2.

been molded to reflect them.”⁹⁴ The Lebanese political system is frequently depicted as fragile because of the constant danger of confessional crisis. Samir Khalaf alludes to this fragility when discussing the outburst of violence between the Druze and Maronite communities in Mount Lebanon in the 1840s: “The delicate balance which held society together was disrupted. Civil crisis and confessional rivalry, so far kept in abeyance, had become imminent.”⁹⁵ Note that confessional forces are said to have been “kept in abeyance,” indicating the need to manage the primordial forces of sectarianism. However, if communal identities are re-conceptualized as dynamic, ever evolving identities, a very different perspective emerges.

The more interesting issue becomes the question of *how* sectarianism came to be so central to the Lebanese polity and, in the extension, how a culture deplored by the majority of the population continues to wield such influence. Instead of assuming pre-given, primordial identities with clear collective interests, Ussama Makdisi argues that in the case of Lebanon, sectarian divisions are a construct of modernity.⁹⁶ Makdisi does not claim that religious identities as such are new, but that the conflation of politics and confessional identity is a modern construct. Before the mid-nineteenth century, according to Makdisi, boundaries between communal groups were much less rigid: “Local communities did not identify themselves tribally or nationally, and they subsumed their religious identities within a political and public space that accommodated differences of

⁹⁴ Hudson 1968: 19.

⁹⁵ S. Khalaf “Communal Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Lebanon,” in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. Vol. II* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc. 1982): 117.

⁹⁶ Makdisi 2000.

faith.”⁹⁷ In fact, bonds of loyalty between a peasant and notable of different faith were quite common in nineteenth century Lebanon; a Christian could pay homage to a Druze lord, and vice versa. In other words, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the social and political distinction was one of “knowledgeable elites” and “ignorant commoners.”⁹⁸ This depiction of nineteenth century Lebanon is supported by, among others, the contemporary observer Mikhayil Mishaqa:

Although clan membership was generally drawn along religious, or confessional, lines – Druze Jumblatis, Maronite Khazinities, e.g. – members of other confessional groups were attached to a clan, house or even an individual as “followers” or liegemen, as Mishaqa says of the Shi’ite clansmen who served his Greek Catholic grandfather Ibrahim Mishaqa.⁹⁹

If the sectarian violence in Mount Lebanon and Damascus was not a matter of resurfacing primordial identities, reacting against the Ottoman path to modernization, then what was it? According to Makdisi, sectarianism rose when “old-regime society had collapsed but an independent nationalist society had not yet formed – a period of indigenous, European, and Ottoman interaction and collaboration that spawned the contested culture of sectarianism.”¹⁰⁰ According to Makdisi, the *Tanzimat*, the series of reforms undertaken by Ottoman authorities beginning in 1839 created a situation where the elites fought to maintain their privileges and to uphold the hierarchical structure, while the commoners found themselves in a new social landscape, and were demanding

⁹⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁸ U. Makdisi, “After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire,” *Middle East Studies*, Vol. 34 (2002, 601-617): 604.

⁹⁹ M. Mishaqa, *Al-Jawab ‘ala iqtirah al-ahbab*. In Wheeler M. Thankston Jr. (ed. and trans.) *Murder, Mayhem, Pillage and Plunder: The history of the Lebanon in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988): 4.

¹⁰⁰ Makdisi 2000: 166-167.

rights they believed they were entitled to according to the *Tanzimat*: “The cumulative impact of the Egyptian invasion, the fall of the Shihabs, the introduction of the *Tanzimat*, and the interventions of European powers contributed to an environment that metaphorically and physically opened Mount Lebanon to the possibilities of a new political order based on religious differentiation.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the clashes of 1841 “ushered in the age of sectarianism.”¹⁰² In the summer of 1860 violence once again erupted in Mount Lebanon as Christian and Druze communities clashed. That same summer, deteriorating economic conditions led to riots in the streets of Damascus and Muslims massacred hundreds of the town’s Christian residents. While the violence in Damascus and Mount Lebanon had very different reasons, the Ottoman and European authorities, as well as local observers, conflated the two events. The Ottoman perspective was

that the sectarian unrest was a primordial outburst of long-standing indigenous hatreds; that the object of the Ottoman state was to try to contain these supposedly age-old hatreds within a modernizing project of the *Tanzimat*; that this periphery on its own had no contribution to make to debates about the meaning of Ottoman modernity except as a foil to modern Ottoman identity.¹⁰³

Makdisi is not alone in noting the “hardening” of sectarian identities in the nineteenth century; Bruce Masters concludes that although the question of whether or not confessional loyalties and religious identities in Ottoman Syria were “primordial” will never be satisfactorily answered, it is clear that before the hardening of sectarian identities in the nineteenth century, “more heterodox religious traditions prevailed and the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 52

¹⁰² Ibid., 51.

¹⁰³ Makdisi 2002: 601.

casual intermingling of people of different faiths was common.”¹⁰⁴ In terms of sources of collective identities, the notion of family allegiance, i.e. perceiving kinship ties as the central common signifier, certainly outdates Lebanon’s “culture of sectarianism.” Long before social capital or collective identity became common concepts among scholars, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) understood group cohesion as a dynamic and, to some extent, evolving concept. The term *‘asabiyyah* refers to group cohesion or solidarity among individuals in a community, which evolves and ultimately gives way for a “new” *‘asabiyyah*. While the word *‘asabiyyah* is originally derived from *asabah*, meaning male lineage, Khaldun’s conception of *‘asabiyyah* emphasizes the inherent potential of a decline of *‘asabiyyah*. Indeed, according to Khaldun, an old *‘asabiyyah* is eventually replaced by a new one, better suited for the context as dynasties rise and fall.

Thus, in Khaldun’s view, the bonds of *‘asabiyyah* are not only based on blood or religion, but on culture, language, and a common code of conduct. Nor is his concept static; Khaldun describes a cyclical dynamic, whereby individuals moving from, for instance, the mountain to an urban center eventually adopt the urban *‘asabiyyah*. Yet, the *‘asabiyyah* based on other bonds than kinship are, according to Khaldun, not as strong: “It is clear that it is in the nature of human beings to enter into close contact and to associate with each other, even though they may not have a common descent. However, such association is weaker than one based upon common descent, and the resulting group feeling is proportionately weaker too.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, while Khaldun describes factors other

¹⁰⁴ B. Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 38-39.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, transl. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 292.

than kinship that can create a sense of *'asabiyyah*, he sees the strongest bonds as being those of family.¹⁰⁶ However, when Khaldun speaks of “kinship,” he sometimes includes the ties between a patron and client:

The affection everybody has for his clients and allies results from the feeling of shame that comes to a person when one of his neighbours, relatives, or a blood relation in any degree is humiliated. The reason for it is that a client (-master) relationship leads to close contact exactly, or approximately in the same way, as does common descent.¹⁰⁷

Ahmad Beydoun, in reflecting on the Lebanese case, argues that this prevalence of “familism,” a form of clientelism based on kinship ties and loyalty to a certain dynasty, is inseparable from the broader concept of confessionism:

Some say that the corruptive bug in the system is not confessionism but rather favoritism (literally known as clientelism) and some claim (or imply) that favoritism is not the consequence of confessionism. This conceptual distinction between ‘a thing’ and ‘one of its manifestations’ does not prove helpful when we contemplate remedies. Favoritism, though possible also outside the context of confessionism, is inherently a form of *asabiyyah* (partisanship). Confessionism in essence is one such manifestation.¹⁰⁸

To Beydoun, *'asabiyyah* denotes “partisanship,” which has a much more negative connotation than “group cohesion,” and Lebanese confessionism is a manifestation of *'asabiyyah* based on kinship. Indeed, the Lebanese proverb *al-damm ma bisir mai* (blood never becomes water) illustrates the emphasis placed on kinship in Lebanese society. But as Makdisi and others have shown, Lebanon’s clientelist networks were not always

¹⁰⁶ The similarities between Khaldun’s conception of *'asabiyyah* and Charles Tilly’s “detached-embedded identities” will be discussed in chapter 5. See C. Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ Khaldun 2005, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmad Beydoun, “Confessionism: outline of an announced reform,” in Nawaf Salam (ed.), *Options for Lebanon* (London and New York: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 2004), 77-78.

structured within communal boundaries and allegiance to a family was not dependent on shared sectarian identity. Yet, Lebanon's political system was constructed on the assumption that a sectarian balance needed to be upheld – it presumed clear boundaries between communities and undisputed leadership within them. Identities, religious or secular, are never static, they are in the constant process of being reinvented – a process bound to be influenced by a multitude of factors, many of them locale-specific. Consequently, the re-organizing of Lebanon's social order in the mid-nineteenth century was to have a profound impact on the new nation-state that emerged in the twentieth century, in terms of its political system and the evolution of a national identity.

The French Mandate: institutionalizing sectarianism (1920-1943)

When designing the political system for the Lebanese Republic, the notion of “primordial” identities became a prominent concern and at independence in 1943 sectarianism was institutionalized through a consociational political system based on the communal demographics of the time.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, since its inception Lebanon employs a system in which power is formally shared among the eighteen officially recognized religious communities. From independence until the end of the civil war in 1990, Lebanon's political system rested on two pillars. The first pillar was the Constitution of 1926, which avoided the issue of confessionalism and established a system based on three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary.

¹⁰⁹ J. M. Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Zisser 2000.

Moreover, it enshrined basic civil and political rights: equality before the law and freedom of the press, speech and association.¹¹⁰ The second pillar, the National Pact (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*) of 1943, was meant to deal with the issue of “managing” communal relations in Lebanon and ensure coexistence for all communities in a Lebanese homeland. The National Pact was a gentlemen’s agreement between Maronite Bechara el-Khoury and Sunni Riad al-Solh, who were to become the first president and prime minister of Lebanon. In this pact, the office of the executive (presidency) was awarded to the Maronites, as the largest minority according to the 1932 census. The premiership was to be held by a Sunni Muslim, and the position as Speaker of the Parliament by a Shi’a Muslim.¹¹¹

The electoral system was also designed to uphold the sectarian balance based on the 1932 census, distributing the 99 seats in Parliament (*Majlis al-Nuwab* – Chamber of Deputies) according to a 6:5 ratio in favor of the Christian sects.¹¹² While the electoral system was proportional in the sense that seat distribution among the various sects was pre-determined so as to reflect each sect’s size, voting took place based on a majoritarian principle, electing candidates on a “first past the post” basis. In other words, candidates did not have to win over fifty percent of the vote to take all seats in a district – only the largest share of votes compared to other lists. As a result, a minority of the popular vote can win the majority of parliamentary seats. This system has remained intact since the

¹¹⁰ Chapter 3 discusses Lebanon’s legal protection of associations further.

¹¹¹ el-Khazen 1991. In the literature on Lebanon, this “troika” is sometimes referred to as the “three presidents.” This is because of the Arabic word “*Rais*,” which is used for all three positions.

¹¹² The Lebanese Parliament sometimes goes by its French name: *Assemblée nationale* (National Assembly). In the 1989 Ta’if Agreement, the number of seats in parliament was increased to 128, and the Christian-Muslim ratio was changed to 5:5. This is discussed further in chapter 3.

inception of the Lebanese Republic, with only occasional redrawing of districts.¹¹³ In the simplest terms, Lebanon is divided into electoral districts, and in each district voters will have a choice of lists of candidates to vote for. The ballots are not pre-made; the respective political blocs, which come into being through various political alliances, produce their own ballots. This is significant as it makes it more difficult for voters to elect candidates across lists, which they are legally entitled to do. The lists are cross sectarian; candidacies are allocated among the sects depending on the communal distribution of available seats in each district. In theory, this system was to ensure inter-sect cooperation since all sects must be represented in the lists and candidates must receive a plurality of the total votes cast – not only from their own sect.

But in practice, geographical compartmentalization among sects and “creative districting” in different elections produced districts with large majorities of specific constituencies, ensuring certain outcomes in elections. For instance, in the 2000 elections, authorities combined the predominantly Druze district of Aley, in which Syria’s allies were strong, with the predominantly Christian district of Ba’abda, where discontent with Syria was more pronounced. The result was a district with a pro-Syrian majority, where the Christian voters critical of Syria were marginalized, thus ensuring a victory for candidates aligned with Syria, which controlled Lebanon at the time.¹¹⁴ Gerrymandering is, of course, not a practice exclusive to Lebanese politics, nor is the phenomenon of a popular vote minority winning a majority of the seats – this is the case in the United

¹¹³ N. Salam (ed.), *Options for Lebanon* (London and New York: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 2004).

¹¹⁴ Chapter 4 will discuss the Lebanese electoral mechanics in depth. See, for instance, Gary C. Gambill and Elie Abou Aoun, “Special Report: How Syria Orchestrates Lebanon’s Elections,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 2 No. 7, August 2000.

States' Electoral College and in Canada's version of consociationalism as well. But these electoral systemic peculiarities aside, in Lebanon, the ability of political elites to shape the system as an framework for institutionalized clientelism has led to a situation where, from the constituents' point of view, the system has not served to provide citizens with a space for public participation, but rather has functioned as a new version of the family alliances of old.¹¹⁵ Indeed, a powerful family/political elite will normally be at the top of an electoral list, which is then populated with their "loyalists" from other sects, and any challenge will come from a rival elite heading an opposing list. In theory, it is possible for candidates to run outside a "patron list," but very rarely do such independents succeed in getting elected.

Thus, Lebanon's electoral system appears to be little more than a continuation of family-based politics with intra-elite alliances and rivalries of a kind that has little to do with representing citizens of a modern state, and more to do with paying allegiance to a notable family. The designing of the political system around communal identities is problematic from at least two perspectives. First, since voting happens based on sectarian denomination, the political system makes communal identification a necessity for participation in the political arena, essentially making communal identity a prerequisite for full citizenship. Second, shifting demographic realities is bound to render such a political system inherently unstable.¹¹⁶ Beyond the issue of shifting demographics, the question is whether the Lebanese system has done more to facilitate cooperation or

¹¹⁵ For a discussion on the 'redressing' of clientelist networks in 'modern' guise, see N. Hamzeh, "Clientelism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (July 2001), 167-178.

¹¹⁶ Because of the implications of demographics on Lebanon's political system, no official census has been carried out since 1932. Recent statistics suggest Christians are now at 39 percent and Muslims at 59.7 percent. CIA World Factbook, 2010.

simply serves to reify sectarian politics. Indeed, the dilemma of consociational models is the risk of reifying communal identities at the expense of a national identity – i.e. the emergence of an *imagined community* beyond the communal group.¹¹⁷ This has been a problem for consociational democracies in the developed world, perhaps most prominently Belgium, as institutional consociationalism appears to facilitate cooperation and avoid “ethnic” conflict, but also prevents a sense of national solidarity to arise.¹¹⁸

The importance of the National Pact, which established the power sharing formula, and the strong focus on communal identities in the formulation of what makes Lebanon distinct from its neighbors can, as has been shown, be said to permeate historical narratives on Lebanon. In other words, while communal identities were institutionalized on the political level, on the social level communalism became an inextricable part of the mythology of the Lebanese nation. Yet, the road from a French Mandate to independence was to a great extent characterized by *intra*-communal rivalry, rather than *inter*-communal conflict. Among the Maronite Christians, Emile Eddé and Bechara el-Khoury vied for the presidency of independent Lebanon (Eddé having served as president 1936-1941 under the Mandate authorities), both forming alliances with Muslim politicians in the process.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Anderson 1991.

¹¹⁸ K. Deschouwer, “The Unintended Consequences of Consociational Federalism: The Case of Belgium.” In O’Flynn, Ian and Russell, David (eds.), *Power Sharing: New Challenges for Divided Societies* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005); A. Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977). For Northern Ireland’s consociational arrangements, see J. McGarry and B. O’Leary, *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁹ A. Hourani, “Ideologies of the Mountain and the City.” In R. Owen (ed.), *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976); Dueck 2010.

Eddé was in favor of reducing the Lebanese Republic into *le Petit Liban*, with a significant Christian majority, which would serve as a Maronite homeland. Khoury, on his part, favored independence for the Lebanese Republic as the borders had been drawn in the establishment of *le Grand Liban*.¹²⁰ Khoury's parliamentary bloc, the Constitutional Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Dusturiyya*) in part consisted of Christian economic elites from Beirut, who benefited from the expanded borders of *le Grand Liban*, at the expense of the Maronite Church, which would wield far more power in a polity restricted to Mount Lebanon.¹²¹

Thus, the power-sharing formula so central to the Lebanese political system came about through the maneuvering of political elites – not acting on confessional basis, but out of political and economic motives vis-à-vis rival elites within their own communal group.¹²² Moreover, in 1940 the Mandate territories fell under the control of the Vichy government set up after the German occupation of France. However, in 1941 a successful Allied invasion of the territories led to yet another shift in power, as the Lebanese Republic fell under the control of the Free French. These events had an impact on the Lebanese cause of independence, as there was now room for Lebanese nationalists to put pressure on the Free French to grant Lebanon independence, which France had already promised in the French-Lebanese treaty of 1936.¹²³ In fact, France had been reluctant to relinquish control over Lebanon and they were not willing to do so quite yet, despite

¹²⁰ Zisser 2000.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Though not institutionalized through their constitutions, similar consociational arrangements characterize many other polities in the Middle East. See N. N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995).

¹²³ Zisser 2000.

pressure from the British, who in the midst of the war effort were inclined towards a policy of appeasement towards Arab nationalist movements. Thus, the Free French authorities promised independence for the Lebanese in 1941, but remained deeply entrenched in Lebanon, showing no interest to end the Mandate regime. However, the final French attempt to tighten the grip on Lebanon ended with a victory for Lebanese nationalists. In 1943, after Bechara el-Khoury had been elected president and Riad al-Solh had been appointed prime minister, the Lebanese government unilaterally declared an end to the Mandate. In response, the French arrested several cabinet members, including Khoury and Solh. After massive street protests and international pressure, the French authorities released the prisoners after two weeks of imprisonment on November 22, henceforth celebrated as Lebanon's Independence Day.

However, French troops remained on Lebanese territory until 1946. Rather than a straightforward colonial imposition of an artificial state, Lebanon's path to nationhood was a process of inter- and intra-communal maneuvering, shaped by global and local dynamics. In terms of Lebanon's problems of employing a national mythology accepted by all communities, if Smith's concept of *ethnies* is conceptualized beyond the problematic label of ethnicity, and instead understood as dynamic communal identities (*'asabiyyah*), developed and shaped by historical processes, the concept becomes helpful in illustrating Lebanon's dilemma. The various national narratives, including those that considered the Lebanese nation artificial, resonated with the predominant beliefs and understandings among the different communal groups, as they had hitherto developed. This is an important distinction to make because it eliminates the rigid and deterministic character any analysis of Lebanese politics and society will have when communal

identities are assumed to be clear-cut and static categories. The focus then shifts; the interesting issue is not that of “managing” the relations between pre-existing identities who are forced to coexist within a given territory, but that of the processes of intra- and inter-communal negotiations on the identity of the Lebanese nation *as well as* the identities of the communal groups themselves. If the creation of Lebanon is understood both in the context of post-colonial nationalist struggles – which did not necessarily correspond to how the lines were finally drawn on the map – and the processes of collective identity production, Lebanon’s problems can be understood to stem not from the clashing interests of pre-existing identities, but rather from the systemic regulation (through a consociational political system) of multiple intra- and inter-communal negotiations and renegotiations of collective identities.

Moreover, this system also dresses in confessional guise the power struggles among elites both internally (who will represent the community?) and externally (who will gain the most influence for ‘his’ community?). As such, the Lebanese consociational system is designed to manage elite relations, not communal relations. Indeed, the concern with upholding communal balance led to a political system that did nothing to erode the pervasiveness of familism and clientelism, and effectively “locked in” communal identities by making it impossible to be a Lebanese citizen without also identifying with a specific sect. Thus, the political system simply enshrined clientelism and provided it with a “modern” institutional veneer, while reinforcing the development of separate *‘asabiyyah* within the framework of the Lebanese Republic. Against this background, the next section turns attention to the effects on Lebanon of the supposedly secular and cross-communal ideologies that swept across the Middle East in the 1950s and onwards.

Post-independence: rise and fall of a state

Pan-Arabism and Socialism (1943-1975)

Since gaining independence in 1943, Lebanon has had the dubious honor of being awarded such epithets as “improbable nation”¹²⁴ and “precarious republic.”¹²⁵ Yet, between independence and the collapse of the state in 1975, Lebanon was spared most of the major upheavals other countries in the region experienced during this time period. For example, Lebanon’s most immediate neighbor, Syria, saw a highly turbulent post-independence period, with military coups succeeding each other.¹²⁶

The political and economic developments in Syria and Lebanon took separate paths from the early days of independence. During the period between 1920 and the mid-1940s, Syria and Lebanon had maintained a common currency and a common tariff. The Lebanese economy was, however, based on the same principles that had been guiding the economy of Mount Lebanon since the 1860s, its policies being characterized by *laissez-faire* and low taxes.¹²⁷ The Lebanese economy after independence remained highly influenced by France, a predominance institutionalized in the Franco-Lebanese Monetary Agreement of 1948, which regulated Lebanon’s place within the Franc zone, providing the country with only partial access to Lebanese foreign currency reserves held in Paris.

¹²⁴ Leila Meo, *Lebanon, Improbable Nation: A Study in Political Development* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

¹²⁵ Hudson 1968.

¹²⁶ F. el-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000).

¹²⁷ R. Owen “The economic history of Lebanon: its salient features 1943-74.” In Halim Barakat (ed.), *Toward a Viable Lebanon* (Georgetown University and Croom Helm, 1988).

The agreement gave Lebanon the ability to set up its own currency, independent from the Syrian Pound, which had prevailed during the French Mandate, and the Lebanese Lira (LL) was established through the passing of a monetary law in 1949.¹²⁸ The decision of the Lebanese government to take a stand independent of the Syrian government disappointed the Syrians and their supporters in Lebanon, who had hoped for a unified Lebanese-Syrian stand against the French. In contrast to Lebanon, Syria developed its economy according to a socialist model and mainly traded with other Arab countries. The rapidly deteriorating economic relations between the two countries culminated in the breakup of the Lebanese-Syrian Customs Union in 1950, followed by an almost total Syrian economic blockade of Lebanon.¹²⁹

In early 1958, the United Arab Republic (UAR) was proclaimed, uniting Egypt and Syria under the Egyptian President Nasser. The marriage between Syria and Egypt only lasted three years and in 1961 Syria withdrew from the UAR after a right-wing coup that brought conservative elements to the government.¹³⁰ In 1963 a number of Ba'th officers, including Hafez al-Assad, took control over the government through a military coup, and ousted the regime that was held responsible for the failure of the Syrian-Egyptian venture in the United Arab Republic. Tensions within the Ba'thist leadership led to yet another coup in 1966 and finally, after an unsuccessful Syrian intervention on the side of the Palestinians in the Jordanian military eviction of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Hafez al-Assad seized power in the fall of 1970.¹³¹ While not

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ P. Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, London, 1988).

¹³¹ A. I. Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); Seale 1988.

experiencing military coups, Lebanon was not entirely spared internal turmoil during this time period. In 1943, Lebanon's Constitution was amended to read that Lebanon is a country with an "Arab face." This compromise between those conceiving of Lebanon as a nation distinct from a broader Arab nation and those believing Lebanon to be an inextricable part of the Arab nation is indicative of the tensions Lebanon would experience in the era of pan-Arabism and Arab socialism. Indeed, Nasser's ascent to power in Egypt in 1952 ushered in an era of populist pan-Arabism across the Middle East. The Suez crisis of 1956 and the revolution in Iraq 1958 did not leave Lebanese society untouched. For example, in 1958, outgoing President Camille Chamoun failed in his attempts to bring Lebanon closer to the West as pan-Arab forces considered his move contrary to Lebanon's affirmation of its "Arab identity."¹³²

Chamoun had already caused tension with pan-Arab forces two years earlier by not cutting diplomatic ties with the Western powers that attacked Egypt in the Suez crisis. In 1958, the tension culminated when Chamoun expressed support for the Baghdad Pact, which was perceived by Nasser as a Western attempt to curtail the advances of the Arab socialist movement. Pan-Arab forces in Lebanon, on their part, pushed for Lebanon to join the newly formed UAR. This resulted in a "civil strife," pitting Chamoun's allies, the Christian al-Kata'ib (Phalange) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) against the predominantly Muslim leftist parties. In this "miniature civil war" the Lebanese army stood by the sidelines in order to preserve its coherence as a national unit and after the dust settled and the US Marines had been deployed in accordance with the Eisenhower doctrine, army commander Fouad Shihab was elected new president. It has been debated

¹³² Meo 1965.

among scholars on Lebanon whether the causes of the 1958 crisis can be found in the social, ideological, or sectarian realm. Michael Hudson views it as the result of the mobilization of the “have-nots” by “feudal leaders” whose power was threatened by President Chamoun; Arab nationalism was in this narrative merely a tool for the insurgent leaders against the loyalist camp, and the causes are found in the tensions arising from Lebanon’s transition from a feudal to a modern society.¹³³ Farid el-Khazen takes issue with Hudson’s modernization approach, pointing to the ideological impact of Arab nationalism sweeping the region: “Lebanese groups in 1958 were divided over the political and ideological content of Lebanon’s ‘Arab face’.... Lebanon, like other Arab countries, had to generate a new political equilibrium, one that would take into account the Nasserite factor in pan-Arab politics.”¹³⁴

But to Ahmad Beydoun, the 1958 crisis was different from previous crises in that the parties didn’t question the borders of *le Grand Liban*; instead the ties to external powers were used to enhance the bargaining position with domestic rivals – not to force secession. Accordingly, for Beydoun the 1958 crisis began and ended with sectarian division, but started a new era of nation building.¹³⁵ The Shihabist era (Fouad Shihab 1958-1964, Charles Helou 1964-1970) in Lebanon was significant not only because it is frequently “remembered” as the Golden Age of Lebanon, when Beirut was known as the “Paris of the East,” but also because despite the many social reforms that were carried out during this time period, Lebanon inevitably moved towards increased destabilization and,

¹³³ Hudson 1968.

¹³⁴ el-Khazen 2000: 105-106.

¹³⁵ A. Beydoun, “Lebanon’s Sects and the Difficult Road to a Unifying Identity,” *The Beirut Review*, No. 6, (Fall 1993).

ultimately, civil war. While Lebanon certainly saw its share of secular leftist movements during this time period, truly cross-communal political parties did not seem to materialize. The reason for this may be found in the uneasy relationship many of Lebanon's political elites on the "left" felt towards wholesale reform. Despite paying lip service to social reform, and indeed secular reform, Lebanon's political elites from across the political and communal spectrum have always been careful not to upset the status quo and destabilize the political climate. Michael Johnson argues that the Muslim *Zu'ama* in Lebanon's clientelist system felt threatened by the socialist aspects of Nasserism, leading them to adopt the less class-focused aspects of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalism.¹³⁶ There were plenty of such aspects to seize on; the Arab socialism of this period largely avoided class-based arguments and instead centered on *Othering* through an Arab versus foreign dichotomy:

Speeches by the leaders of [Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Tunisia]...were always careful to make it quite clear that, in a Middle Eastern context, socialism had nothing to do with the dangerous notion of social division and class struggle. Only very rarely was it suggested that any local class or group was no longer to be considered as part of the national community. And even then, as in the occasional references to feudalists or parasitic capitalists, the impression was usually given that such persons were either foreigners or else so closely allied with the forces of reactionary imperialism as to have lost the right to be called citizens.¹³⁷

While ostensibly secular and thus potentially of cross-communal appeal, the Nasserist brand of Arab socialism did not reject religion entirely because of the

¹³⁶ M. Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State, 1840-1985* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986).

¹³⁷ R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000): 31.

ideological and cultural centrality of Islam to the Arab populations.¹³⁸ Moreover, the Arab socialist regimes looked to Ottoman practices of co-opting the religious establishment, “by paying the *ulama* [the clergy] official salaries, by creating a government ministry to manage its property, and by building up a secular educational and legal system to challenge its previous monopoly over these two important areas.”¹³⁹ Thus, the pan-Arab socialist currents sweeping across the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s did not so much threaten the power of Lebanon’s communal notables, as it provided some of them with new sources of legitimacy. In Lebanon, even ostensibly secular parties drew the majority of their constituents from specific communal groups.

In fact, the remnants of these developments are still visible in Lebanese society today, most prominently in the inherited position of Walid Jumblat as the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP).¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in other countries in the region, military-institutional rule has been little more than a veneer for hereditary family rule. This was the case in Syria, where Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father, and in Egypt, where Hosni Mubarak’s son was being groomed to take over.¹⁴¹ Thus, a patrimonial logic can be detected in the autocratic institutions of other MENA region countries as well as in Lebanon’s social and democratic institutions. In other words, socialist currents and secular principles did not weaken those among the political elites who were able to harness them for their own purposes.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 33

¹⁴⁰ Walid Jumblat’s followers commonly refer to him as “Walid Bey.” “Bey” is a word of Turkish origin, meaning “lord” or “chieftain.”

¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Bellin 2005.

Religious authorities, which could have been threatened by such currents, had little to worry about as long as Lebanon's confessional political system remained intact, the preservation of which was an objective they shared with political elites. Indeed, since sectarian identity was enshrined in the citizenship and civil law matters, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc., were the exclusive domain of the religious authorities of each sect, citizens had little opportunity to break free of their respective religious communities. But regional developments would combine with domestic dynamics into a combustible blend that eventually would prove difficult for Lebanon's traditional political elites to control. The steady flow of Palestinian guerrillas into Lebanon, adding to the already sizeable and disenfranchised Palestinian refugee population, and the increasing socio-economic rifts between urban centers and the countryside, caused significant strains to the Lebanese system. Finally, tensions boiled over in 1975, leading to the collapse of state authority and ushering in an era of militia rule, the emergence of new elites, and, eventually, the birth of a war-weary civic constituency.

Lebanon's civil war: rise of "uncivil" civil society (1975-1990)

Armed men are everywhere. All roads are closed. Blood maniacs are at large. We are losing Lebanon.

Radio Lebanon announcer Sharif Akhawi, October 1975¹⁴²

On April 13, 1975, the first stage in what would become a fifteen-year period of wars involving internal and external actors began with an attack on Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Christian al-Kata'ib Party, by Palestinian gunmen. This attack, in which one

¹⁴² Quoted in "Lebanon: Bloody Round 4 in Beirut," *Time Magazine*, October 20, 1975.

Palestinian and three al-Kata'ib members were killed, was followed by the swift retaliation by Christian militiamen by attacking a bus of Palestinian *Fedayeen* passing through the Christian neighborhood of Ain al-Rummaneh in Beirut, leaving 27 men dead.¹⁴³ Alternatively, the war began with the Christian militia attack on the bus, which, according to this narrative, was full of civilian Palestinians returning to their camp after attending festivities. As has been the case since the founding of the Lebanese Republic, conflicting historical narratives tend to proliferate in the various communities. What is clear, however, is that from 1975 until 1990, Lebanon experienced a series of wars – sometimes with periods of calm in between – featuring sectarian and political violence, invasions of foreign armies, and intra-communal conflict.

These wars are usually, more due to convenience than ignorance, conflated into the collective label of “Lebanon’s civil war.” The distinctly sectarian overtones of much of the violence during this period, such as ID-card killings, whereby motorists would be stopped at a militia checkpoint, have their ID-cards checked (the Lebanese ID-cards stated confessional belonging), and executed on the spot or abducted if belonging to the “wrong” sect, led many observers to, much like during the violence in the 1840s and 1860s, view the conflict as essentially sectarian in nature. The consociational system, in this view, had failed to manage the communal relations and the sectarian hatreds bubbling underneath the surface finally broke through. The West Beirut districts of Hamra and Ras Beirut, once cosmopolitan melting pots of Christians and Muslims, Lebanese and foreigners, saw a mass exodus of Christians moving to the predominantly Christian East Beirut. Similarly, Muslims living in the eastern parts of the city moved

¹⁴³ el-Khazen 2000.

west, for fear of being massacred because of their communal belonging. To be sure, many Lebanese did understand the conflict in existential terms; from the Christian perspective the character of Lebanon as a distinct entity from the Islamic Arab world was threatened because of the rapid growth of the Muslim population and influx of Palestinian guerrillas since their 1970 expulsion from Jordan, the destabilizing effect of whom had been evident for several years before the outbreak of war in 1975. Similarly, due to the Christians being awarded more power through control of the Presidency and a parliamentary majority by the 6:5 ratio established in the National Pact, the feeling of disenfranchisement among many Muslim Lebanese provided ample ground for mobilization through equality and justice arguments.

Moreover, there was no shortage of foreign involvement: Syria intervened in 1976 to prevent the defeat of the Christian side, Israel invaded in 1978 and 1982 against Palestinian militants (expelling the PLO in the latter campaign), and regional powers, such as Iran after the revolution in 1979 and Iraq (against its Ba'athist rival Syria), sponsored different factions, pouring fuel on the fire.¹⁴⁴ In such a complex web of dynamics, it is seldom fruitful to attempt to identify simple causal relationships. While most scholars include all or most of the factors above, some emphasize the destabilization of the Lebanese balance of power between Christians and Muslims, while others view the conflict as a result of social divides, especially the urban-rural relationship, and yet others

¹⁴⁴ At the time of the outbreak of civil war Palestinian groups represented a force of 19,200 armed men. A few months later, this force had increased to 22,900. Their leftist/Muslim Lebanese allies could mobilize around 12,000 additional men, whereas their main Christian opponents al-Kata'ib and the National Liberal Party (NLP) maintained forces of 8,000 and 4,000 armed men respectively. These figures can be compared to the Lebanese Army, which held a total of 19,000 soldiers, of which only about half was a fighting force el-Khazen 2000: pp. 299-304. On the Syria-Iraq rivalry, see E. Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th, The Conflict Between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (I.B. Tauris, London, 1990).

place the bulk of blame on the influx of Palestinian militants and the foreign sponsors who kept the conflict alive. This notion of *une guerre des autres* (a war of others) on Lebanese soil became a popular refrain among Lebanese of all sectarian denominations towards the end of the war, allowing for an externalization of blame and shame.¹⁴⁵ While all of the factors above played more or less crucial roles at different points of the various conflicts of Lebanon's civil war, of immediate interest to this study is the use of identity politics in Lebanese society and politics.

To be sure, power struggles between different political elites, in which identity politics were utilized in order to garner support, were at the center of many crucial conflicts during the civil war. Political elites in Lebanon generally fall in one of three main categories: traditional *Zu'ama* (notable families, such as the Khazens, Solhs, Gemayels, Jumblats, etc.), economic elites (individuals who rose to prominence due to their financial achievements, such as the Beiruti merchants around the time of independence, and later Rafiq al-Hariri), and a third category that became prominent during the civil war – warlord elites. Indeed, the civil war offered an entry point for new elites, as militia leaders who were not part of the traditional establishment found a path to power, albeit violent.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ S. Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also, S. Khalaf . *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁶ Prominent individuals in this category would be Samir Geagea, leader of the Christian militia Lebanese Forces, and Nabih Berri, leader of the Shi'a Amal Movement and Speaker of Parliament since 1992. According to some, Michel Aoun, the former commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces and leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) also falls into this category. While Aoun certainly rose to fame during the civil war, he was, in fact, not the leader of a militia and did not benefit from the “war system,” rather he tried to dismantle it. Other prominent leaders were both traditional *Zu'ama* and militia leaders, such as the Gemayels (Kata'ib/LF) and the Jumblatts (PSP).

This time period saw the institutionalization of a “war system,” by which the warring factions benefited more from preserving the state of crisis than to seek solutions.¹⁴⁷ Thus civil society (broadly defined), though it has a long history in Lebanon where the state has always had limited influence, ironically rose to true prominence during the civil war, when the central authorities’ ability to govern was virtually non-existent.¹⁴⁸ “Civil society” in this context includes the militias and local notables that took on the role as providers of social services and security in their zones of influence – this is a segment of non-state actors sometimes referred to as “uncivil society.”¹⁴⁹

The concept of “civil society” is problematic as an analytical tool because of the number of different definitions that exist. In its broadest sense, civil society has been defined as any non-state actor (including political parties outside of the state system) and in its most narrow sense it is defined as only including non-violent, non-political associations and NGOs. The heterogeneous character of civil society is not in itself a novel notion; already in the nineteenth century Hegel emphasized the inherent conflicts within civil society and pointed out that civil society overlaps with the state (indeed, should be controlled by a strong state), rather than standing in clear opposition to it, as

¹⁴⁷ F. el-Khazen, “The Postwar Political Process: Authoritarianism by Diffusion,” in Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (eds.), *Lebanon in Limbo: Postwar Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003), 53-74.

¹⁴⁸ Marwan M. Kraidy, “Broadcasting Regulation and Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1998): 387-400; Marwan M. Kraidy, “Television and Civic Discourse in Lebanon.” In Leo A. Gehr and Hussein Y. Amin (eds.), *Civic Discourse and Digital Age Communications in the Middle East* (Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2000), 3-17.

¹⁴⁹ Norton 1995; Khalaf 2002.

John Locke's or Charles de Montesquieu's views would suggest.¹⁵⁰ Inherently a vague concept, various scholars have understood civil society differently. John Keane's concept of civil society, for instance, does not include groups using violent means; in his use, civil society is an ideal-typical category, "that both describes and envisages a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that 'frame', constrict and enable their activities."¹⁵¹

While Keane takes issue with the classical liberal depiction of civil society as inherently "good," even his own definition implies a normative positioning of civil society through excluding groups using violent means. The distinction of "civil" versus "uncivil" society is based on the notion that a "civil" society must "accept the profoundly important idea that there is no right answer."¹⁵² Consequently, groups that do not abide by a "live and let live" philosophy are part of "uncivil" society. According to some critics, such a distinction ignores the importance of organizations that are significant actors simply because we disagree with their objectives and tactics, thus skewing the analysis.¹⁵³ In the Lebanese case, a broad definition of civil society would include religious authorities, political parties that are, or were, militias (e.g. the Lebanese Forces, Hezbollah), foundations affiliated with political patrons, family associations, confessional

¹⁵⁰ John Keane, "Despotism and Democracy." In John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, (London: Verso, 1988), 35-71; S. M. DeLue, *Political Thinking, Political Theory, and Civil Society* (Boston ; London: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).

¹⁵¹ J. Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 6.

¹⁵² Norton 1995: 12.

¹⁵³ N. Kasfir, "Civil society, the state and democracy in Africa," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1998b), 123 – 149.

associations and relief organizations, as well as secular-liberal NGOs and grassroots organizations. Most of these entities operate both inside and outside the boundaries of the state. Thus, the boundaries between civil society and the political sphere are quite fluid, and renegotiations of the civil society-political sphere formula is a struggle internal to civil society as well as external towards the state. During the civil war, there were also technological developments in the media realm that militias seized on. In the absence of state authority, numerous media outlets, from all militias and political parties proliferated to an absurd level.¹⁵⁴

On the whole, Lebanon has a long tradition of a dynamic civil society: “For more than a century...Lebanon sustained a rather vibrant civil society which manifested itself in a lively press and multi-cultural communication networks, an inventive system of private education, a virile, often impetuous and risk-prone entrepreneurship and informal economy, and a spirited voluntary sector.”¹⁵⁵ The vast majority of Lebanese did not join a militia and they never committed atrocities; they spent the civil war years trying to survive and hoping the war would end so that they could return to living normal lives.¹⁵⁶ But there was a segment of the Lebanese population who had no normal lives to which they could return. Rapid urbanization during the 1950s and 1960s¹⁵⁷ and uneven socio-

¹⁵⁴ Marwan Kraidy, “State Control of Television News in 1990s Lebanon,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1998): 485-498; Nabil Dajani, “The Changing Scene of Lebanese Television,” *Transnational Broadcasting Journal*, No. 7 (Fall/Winter 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Khalaf 2003: 138.

¹⁵⁶ T. Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (Beirut and London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 1993); M. Johnson, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (London & New York: Centre of Lebanese Studies & IB Tauris Publishers, 2001).

¹⁵⁷ The proportion of urban residents in Lebanon increased from 27.7 percent to almost 60 percent during the 1950s and 1960s. Khalaf 2002, 169.

economic development between an educated urban middle class and uneducated rural youths without employment had provided militias with fertile soil. In a very real sense, the civil war was not so much a war of others; it was a war of militias on the civilians. Among the ordinary Lebanese, the sense of “losing Lebanon” to “blood maniacs” was a common feeling, and one that is still repeated today whenever tensions are heightened on the political arena. Because of this, even in the mid-1980s, in the midst of the civil war, civil society organizations and unions opposed to militia rule were able to organize strikes and mass protest that drew thousands of participants from across the sectarian spectrum.¹⁵⁸

The civil war also saw the birth of a range of human rights oriented civil society organizations, such as the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) in 1981; the Lebanese Association for Human Rights (*Association Libanaise des Droits de l'Homme – ALDHOM*) in 1985; and the Permanent Peace Movement (PPM) in 1986. In the end, it was not the anti-war movement that ended Lebanon’s civil war. Instead, the war “ended with a final act of war,” namely the violent ousting of General Michel Aoun from the Presidential Palace in Ba’abda by Syrian forces, following an agreement struck in the Saudi town of Ta’if through which the majority of warring factions and, importantly, their foreign sponsors committed to a new Constitution and the imposition of security under a Syrian regime.¹⁵⁹ The Lebanese civil war has led some scholars to announce the

¹⁵⁸ T. Hanf, “Homo Oeconomicus-Homo Communitaris: Crosscutting Loyalties in a Deeply Divided Society: The Case of Trade unions in Lebanon.” In Esman, Milton J. and Rabinovich, Itamar (eds.), *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the state in the Middle East* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.1988); Hanf 1993; Norton 1995.

¹⁵⁹ el-Khazen 2000. The Ta’if Agreement and the ousting of General Aoun are discussed further in Chapter 3.

death of a nation,¹⁶⁰ while others have declared the decline of a state, but *rise* of a nation.¹⁶¹ The reason for these seemingly contradictory assessments lies in the understanding of nationhood and statehood. During the civil war, the Lebanese state ceased to exist in the sense that it no longer could provide security or services for its citizenry. Instead, these responsibilities were taken over by various local militias and patrons. But while the civil war crippled the state, the sense of nationhood was alive in the shared suffering of the ordinary people of all warring sides – those who did not fight in the streets, but simply tried to survive every day. It was from their ranks the anti-war movement drew its membership and it was among these segments of Lebanese citizens civic organizations found a constituency in the 1990s.

Conclusion

The dynamic understanding of nationalism and nation building presented in this chapter assists in framing the environment in which civic activists operate in collective identity terms. The construction of a culture of sectarianism in Lebanon had an enormous impact on both the nation- and state-building projects in Lebanon. Like all collective identities, Lebanon's communal identities are continually defined and redefined, and these processes happen in part through drawing on real and imagined pasts. It will come as no surprise to most that the "Phoenician gene project" found an even distribution of the gene among Lebanon's populations, Christian and Muslim sects alike. The glorification of Lebanon's Phoenician past among some Christians is a clear example of

¹⁶⁰ S. Mackey. *Lebanon: Death of a Nation* (Chicago: Congdon & Weed, 1989).

¹⁶¹ Hanf 1993.

Othering – an attempt to distinguish their nation from the overwhelmingly Islamic Arab world. That communal identities are constructed (or “imagined”) does not, of course, mean that they are not also very real and potent forces in Lebanese society. On the contrary, by the time *le Grand Liban* was conceived and materialized, vertical identification within communal boundaries had already become the social order in the territories it came to encompass. The external involvement in drawing the borders of Lebanon no doubt laid the foundation for constant instability, given the institutionalization of the social order as it had been constructed during the Ottoman period. In the process of creating this “precarious republic,” new political elites emerged, challenging old elites. These challengers to the traditional families emerged either through rising to prominence by achieving economic success and influence, such as the Beirut economic elites challenging the old “feudal” mountain elites in the creation of *le Grand Liban*, or, as happened later in the country’s history, “warlord” elites gaining power through the militias that dominated politics during the civil war.

In this process, some of the traditional *Zu’ama* became marginalized, while others were able to reinvent themselves in the new Lebanon through seeking new sources of legitimacy (e.g. adopting pan-Arab and secular ‘ideologies’). Arguably, this need to seek new sources of legitimacy indicates both certain agility among elites, and also the existence of pressures from “below.” However, the ability of the broader public to get access to a public space free of a patrimonial logic was not facilitated by the creation of Lebanon’s democratic institutions. Instead, in the modern state of Lebanon, the clientelist system was institutionalized and communal identities were enshrined. As this chapter has sought to show, the Lebanese political and civil societies have been – and are

continuously – shaped by interactions of various collectives and the manipulation of collective identities by political elites. Moreover, while the power-sharing system employed in Lebanon ostensibly facilitated cooperation between the various communities, in reality it is designed to facilitate cooperation between *certain elites* within those communities, leading to intra-communal conflict as well. Indeed, the assumption that Lebanon’s various communities are homogenous entities not only disregards the dynamic character of collective identities, but also the very tangible power struggles between elites occurring within each community. Thus, for example, the Maronite community has seen struggles between the Eddés, Chamouns, Frangiyehs, and Gemayels; the Sunni community between the el-Solhs and Salams; the Shi’a between the Asads, Zayns, and the Khalils; the Druze between the Arslans and Jumblats, and so on.

Significantly, in these power struggles identity politics are frequently used to mobilize support; the use of communal identity and the claim to representing *the* Maronite community or *the* Shi’a community are commonplace in Lebanon’s history of violence and conflict. Rather than being a cause of Lebanon’s malaise, then, societal sectarianism (as opposed to political sectarianism) is better understood as an infrastructure for mobilization utilized by political elites to bolster support for their agenda. Given the central role of elites and external actors in Lebanon’s political history, it is no surprise most studies of Lebanon focus on that particular level of analysis. Indeed, as this chapter has illustrated, Lebanon’s political system was designed to manage elite relations rather than providing citizens with space for political participation. Why, then, does this study focus on grassroots activism? The reason is that an elite-focus not only neglects the dynamics that no doubt happen under the surface, as the tendency of political

elites to constantly seek new sources of legitimacy would suggest, but it also makes Lebanon appear more unique than it is. To be sure, due to the specific type of consociational political system, and its geostrategic location in relation to one of the world's most protracted and infected conflicts, Lebanon is easily dismissed as an anomaly, not useful as a comparison with other cases. But, as this and the following chapters will emphasize, Lebanon is no anomaly, but offers an opportunity to study dynamics that happen anywhere there are struggles from below to broaden the space for political participation. Civic activists in Lebanon are trying to construct an *'asabiyyah* built on other ties than kinship, and they struggle to compete with cultural systems, which have developed over a century and a half, institutionalized in the political system and incorporated in the national mythology of Lebanon. They are fighting battles on the institutional and cultural level, trying to both reform the political system and transform the mindset of the populace.

They do this in an environment where the modus operandi of political elites is to utilize identity politics and co-opt popular agendas in order to secure influence in the Lebanese state and society. Thus, Lebanon's civic activists not only face significant challenges to their goals of creating a collective identity based on citizenship, but also challenges in the form of a history of political elites utilizing popular sentiments for their own gains. The challenges Lebanon's political and civil societies pose to the civic movement cannot be understood simply through a lens of communal coexistence and conflict, but must be understood in a context of continuous negotiations of collective identities, funneled into a communal mold by a sectarian system and manipulated by political elites.

In the chapters that follow, several important themes to come out of this chapter are recurrent. First, the theme of a patrimonial logic pervading institutional structures in Lebanon and the creation of a political system centered on *Zu'ama* management rather than citizen representation. Second, the “East-West divide” playing out in Lebanon’s national identity debate – i.e. the issue of Lebanon’s “Arab face.” Third, the role of *‘asabiyyah* in the civic struggle to gain access to the political sphere and the resultant clash with other identities. As a first step towards better understanding the dynamics at work in attempts from below to broaden the space for political participation, the next chapter will frame the emergence of “new” types of civil society organizations on the Lebanese scene in the post-civil war years of 1990-2000 in a social movement approach. Doing so, I argue, will yield both important insights in the specific case of Lebanon, but, more importantly, illustrate the “un-uniqueness” of Lebanon.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF LEBANON'S CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Those who are outside looking in see only the war. For us, there are people, friends, life, activity, production, commitments, a profound intensity of meaning. It is these things that have given us the strength to continue, even when we are filled with doubt, for they reassert themselves during and after every battle. Most important of all, there has been a sense of community so powerful as to compensate for the difficulties of life.

Jean Said Makdisi, Beirut Fragments, 1990

Introduction

Lebanon's civil war ended in 1990 with a final act of violent warfare, as interim Prime Minister Michel Aoun was ousted by Syrian troops from the Presidential Palace in Ba'abda, located in the southeastern outskirts of Beirut. The removal of Aoun ushered in Lebanon's Second Republic, resting on a revised Constitution as laid out in the Ta'if Agreement, which was ratified in 1989 by the majority of the surviving members of the 1972 Lebanese Parliament – the last to be elected before the outbreak of civil war in 1975.¹⁶² However, it became increasingly clear as the years went on that the Second Republic was enjoying a peace entirely on Syria's terms – a *Pax Syriana*.

Under Syria's stewardship, the state in Lebanon became gradually more securitized, political freedoms were curtailed, and non-cooperative political elites were marginalized, exiled, or jailed. In this increasingly oppressive environment, a new type of civil society actors emerged, launching nationwide social movements that amounted to efforts to increase citizen influence in the political sphere. Not only did they resist efforts by the political sphere to assert its influence over civil society, but they also initiated a

¹⁶² J. Maila, *The Document of National Understanding: A Commentary* (Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies, 1992).

renegotiation of the historical civil society-political sphere formula in Lebanon. This chapter examines the macro- and micro-processes involved in social movement formation in post-civil war Lebanon. It outlines the development in the latter half of the 1990s of networks of civic grassroots organizations, examines the structural potential for social movement activity, identifies the macro-level factors that allowed for new actors to emerge on the political scene, and links these to micro-level factors of resource mobilization and social network formation. Using a social movement theory framework, it examines how it was possible for independent associational life to develop after Lebanon's civil war, despite a highly polarized society and an unfavorable political climate where security, stability, and reconstruction frequently took precedence over political freedoms.

This chapter examines three vital components for movement formation put forth by social movement theory – political opportunities/constraints, insurgent consciousness, and organizational strength – in Lebanon's post-war environment (1990 – 2000).¹⁶³ The key goals of this chapter are to delineate the core characteristics of the “new” associational life of post-civil war Lebanon; examine the macro and micro level factors that allowed for the emergence of new avenues of political participation in Lebanon; and provide a plausible account of why some grassroots activity saw opportunities in the 1990s, while others experienced severe constraints. I present the argument that the emergence and proliferation of civic organizations since the 1990s to a significant degree was a result of the civil war of 1975-1990, which produced a movement toward the

¹⁶³ S. Tarrow. *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965-1974* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); David S. Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 30 (2004): 125-145.

establishment of a “civic” state and, importantly, created a constituency for CSOs working to that end. In the context of a broader regional and global development toward civil society mobilization, Lebanese activists utilized existing associational structures to create new modes of action adapted to the political constraints they faced in the post-civil war era. By fostering elite support in a political situation of weak elite unity and primarily focusing on uncontroversial single-issue campaigns, civic organizations were able to carve a space for themselves and avoided the fate that Lebanon’s trade unions suffered during the same period. Experiencing both failure and success, the 1990s was a learning period for Lebanon’s emerging civic movement, during which time activists developed the modes of action and cultural frames that continue to be utilized by Lebanon’s civic movement today. The analysis in this chapter primarily draws on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews conducted in Lebanon in 2008 and 2009, and survey data from the time period 1981-2008.¹⁶⁴

This chapter will proceed with a discussion of the characteristics of the civic organizations that emerged in the aftermath of Lebanon’s civil war. Turning to the question of how they were able to emerge and proliferate, political constraints and opportunities facing the emerging Lebanese civic organizations in the early 1990s are examined next. This is followed by an examination of the civic organizations’ constituency through tracing the materialization of a collective sense of injustice, or, to use the language of social movement theory, the awakening of an “insurgent

¹⁶⁴ Hanf 1993; T. Hanf, “The Sceptical Nation: Opinions and Attitudes Twelve Years after the End of the War,” in Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (eds.) *Lebanon in Limbo: Postwar Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.2003), 197-228; T. Hanf, “E pluribus unum? Lebanese Opinions and Attitudes on Coexistence” (Centre International des Sciences de l’Homme, International Centre for Human Sciences & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Byblos [Jbeil], Lebanon, 2007); UNDP 2009; the World Bank 2009.

consciousness.” Finally, I turn to the mobilization of resources – how civic activists organized and created networks, secured funding, developed media strategies, forged alliances with elites, and developed the institutional structures that form the foundation of Lebanon’s civic movement today.

The proliferation of civic grassroots organizations

In the latter half of the 1990s, Lebanon saw a significant increase in civil society activities outside the traditional civil society realm of community and charity work.¹⁶⁵ In part, this development can be attributed to the general improvement in the security situation and end to the de facto cantonization of Lebanon brought about by the civil war, making it possible for people to move more freely across the country. But the Lebanese development was not just toward increased participation in existing modes of activism; new modes of participation were also developed. While anti-sectarian and pro-secular state arguments are themes that have existed throughout Lebanon’s history, in particular among pan-Arab and socialist political currents (see chapter 2), in the post-civil war era the proponents of these themes were not primarily political parties, but non-political associations in the civil society realm.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, the post-civil war period saw a proliferation of non-affiliated civil society organizations, populated by individuals who because of their socio-economic positions (e.g. intellectuals, self-employed professionals, and students) were not beholden to political patrons or religious authorities.¹⁶⁷ During

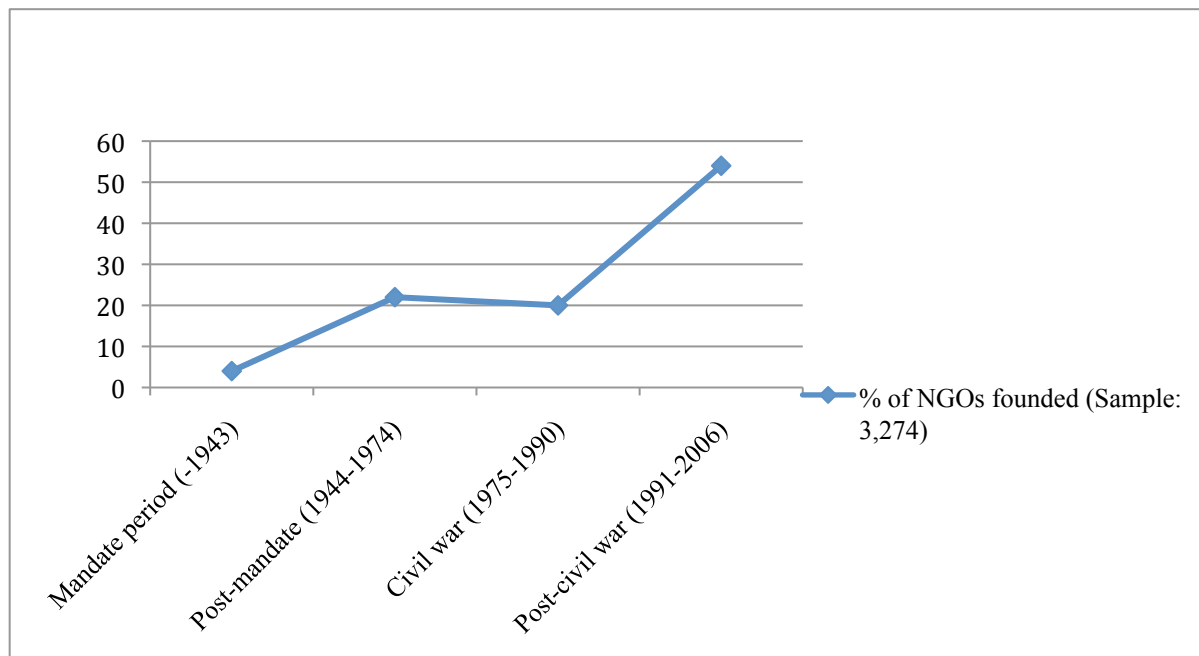
¹⁶⁵ Abou Assi 2006; S. Djoundourian, “Environmental Movement in Lebanon,” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2007), 427-438; Hanf 2002; Karam 2005, 2006, 2009.

¹⁶⁶ Interview LCPS researcher, Beirut, August 4, 2008.

¹⁶⁷ UNDP-HDR 2008-2009.

this time period, civic activist networks launched two major campaigns; in 1997 the Rally for the holding of Municipal Elections (RME) became the first sustained campaign to cover the entire nation at the same time, and in 1998 the Rally for an Optional Civil Code on Personal Status – Civil Marriage (RCM) utilized similar network structures across Lebanon in a campaign to pass legislation that would institute civil marriage.¹⁶⁸ Figure 3.1 shows the trend of NGO establishment in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries from a sample of 3,274 existing NGOs. While 20 percent of NGOs in the sample were founded during the thirty-year period of the post-mandate period, no less than 54 percent of them were founded in the fifteen-year post-civil war period of 1991-2006.

Fig. 3.1: Founding period of NGOs – historical trend



Source: UNDP Human Development Report Lebanon 2008-2009

¹⁶⁸ For a comprehensive study of the RME and RCM, see Karam 2006.

It should be noted that because the sample is limited to currently existing NGOs, the results are likely to be slanted towards higher observation values in more recent years, as NGOs established in earlier years has had more time to run its life cycle and disband. Furthermore, from this particular data set, there is no way of distinguishing between the type of *civic* organization of immediate interest to this study, and other types of NGOs. Nevertheless, while there are obvious risks with drawing too far-reaching conclusions from these numbers alone, they do mirror global developments of increased NGO activity in the 1990 – 2005 time period,¹⁶⁹ and support the claim made by several observers that the post-civil war period in Lebanon saw an increase in civil activism.¹⁷⁰

What is clear in the Lebanese case is that the 1990s saw the birth of some of the most established and significant civic-oriented NGOs active today; for example, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE – 1996) and the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA – 1999, as a chapter of Transparency International). Moreover, during this time period Lebanon’s environmental movement first began to take shape, the post-war period seeing the establishment of no less than eighty-five environmental NGOs.¹⁷¹ These organizations differed from what Lebanon had seen previously: “Instead of a hierarchical and vertical organization, new horizontal structures that are more flexible are set up.... They operate in an ad hoc manner, by reducing the number of paid staff (limited to managing the secretariat). They depend on a group of

¹⁶⁹ J. McGann and M. Johnstone, “The Power Shift and the NGO Credibility Crisis,” *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (January 2006).

¹⁷⁰ Abou Assi 2006; Djoundourian 2007; Hanf 2002; Karam 2006.

¹⁷¹ Djoundourian 2007.

voluntary workers and specialize in their field of interest.”¹⁷² Importantly, these new organizations were not restricted to community or charity operations, nor did they restrict themselves to the “cultural” realm of civil society, but focused on the democratic practices and structures of the Lebanese polity. By doing so, I argue, they essentially engaged with the authorities in a negotiation to establish a new role for civil society vis-à-vis the political sphere. While the organizations emerging in the 1990s were of a new breed in terms of organizational structure and the range of their modes of operation, organizations that can be considered their predecessors had emerged during the civil war, primarily in the realms of advocacy, such as the LPHU (1981); human rights, such as ALDHOM (1985); and anti-war activism, such as the PPM (1986).

Unlike these organizations, however, the new organizations operated to a greater extent on an *ad hoc* basis and focused on building networks and coalitions across the country. Indeed, their organizational mode and rights-based focus correspond with the New Social Movements (NSM), which some social movement theorists argue emerged as western societies entered a post-industrial era in the 1960s and onwards.¹⁷³ NSMs, they argue, were different from earlier social movements in that their focus was not on material/economic needs, but centered on human rights and equality claims. NSMs also tended to operate by a less rigid organizational model than their predecessors, essentially consisting of loosely coordinated social networks. The women’s movement, gay rights movement, and anti-globalization movement all display the characteristics of NSMs. There are, however, factors that distinguish the Lebanese movements from the typical

¹⁷² Karam 2005: 316-317.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Melucci 1980; Habermas 1981; Eder 1985; Offe 1985; Cohen 1985.

NSM. NSMs tend to focus on broader issues, often transnational in character, and while they can utilize “protest campaigns” as part of their mode of action on the individual member organization level, the movement as such does not limit itself to specific public policy changes. The Lebanese organizations, however, certainly put forth rights-based claims and operated on a network basis rather than hierarchical organizational structures, but they were very much national in character, albeit often funded by foreign donors, and never overtly formulated a broad overarching goal of, for instance, abolishing confessionalism and establishing a civic state in Lebanon. Instead, they employed campaigns that pushed for specific legislation and changes in public policy, such as holding municipal elections or making legal civil unions.

In some ways, these organizations acted as interest groups, lobbying for ‘material’ change in terms of policy and institutional reform, but implicitly their objectives were more far-reaching. They mobilized around rights-based arguments and employed awareness campaigns that not only focused on the specific issue at hand, but also aimed to instill a sense of active citizenship among the populace. In other words, the new organizations that emerged in Lebanon during the post-civil war period displayed characteristics from both NSMs and “traditional” social movements. In this process, these new organizations faced challenges from multiple levels – they had to carve a space for themselves in the existing civil society, while simultaneously facing attempts by the state to assert its authority over civil society in the post-civil war environment. The following section examines the macro-factors of political constraints and opportunities for civic activists in *Pax Syriana* Lebanon.

Political constraints and opportunities

Theories centering on political constraints and opportunities emphasize the structural context of contentious challenges from social movements.¹⁷⁴ In other words, the environment in which engaged individuals attempt to organize and coordinate their actions can offer both constraints and opportunities for their ability to engage in contentious politics.¹⁷⁵ Tarrow's definition of political opportunity is: "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics."¹⁷⁶ Traditionally, social movement scholars look to the level of the state to identify political opportunities and constraints.

Thus, political constraints limiting the ability of grassroots to organize are found to be severe in a context with efficient repression, unity among ruling elites, and a high level of centralized control of the state. Conversely, political opportunities can emerge when there is a decline in the effectiveness of repression on the part of the state, elite disunity leading to internal fragmentation in the ruling segment, or a broadening of access to institutional political participation. Beyond the state, the physical environment itself can also be either permissive or restrictive to people engaging in collective action; in the Lebanese case, the end of armed conflict and higher levels of security can certainly be seen as the lifting of an external constraint on grassroots activism, but, as the following section will show, the end of civil war in Lebanon brought both constraints and opportunities for social movement formation.

¹⁷⁴ Kriesi 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1989; Meyer 2004.

¹⁷⁵ Tarrow 1989.

¹⁷⁶ Tarrow 1998.

Ending the civil war – the political constraints and opportunities of *Pax Syriana*

The environment in which Lebanon's civic movement emerged in the 1990s was not ideal to grassroots activity. Quite the contrary; the agreement that ended the civil war placed most warlords in positions of power while marginalizing the role of civil society.¹⁷⁷ The Document of National Understanding, (commonly known as the "Ta'if Agreement," after the city in Saudi Arabia where it was signed), put in writing what the National Pact of 1943 only said in words regarding Lebanon's confessional system.¹⁷⁸ Officially ending the civil war, it was signed under Arab league auspices in the fall of 1989 by fifty-eight of the sixty-two surviving members of the last elected parliament.¹⁷⁹

Syria had maintained a significant military presence in Lebanon since 1976, when it intervened upon the request of the Lebanese government to stop the fighting that had broken out between various militias in 1975. Once the implementation of the Ta'if Agreement had been initiated, a certain level of elite unity was achieved, albeit through forceful means and threats of violence. Elites who opposed the new order were isolated, as in the case of Michel Aoun, or neutralized with forceful means, as in the case of Lebanese Forces (LF)¹⁸⁰ leader Samir Geagea's imprisonment. The Ta'if Agreement

¹⁷⁷ F. Kiwan, "The Formation of Lebanese Civil Society," *The Beirut Review*, Vol. 6 (Fall 1993): 69-74.

¹⁷⁸ The National Pact (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*) of 1943, a gentlemen's agreement between the Christian leader Bechara al-Khoury and the Sunni leader Riad al-Solh, set forth the formula upon which Lebanese politics would be based for decades to come. It was here the governmental positions were distributed among the different religious communities, the president had to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the house Shi'a etc. The National Pact affirmed the Arab identity of Lebanon, and assured that Lebanon would remain neutral, not giving any outside power a privileged position on its soil. For an extensive study of the National Pact of 1943. See el-Khazen 1991.

¹⁷⁹ Norton 1991: 461. A full English version of the Ta'if Agreement can be found in the *Beirut Review*, no 1, 1991 (translation Paul Salem).

¹⁸⁰ The Lebanese Forces was the Christian militia developed by the late Bashir Gemayel, brother of the President and himself President-elect at the time of his assassination in 1982. The LF originally developed

emerged against the background of Syria trying to impose a President on Lebanon when President Amin Gemayel's term was up in 1988.¹⁸¹ When the LF refused to accept the Syrian candidates, President Gemayel resorted to appointing Maronite General Michel Aoun prime minister in an interim government. This was a severe breach of Lebanese political tradition and caused a deadlock between the opposing camps. Furthermore, the appointment of Aoun led to the existence of two rival governments: one under the General's leadership, and one under Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss, who had taken office in 1987 when Prime Minister Rashid Karame was assassinated. In March 1989, General Aoun, who commanded a segment of the Lebanese Army, in alliance with the LF launched a "war of liberation" against Syria and when the Ta'if Agreement was signed in the fall, Aoun refused to implement it.

In 1990, the Iraq-Kuwait crisis helped Syria acquire western acquiescence for their presence in Lebanon, as Syria joined the coalition against its rival Ba'th regime in Iraq.¹⁸² Indeed, after years of militia rule the Lebanese public responded well, at least initially, to the "romantic, secular nationalism" of General Aoun. However, while the popular mood among the Lebanese favored the dismantling of militias and an end to foreign occupation, the United States was in favor of a stabilizing force, essentially promoting "a new central regime incorporating the militias...under a Syrian security

as the military wing of the Kata'ib (Phalange) party, but a separate political wing of the LF was later created and the separation from the Kata'ib was a fact. The LF was one of the most powerful and richest militias in Lebanon during the 1980s. For more on the various militias in Lebanon during the war, see W. Harris, *Faces of Lebanon: Sects, Wars, and Global Extensions* (Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, 1997).

¹⁸¹ Norton 1991.

¹⁸² Y. Sadowski, *Scuds or Butter? The Political Economy of the Arms Control in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993).

umbrella.”¹⁸³ Furthermore, in the beginning of 1990, the union between the LF and Aoun’s Lebanese Army collapsed and violence broke out between the two.¹⁸⁴ During this time, Michel Aoun tried to break the influence of the militias by, for instance, forcefully wresting control of the Beirut port from the LF (which earlier had joined Aoun in confronting the Syrians) and placing militia-controlled ports elsewhere in the country under blockades. Such acts of reasserting state authority resonated with a significant segment of the Lebanese. Finally, in the fall of 1990, the Syrians and their Lebanese allies, backed by the international legitimacy of the Ta’if Agreement, drove Aoun out from the presidential palace in Ba’abda into exile in France.¹⁸⁵

The Ta’if Agreement contained parts that had been included in agreements drafted by Syria in previous failed attempts to end the fighting, thus ensuring that Syrian interests were met, despite the fact that they were not the party to put forth the agreement.¹⁸⁶ The bulk of the Ta’if Agreement regards the textual changes made in the Lebanese constitution. Other parts regard ending the state of war, disbanding the various militias, and Lebanese-Syrian relations. Because the Syrian forces were viewed as imperative in the implementation of the early stages of the Ta’if, i.e. the ending of the state of war and disarming of the militias, the agreement awarded them special status. In

¹⁸³ Harris 1997: 208-209.

¹⁸⁴ R. Avi-Ran, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ The previous agreements referred to are the Constitutional Document from 1976 and the Tripartite agreement from 1985, which was an agreement between the three main militias in wartime Lebanon and was signed by Elie Hubeiq of the Lebanese Forces, Nabih Berri of Harakat Amal, and Walid Jumblat of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). The Tripartite agreement collapsed when President Amin Gemayel, Samir Geagea (who in the process overthrew Elie Hubeiq as leader for the LF) and other Christian leaders rejected it. See el-Khazen, 2000.

the actual political system, the most important changes were the increase of seats in parliament from 99 to 128, the shift in Christian-Muslim ratio from 6:5 to 5:5, and the reduced power of the President of the Republic.¹⁸⁷ In the new constitution the president lost most of his executive powers and became the head of state and the symbol of the nation's unity. After the Ta'if, the president was in effect part of a decision-making troika consisting of himself, the prime minister, and the speaker of the house; theoretically dividing executive power equally among the Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi'a Muslim communities. However, this "troika system" often led to stalemates between the three offices. In such situations, Syria functioned as the mediator, which effectively provided Syria with a tool to control the Lebanese leadership.

Indeed, the Syrians skillfully used personal rivalries among Lebanese elites for their own purposes, playing arbiter, for instance, in the tensions between President Hrawi and Speaker Husseini, and later President Lahoud and Prime Minister Hariri. This Syrian practice of maneuvering elite rivalry and antipathies was not restricted to the top positions of the state, but was also a method they used in local districts, when facilitating alliances for elections lists, aiming to marginalize political elites who were not their favored candidates. While elite disunity could be used to Syria's advantage, it also meant that there were opportunities for other actors to find allies among the elites. Indeed, the marginalization of some elites to the advantage of others would in the long run provide fertile soil for the emergence of an opposition capable of challenging the Syrian hegemony. This challenge would originate in, but not be limited to, the Christian

¹⁸⁷ The Ta'if Agreement actually stipulated the number of seats in parliament be raised to 108, but this was later amended to 128. Salem 1991. The Ta'if also 'embraced' the abolishing of religious distribution of all government positions, but set no timeline for implementation. See Khalaf 2002, and UNDP-HDR 2008-2009.

communities in Lebanon. To ameliorate fears that the Syrian presence would be made permanent, the Ta'if Agreement called for Syrian redeployment of troops to specific areas two years after the incorporation of the Ta'if provisions into the Lebanese constitution. Notably, the agreement did not provide a detailed schedule for a complete withdrawal of Syrian forces; this issue was to be subject of further negotiations between the Lebanese and Syrian governments. But when the scheduled time for the first Syrian redeployment of troops came in the fall of 1992, no redeployment occurred and the troops remained in place.¹⁸⁸

Many Lebanese, especially among the Christian communities, who felt they had been marginalized in the Ta'if Agreement, had been uncomfortable with Syria's role ever since the signing of the agreement. To them, the Syrian disregard for the redeployment plan in the agreement confirmed their fears that Syria was in fact annexing Lebanon. This fear has deep roots; it harked back to the debate on Lebanon's borders as the new state was being carved out during the French Mandate period (see chapter 2). Essentially, they feared that Lebanon would be transformed from a country with an "Arab face," into simply an "Arab country," with an insignificant Christian minority in an overwhelmingly Islamic Arab world, thus, in their view, erasing Lebanon's unique character. Indeed, the dissatisfaction among Christians with the Second Republic began to spread, both among political elites and the broader populace. As the next section will show, this growing dissatisfaction was clearly reflected in the first parliamentary elections since the civil war began.

¹⁸⁸ el-Khazen 2000.

Elite disunity and increased “securitization” of Lebanese society

The first post-civil war parliamentary elections were held in 1992, but the process through which they were held was widely criticized for not being transparent, directed by Syria, and essentially undemocratic.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the 1992 elections suffered from an exceptionally low voter turnout, which was, to a great extent, the result of a boycott carried out by the mainstream Christian parties – a manifestation of the growing Christian dissatisfaction with the post-civil war equilibrium.¹⁹⁰ Presidential elections had been held during the war (in 1976, 1982, and 1989), but since the president is elected through parliamentary, not popular, vote, the parliamentary election of 1992 was the first opportunity for the Lebanese citizens to exercise their democratic right since 1972.

Significantly, the elections were criticized and boycotted not only by political elites who had been opposed to the Ta’if Agreement in the first place, but also by actors who had actively supported it, such as the Kata’ib Party, Samir Geagea’s LF, and the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir.¹⁹¹ These Christian elites had given their support to the Ta’if Agreement, which was widely unpopular among their constituents, under the precondition that the agreement would be implemented in full, including several clauses that had direct significance to their constituents. Indeed, Christian concerns with selective implementation of militia disarmament (e.g. exempting

¹⁸⁹ Farid el-Khazen, “Lebanon’s First Postwar Parliamentary Elections, 1992,” *Middle East Policy*, Volume 3, No. 1 (March 1994), 120–136; Iliya Harik, “Pluralism in the Arab World.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1994), 43-56.

¹⁹⁰ el-Khazen 1994. Khalaf speaks of *al-ihbat al-Masihi* (Christian hopelessness and discontent). Khalaf 2002: 54.

¹⁹¹ el-Khazen 1994.

Hezbollah from disarmament),¹⁹² disregard for Christians displaced by the war,¹⁹³ extensive gerrymandering of electoral districts to create a majority of MPs aligned with Syria, and the appointment of only Christians with close ties to the Syrians in cabinet positions,¹⁹⁴ all combined to create a collective sense of disenfranchisement among the Christian population. Consequently, the Christian elites who had supported the agreement not only saw themselves marginalized in comparison to other political elites, but their position vis-à-vis their constituency was also further undermined, while Michel Aoun's early opposition to the agreement appeared to be validated.

In other words, in the first two years of *Pax Syriana*, elite disunity was brewing. Indeed, the immediate post-civil war period was not one of harmonious peace and understanding, but despite disunity among the political elites, grassroots activists did not immediately find allies among political elites. In addition to crippling government crises in the early 1990s, Lebanon's historically open society became increasingly influenced by the Syrian security regime as Syria consolidated its hold on Lebanon throughout the 1990s. In May 1991, the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination between the Lebanese Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic" was signed in Damascus.¹⁹⁵ The treaty established a formal structure for setting and implementing coordinated policies on

¹⁹² Hezbollah was awarded special status as a "national resistance" against the continued Israeli occupation of a part of southern Lebanon. Consequently, Hezbollah was exempt from the disarming of militias that commenced after the end of the civil war.

¹⁹³ Of the 827,000 residents displaced because of war 1975-1989, 670,000 were Christians and 157,000 Muslims. See Khalaf 2002: 301.

¹⁹⁴ The stipulation in the Ta'if Agreement that Lebanon's six *Muhafazat* (North Lebanon, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Beqaa, Nabatiyya, and South Lebanon) would constitute electoral districts (ensuring cross-sectarian voting) was ignored and the election was instead carried out based on the smaller *Qada'* (district).

¹⁹⁵ For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see an-Nahar, May 23, 1991.

the military, political, internal security, and economic levels between Syria and Lebanon. Critics of the Syrian role in Lebanon interpreted even the date chosen by the Syrians to sign the treaty, May 22, 1991, as a message of significant symbolism; it was the first anniversary of the reunification of the two Yemens, further stoking fears of a Syrian annexation of Lebanon.¹⁹⁶ The pact stipulated that Lebanon conduct all policies in harmony with Syria. In return, Syria promised to respect Lebanon's liberal political system and capitalist economy. In the treaty's third article, which emphasized the interconnectedness of the Syrian and Lebanese security, Syria committed itself to "not allow any action that threatens Lebanon's security, independence and sovereignty."¹⁹⁷

In effect, Syria was given control over Lebanese sovereignty; a formal request from the Lebanese government for assistance was no longer a necessary prerequisite for Syrian military action on Lebanese soil. Furthermore, the treaty established joint councils in which the decision-makers of the two countries were to coordinate their actions. The most important of them was the Supreme Council, which was vested with executive powers and consisted of the two presidents, prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, and speakers of the house. However, in reality the Lebanese members of the council had no decision-making status, neither singly nor collectively, providing Syria with unprecedented influence over the decision-making process in Lebanon.¹⁹⁸ In August 1991, the first of a series of "special agreements" to follow the Treaty of Brotherhood,

¹⁹⁶ F. Nasrallah, "The Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination: An Assessment," in Y. M. Choueiri (ed.), *State and Society in Syria and Lebanon* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), pp 103-108.

¹⁹⁷ R. G. Rabil, "The Maronites and Syrian Withdrawal: From 'Isolationists' to 'Traitors'?" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September 2001): 28.

¹⁹⁸ Nasrallah 1993.

the Defense and Security Agreement, was signed.¹⁹⁹ It stipulated that the two countries should prevent any activity in the political, military, or civil realms that might harm either country.²⁰⁰ Importantly, the treaty assured the Syrian intelligence network full access to its Lebanese counterpart's resources, data as well as personnel. According to several human rights organizations, the Syrian incursions into Lebanese civil society were manifested in repeated violations of human rights; in the early years of the Syrian occupation, opponents of the status quo were arrested and numerous newspapers were shut down.²⁰¹

Indeed, Lebanon's traditionally free media landscape was no exception from the securitization of the country; in 1994 the Lebanese government suspended all television news broadcasts between March and July, following the bombing of a Maronite Church in Beirut.²⁰² The same church bombing was used to silence Samir Geagea, who after his fallout with Michel Aoun and acceptance of the Ta'if Agreement had become an increasingly problematic figure for the Syrian security regime.²⁰³ Geagea was arrested in June 1994 and would spend the following eleven years in solitary confinement.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see an-Nahar, September 7, 1991.

²⁰⁰ H. C. Malik, *Between Damascus and Jerusalem: Lebanon and the Middle East Peace* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997).

²⁰¹ See, for instance, U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 1993. See also the annual reports by the Foundation of Human and Humanitarian Rights, in particular 1992, 1993, and 1994.

²⁰² USDS 1994.

²⁰³ Johnson 2001.

²⁰⁴ Geagea was also accused of assassinating Prime Minister Rashid Karami, rival Christian leader Dany Chamoun and his family, and LF member Elias al-Zayek. While acquitted in the church bombing case, Geagea received four life sentences in the other cases. He was released after the exit of the Syrian forces in 2005. See Amnesty International 2004. In addition to Aoun, Amine Gemayel and Raymond Edde saw fit to enter into exile, further reducing the number of influential Christian leaders on the scene. Khalaf 2002, 54.

Reports of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of Syria's critics had an intimidating effect on the Lebanese public and the government increasingly restrained civil society in the name of security and stability.²⁰⁵ One civic activist commented on the post-civil war environment: "It was an exciting time really, but much more dangerous than now. The Syrians were a much bigger factor – they controlled everything. Security and reconstruction was the mantra of the authorities, we really had to work hard to make ourselves heard in those early days."²⁰⁶ The restraints on free speech and, perhaps to an even greater extent, free assembly, were substantial. These restraints were predominantly directed towards critics of the Syrian order in Lebanon, but the most pronounced restriction of public assembly actually came about after a clash between partisans of Hezbollah, which was supported by Syria and Iran, and security forces in 1993, when the former took to the streets to protest the Oslo Agreement.²⁰⁷

Subsequently, the government banned demonstrations and public gatherings, but in a number of instances the government did not follow through on implementing the ban when challenged.²⁰⁸ According to one participant in several manifestations for the holding of municipal elections (discussed further below), this reluctance to implement the ban stemmed partly from the fear of disrupting public calm in the streets, but also from the obviously civilian character of the participants:

We did encounter security forces, but they didn't intervene for the most part, I think they were very concerned with creating scenes of unrest in the streets. Especially since we obviously weren't the usual *shabab* [youth] from political

²⁰⁵ See, for instance, Amnesty International Annual Report, 1997.

²⁰⁶ Interview, Beirut, August 24, 2008.

²⁰⁷ Karam 2009.

²⁰⁸ Karam 2005.

parties, we were professionals, students, lawyers, people from all walks of life in Lebanon. It would have looked really bad for the authorities to beat up unarmed regular civilians who were simply exercising our right to demonstrate.²⁰⁹

Furthermore, the non-partisan message of the demonstrations also made it difficult to justify crackdowns. After all, the authorities could hardly claim that a call to hold local elections was a threat to public security or represented the agenda of a specific political faction. The authorities' impatience even with actors who enjoyed the backing of Syria, such as Hezbollah, demonstrates their concern with security – the only overtly political manifestations that were tolerated were those specifically in the interest of the authorities, any other manifestation was to be discouraged, regardless of who instigated it. Hezbollah, as the only remaining militia in the country, certainly enjoyed Syria's backing, but it was also reigned in and kept in check by the Syrian military presence.

The end of militia rule did, of course, not mean an end to corruption and patrimonialism. Instead, Lebanese political elites returned to a “business as usual” mode of operation within the framework of the security regime. This use of security doctrine for personal gain is clearly illustrated by the developments in broadcasting legislation during this time period. During the civil war the number of broadcasting outlets had reached an extreme level, as state regulation of the airwaves was practically non-existent.²¹⁰ Consequently, after the war the Lebanese authorities saw fit to regulate the airwaves; not through de-privatization, but through restricting the number of stations

²⁰⁹ Interview, Beirut, July 18, 2008.

²¹⁰ M. M. Kraidy, “The Global, the Local, and the Hybrid: A Native Ethnography of Glocalization,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 16 (1999), 454-467; Dajani 2001.

licensed to operate.²¹¹ All stations awarded licenses were in one way or another linked to a politician in a prominent position, with the possible exception of Hezbollah's *al-Manar* (the Beacon), which was awarded special status at a later date. Among ordinary citizens, this state of affairs did not inspire much faith in the fairness of the broadcasting licensing process, and further confirmed the popular view of Lebanon as a patrimonial and corrupt society. Moreover, adding to the suspicions of those observers fearing that the liberal media climate in Lebanon had become a casualty of the civil war, the Audio-Visual Law of 1994 gave certain rights of censorship to the Lebanese authorities, a development which troubled many journalists. In ambiguous words, the law stipulated that news and political programs were not to disturb public order, national defense interests or public interest.²¹²

At a time when Syria enjoyed full military hegemony over Lebanon, with the exception of Israel's "security belt" in southern Lebanon, many journalists were bound to ask themselves exactly who – the Lebanese or Syrian leadership – was to determine when national defense or public interests were threatened. If there were any doubts as to the answer to that question, Emile Lahoud's elevation to the presidency in 1998, through Syrian maneuvering, was followed by an increased securitization of Lebanon's political and civil society, leading some observers to speak of Syria "cloning itself" in Lebanon.²¹³ To be sure, compared to authoritarian states in the region, the Lebanese state remained relatively decentralized and never reached the levels of efficient repression found in, for

²¹¹ Kraidy 1998.

²¹² Kraidy 1999.

²¹³ Ibid.

instance, Syria or, at that time, Egypt. Nevertheless, by Lebanese standards there was a clear development toward centralization and securitization, and in this environment civic activists risked harassment from authorities for carrying out any acts that could be perceived as a threat to the “internal stability” of Lebanon. In fact, *direct* challenges to the security regime did meet with violent repression, such as the aforementioned Hezbollah protests in 1993, which had not been sanctioned by the Syrians, or street protests against the Syrian occupation by student activists from Aoun’s FPM in 2000, 2001, and 2002.²¹⁴

Indeed, in the words of Samir Khalaf, Lebanon was “being engulfed by all the disheartening manifestations of mounting disempowerment and subjugation.”²¹⁵ In order to maneuver such constraints civic activists chose both non-confrontational and confrontational strategies. On the one hand they adopted a non-confrontational strategy with regards to choosing campaigns; instead of attacking issues that directly threatened the post-civil war order, they targeted partial goals that would be difficult to depict as beneficial to a specific sect or political group, such as the holding of municipal elections.²¹⁶ On the other hand, when challenged by the state, they chose confrontation with the authorities by firmly asserting Lebanon’s long tradition of associational freedom, as established in the constitution. On this issue, civil society activists frequently had to stand their ground to the authorities as the government sought to reinterpret the legal

²¹⁴ See, for instance, G. C. Gambill, “Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon,” *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Spring 2001); G. C. Gambill, “Still Standing: Aoun After the Elections,” *Mideast Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (July-August 2009).

²¹⁵ Khalaf 2002, 303.

²¹⁶ Interviews activists Beirut, July 18 and August 24, 2008.

framework that govern the establishment of associations, in effect attempting to assert state control over civil society.

Reinterpreting *'ilm wa khabar* – attempts to renegotiate state-civil society relations

Lebanon's guarantees for freedom of association date from pre-mandate times. The "Ottoman law" of August 3, 1909, forms the foundation for the legal framework establishing the right of citizens to join in associations without the interference of authorities. This law was inspired by the French law on associations and was confirmed in Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution.²¹⁷ Lebanon's associational law is based on a notification system rather than a registration system, making it, in theory, a very liberal legal framework not only in comparison to Arab states, but also when compared to Western democracies. According to Article 2 of the Law of Associations, an association merely has to notify the authorities of their existence and submit certain documents to the Ministry of Interior, receiving in return a *'ilm wa khabar* (certificate of notification), to be considered legal and commence with their activities.²¹⁸ In 1996, however, when the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) was founded for the purpose of monitoring the parliamentary elections of that year, the government under the premiership of Rafiq Hariri sought to reinterpret the law to require the approval of authorities before an association could function legally.²¹⁹ Accordingly, the authorities

²¹⁷ See the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) 2009.

²¹⁸ M. Makary, "Notification or Registration? Guarantees of Freedom of Association in Non-Democratic Environments: Case Studies of Lebanon and Jordan," *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (December 2007).

²¹⁹ See the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) 1996.

claimed LADE was an illegal association and refused to accept the organization's founding documents. However, members of LADE paid no heed to the re-interpretation of associational law and continued to meet and plan campaigns, essentially challenging the authorities to openly confront their actions. According to the government's interpretation of the law, the organization would technically have been illegal until 2005, which was when authorities finally issued their *'ilm wa khabar*.²²⁰ LADE was not the first association to encounter reluctance on the part of authorities to recognize their existence – *Association pour la Defense des Droits et des Libertes* (ADDL), a human rights organization which was founded in 1995, only received its receipt from the authorities after filing a lawsuit in the *Majlis Shoura el-Dawleh* (State Council).

As one international observer in Beirut pointed out: “These activists were a different set of people from [what] we had seen in previous protest movements; they were lawyers, highly qualified people, who were using courts as their platform.”²²¹ Essentially, the state tried to reassert itself in relation to civil society, an equation that historically has been one of a weak state and a strong civil society. Associations in Lebanon have since seized on the precedents set by ADDL and LADE, and firmly invoke the legal notification system when their legality is questioned. For instance, in recent years HELEM, an association for Lebanon's lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender (LGBT) community, consistently and publicly invoke the associational law whenever their

²²⁰ Interview LADE activist Beirut, July 22, 2008.

²²¹ Interview Beirut, July 25, 2008.

legality is questioned.²²² As a rule, the Lebanese authorities were loath to provoke any kind of popular unrest that could spill over to other sectors. Hence, they ceded space for CSOs that in other societies would be likely to be violently suppressed. While the legal framework does carry some weight, the main reasons the state failed in renegotiating the state-civil society relationship is the tendency toward weak elite unity, which allowed civic activists to find elite allies,²²³ and a constant fear of upsetting the societal calm through public confrontations, especially since Lebanese CSOs contain educated and media savvy individuals who know how to operate both the legal system and the media. Flawed as the Lebanese justice system may be, constitutional protection of associational freedom has given civil society actors a weapon to counter the threat of state interference, either through the courts or through the threat of making infringements of constitutional rights a matter of public protest.

The Fate of the Trade Unions

The fate of Lebanon's trade unions illustrates the restrictive environment in which civic grassroots networks developed in the post-civil war era. Indeed, while civic organizations saw positive developments in Lebanon, this did not hold true for some of the most powerful cross-communal associations of the pre-war era – the once influential trade unions of Lebanon, dating back to the 1920s, found itself to be a target of state repression, especially in the latter half of the 1990s. The umbrella organization for

²²² Interview, HELEM activist, Beirut, May 15, 2009. Homosexuality is illegal in Lebanon, but the LGBT community in urban centers, such as Beirut, is quite visible. Nevertheless, while authorities by and large tolerate (though do not accept) the activities of Helem, harassment of LGBT persons is commonplace.

²²³ At some of the public manifestations organized by the RME, Members of Parliament and other public figures would participate. This crucial issue is discussed further below. See Karam 2005.

Lebanon's trade unions, *Confédération Générale des Travailleurs au Liban* (CGTL), established in 1958, could boast a membership of around 200,000 in the 1970s.²²⁴ This figure, according to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Beirut, was down to 45-50,000 in 2008.²²⁵ The International Labor Organization (ILO) has an even more conservative estimate at around 3 percent of Lebanon's total workforce of 750,000, placing the number at 20-25,000.²²⁶ The main reason for this decline was the collision course between the trade unions' interests as representatives of Lebanese workers' rights, and the authorities' interest in unobstructed reconstruction and security. Indeed, the trade unions had during the war begun to appear as a major site for oppositional mobilization against the authorities – and they continued along this path in the first post-war years.

Focusing on wages and workers rights, the CGTL encompassed workers from all political shades and as such was likely the most representative of all organizations in Lebanon during the war.²²⁷ In the mid-1980s, the CGTL was no longer able to get wage increases that were equal to inflation, and real wages fell. Thus, in 1986, the CGTL called a strike for the first time, targeting the war and *de facto* partitioning of the country, since these factors were perceived as the root causes of economic decline.²²⁸ In 1987, 1988, and 1990, they continued to call strikes on numerous occasions, the manifestations now taking on the form of anti-war and national unity demonstrations of massive proportions,

²²⁴ International Labor Organization (ILO) 2008.

²²⁵ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) 2008.

²²⁶ ILO 2008.

²²⁷ Hanf 1993.

²²⁸ Ibid.

drawing support from outside the trade union circles.²²⁹ While they failed to end the war and change the immediate political situation, “the trade unions gave tens of thousands of Lebanese workers and innumerable others the chance to demonstrate that they rejected the slogans of all warring factions.”²³⁰ In other words, the trade unions were showing promise as a venue for mobilization against the status quo, an outlet for the thousands of militia-weary Lebanese. The final major achievement of the trade unions came in 1992, as rampant inflation prompted them to call for a general strike, which “at times took on shades of a popular uprising.”²³¹

Furthermore, in some instances these protests took on a distinctly anti-Syrian character. The result was a collapse of the Karami government.²³² However, the anti-Syrian message among the demonstrators had not been lost on the Syrian authorities, and their response was to create a new Lebanese caretaker cabinet with even stauncher Syria supporters than before, and call for hasty parliamentary elections (discussed above). The elections brought into office Rafiq Hariri, a billionaire with strong financial *bona fides*. As a result, confidence in the economy was rehabilitated and the Lebanese pound increased in value.²³³ In early 1996, the CGTL once again called for a general strike for the purpose of raising public-sector salaries by 76 percent and the minimum wage by 100

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 640.

²³¹ Hanf 1993, 624.

²³² Norton 1995.

²³³ Johnson 2001. Hariri also expressed a willingness to invest some of his immense personal wealth in reconstruction, further enhancing international and local confidence in the economy. Upon Hariri’s return to the premiership in 2000, a US citizen who had lived in Lebanon for over two decades told me it was helpful to have a prime minister who could solve the country’s debt by writing a personal check.

percent. This time, however, the army was called in to put down the demonstrations and a curfew was imposed.²³⁴ Furthermore, in 1997, local trade unions aligned with political parties loyal to Syria were incorporated into the CGTL through direct interference of the Ministry of Labor. While trade unions of different political shades had always been present in the CGTL – indeed this was what had made it a truly representative organization – the intervention of authorities in 1997 aimed at completely co-opting the leadership of the CGTL, which had until then maintained broad political representation.

In protest against such government interference, the President of the CGTL, Elias Abou Rizk, refused to accept the membership of several politically aligned trade unions, leading to his deposal as president and his temporary arrest for impersonating the President of the CGTL.²³⁵ Since this incident, the trade unions in Lebanon have not been a venue for national unity mobilizations, but rather a clout for political actors taking to the streets.²³⁶ There were several reasons for the Syrians to neutralize the trade unions. CGTL's capacity to mobilize *en masse* in the streets – drawing from different constituencies due to their focus on crosscutting economic interests of workers – did not suit Syria's new security regime in Lebanon. Emerging from fifteen years of chaos and militia rule, controlling the streets of the major cities was a crucial condition for Syria's ability to control the entire country, and the increasing tendency of union demonstrations turning into national unity, anti-Syrian, demonstrations could not be tolerated. Unlike the

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Amnesty International, 1997. The charges were brought by Ghneim al-Zoghbi, who was elected new president of the CGTL through the direct intervention of the authorities. According to statements to Amnesty International, security forces “surrounded CGTL's headquarters at Sidon, arresting members of the leadership while new elections were organized.” When Rizk and the rest of the former leadership refused to accept the outcome of the elections, he was detained.

²³⁶ The role of the trade unions in the 2008 civil strife will be discussed in chapter 5.

newly formed civic grassroots organizations, who had no direct precedence in the Lebanese context, the trade unions were visible on the radar of the security community, as they had a long history of popular mobilization and were involved in the government crises in the beginning of the 1990s. Indeed, trade unions can offer an important space for oppositional politics in authoritarian contexts. In Tunisia, for instance, the General Labor Union – *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT) functioned as “an important arena of contestation within the...political sphere.”²³⁷ Through formal and informal networks, Tunisian union members were linked to other political actors, providing them with the infrastructure to capitalize on elite disunity and find elite allies.²³⁸

It is not surprising, then, that the UGTT played an important role in the 2011 protests that brought President Ben-Ali’s reign to an end. Moreover, the trade unions could present a major obstacle to the reconstruction efforts of post-civil war Lebanon – a time when worker’s rights had little support in the government compared to business interests. Hariri, it was said, put “buildings before people.” Indeed, the direct collision course of the CGTL interests and the aspirations of the government effectively made trade unions a bigger threat to the major stakeholders than grassroots activists calling for municipal elections. Accordingly, the CGTL found itself facing systematic cooptation and marginalization. The trade unions example not only illustrates the repressive climate in *Pax Syriana* Lebanon, but also the mounting dissatisfaction from “below” with the status quo. But it was not simply the status quo of *Pax Syriana* that caused

²³⁷ Delphine Cavallo, “Trade Unions in Tunisia,” in E. Lust-Okar and S. Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne-Rienner Publishers, 2008), 239-255.

²³⁸ Ibid. Chapter 4 will discuss similar formal and informal networks that link civic activists to political actors in Lebanon.

dissatisfaction. After all, the protests of the 1980s were mainly directed towards the militia rule and the sectarian divisions in the country. Thus, while the demise of a powerful trade union movement in Lebanon demonstrates an attempt of an increasingly authoritarian state to close alternative venues of political participation, it also demonstrates the existence of an “insurgent consciousness” among the broader populace in Lebanon.

Finding a constituency – the awakening of an insurgent consciousness

The concept of insurgent consciousness refers to the recognition among a large segment of the populace that they share common grievances and interest. When individuals become aware of a collective sense of injustice, the potential for movement formation exists. Consequently, it is the political context that stresses grievances around which movements can form.²³⁹ Once individuals start identifying themselves as part of a disenfranchised collective, be they women, African-Americans, or homosexuals, and recognize systematic failures that cause this discrimination, the likelihood that they actively will seek out other members of that collective and organize, increases. In that process, they will employ political methods of raising consciousness among others in order to attract more members. As the previous section suggests, there came a time during the civil war when ordinary citizens in Lebanon took every opportunity they could get to protest the dismal political situation. While these protests were directly aimed at the incessant fighting and militia rule, they were also, I argue, representative of a broader sense of disenfranchisement among the broader populace. Although dissatisfaction with

²³⁹ Meyer 2004.

the post-war equilibrium was the greatest among Christian communities, this sense of disenfranchisement did not primarily stem from membership in specific communal groups (e.g. the Muslims before the war, and the Christians after the war), but from the political system's general lack of representativeness. The question, then, is how such a collective sense of disenfranchisement is channeled, that is, what form of collective action will materialize. As this section will show, there was at the end of the civil war a widespread distrust of the political system among the Lebanese that contributed to the emergence of an insurgent consciousness, providing first anti-war protests, then pro-democracy civic groups, with a constituency. Yet, at the same time, pessimism about the possibility of reforming the system essentially divided the constituency into those who believed the best way to have an impact is from inside the system, prompting a political party route (e.g. the underground movement that grew around Aoun), and those who instead believed the civil society-political sphere formula in Lebanon could be renegotiated to give civil society a more active role in the political developments. The latter groups were those who made possible the emergence of new civil society organizations in the 1990s.

Roots of activism – anti-war protests and victim advocacy

In 1991, polling of Lebanese citizens' attitudes toward their polity produced the somewhat contradictory results that parallel to the decline of the Lebanese state came the rise of a nation.²⁴⁰ It appeared a majority of ordinary Lebanese citizens became weary of their local militias and abandoned support for the cantonization of Lebanon in favor of

²⁴⁰ Hanf 1993.

the strengthening of the central state. In other words, fifteen years of armed conflict had left the Lebanese people with a severe case of “militia fatigue,” making a large segment of the population susceptible to the notions of good governance and a functioning civic state. During the various rounds of fighting in the Lebanese civil war, the vast majority of citizens did not pick up arms and join a militia. Rather, the majority suffered in silence, trying as best they could to survive another day and maintain some kind of normalcy in the midst of madness. Though anti-war protests had taken place as early as 1975, the first organized mass mobilization for peace and national unity took place in 1985, when a peace movement, “Women Against War,” marched on the presidential palace and parliament, openly defying militiamen to open fire on them.²⁴¹

Indeed, women were central to the anti-war movement that emerged in the 1980s: “Wives and mothers of hostages taken by the militias formed multiconfessional groups to press for the release of their men and to support each other in facing the horror of not knowing what fate had befallen their love ones.”²⁴² Reminiscent of the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, these women represented a shared suffering, regardless of communal belonging, which spoke to the commonalities among the Lebanese, rather than the differences. In 1986, the CGTL general strike turned into a national unity protest, which was repeated numerous times until May 1990, drawing participants from across Lebanon’s communal spectrum.²⁴³ Several of the leading actors in the anti-war movement of the 1980s, notably left leaning leaders, would subsequently

²⁴¹ Hanf 1993: 639; Karam 2005.

²⁴² Johnson 2001, 256.

²⁴³ Hanf 1993; Karam 2005; Norton 1995.

channel their energy through the civil society campaigns of the 1990s.²⁴⁴ Lebanon witnessed similar cross-communal popular mobilizations in 1989 – 1990 in support of the aforementioned General Michel Aoun. The central theme of Aoun’s stance was the reassertion of the state’s authority and the strengthening of state institutions at the expense of militias. Indeed, Aoun’s move to, on behalf of the state, take control of the Beirut port from the Lebanese Forces, the Christian militia, was widely popular in both Christian and Muslim quarters. Aoun’s statements around this time indicate that he believed the military had to be the strong unifying force to break the militia rule and assert state authority.

A common formula in the MENA region, it failed to materialize in Lebanon because of the country’s conflation of sectarian and political identities, which threatened to splinter the armed forces along confessional lines.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Aoun initially enjoyed broad popular support; when President Elias Hrawi, backed by the Syrians, threatened to evict him from the Presidential Palace in the winter of 1989, he called on his followers to come to Ba’abda and form a human shield around the Palace.²⁴⁶ The result was a three month long popular nationalistic celebration in Ba’abda, which participants remember nostalgically as the “Ba’abda Festivals.” The crowd was made up of civilians of all ages and from all communities, it was a family friendly celebration, and any shelling or military aggression would have resulted in a public massacre of civilians.

²⁴⁴ Karam 2005.

²⁴⁵ Indeed, the Lebanese army had already partially splintered in 1976, when Lieutenant Ahmad al-Khatib formed the Lebanese Arab Army (LAA), which joined the Palestinian/Leftist forces in the first of Lebanon’s civil wars. Subsequently, a Christian faction also broke out to form the Army of Free Lebanon (AFL).

²⁴⁶ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

The significance of these events rests in the reasons why people came out in support of Aoun: “The spirit of the demonstrations was not so much support for one political figure over another as it was a heady celebration of the common citizen’s involvement in politics and his ability to take a stand and change events previously under the control of militias, politicians, and outside powers.”²⁴⁷ While a strong personality cult around Aoun has since developed, and the movement in support of him has evolved into a political party, the quote above and statements from individuals who participated in the Ba’abda Festivals indicate that many of those who came out in support of him in the late 1980s were more interested in the argument of strengthening the state institutions than following him into political activism:

The Ba’abda Festivals were really not just about General Aoun, we were there because we finally saw someone who wanted to make the state take charge against the militias. He did things against the militias, he didn’t just talk about it. I think it made us believe there could actually be a Lebanese state again. So when we gathered around the [Presidential] Palace, we weren’t just providing Michel Aoun with a human shield, the way we saw it we were providing the last hope for a real state with a human shield. But we lost.²⁴⁸

When Michel Aoun was forced into exile in October 1990, remnants of his supporters formed an underground movement, which was instrumental in mobilizing student protests against the Syrian presence in the 1990s and early 21st century. Upon Aoun’s return to Lebanon in 2005, this movement transformed into a formal political party, *al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr* – the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). But some of those who had sympathized with the stated goals of the movement during Aoun’s exile

²⁴⁷ P. Salem, “Two Years of Living Dangerously: General Aoun and the Precarious Rise of the Second Republic,” *The Beirut Review*, No. 1, (Spring 1991b).

²⁴⁸ Interview with participant in the “Ba’abda festivals,” July 28, 2008.

did not appreciate what they perceived as FPM's transformation into "a political party just like the others – sectarian."²⁴⁹ In their eyes, the movement that had been non-sectarian with the creation of a civic state at the center of its platform had become a Christian party led by a powerful patron, with weak internal democratic mechanisms. Indeed, judging by my interviews with civic activists old enough to have experienced these events, several *grassroots* actors involved in the mobilization around Ba'abda Palace in 1989, i.e. those ordinary citizens who answered the call to form a human shield around the palace, were also involved in the most significant civic campaigns initiated by civil society organizations in the 1990s.

The key *leadership* figures in the Ba'abda festivals (e.g. Issam Abu-Jamra), however, did not become high profile actors in the 1990s campaigns, but instead chose the political party route by building what would become the FPM.²⁵⁰ As an underground movement (before 2005), the FPM's presence in Lebanon was most prominent on university campuses and student activists regularly organized sit-ins and protests against the Syrian occupation. Thus, the presence of a "civic consciousness" did not necessarily lead to civil society activism. The question, then, is why some actors were channeled into civic activism rather than political party activism.

Distrust in political leadership – alternative vehicles of influence

Like most data on Lebanese attitudes, indicators of group influence in Lebanon, that is, which type of leaders people believe have the most influence, provide a

²⁴⁹ Interview with former student FPM activist Beirut, July 25, 2008.

²⁵⁰ Interview LCPS researcher, August 4, 2008.

conflicting image. Table 3.1 shows who the Lebanese have believed to be the most influential in Lebanese society at different points in time. While the traditional leaders, the Zu'ama, made a comeback towards the end of the civil war, probably at the expense of party leaders (who during the war years were often also militia leaders – though so were some Zu'ama) they appear to have stabilized in the post-civil war era with 24 percent of respondents deeming them to be the most influential in 2006.

Table 3.1: Group Influence in Lebanon (%)

	1981	1984	1986	1987	2002	2006
Zu'ama'	6	17	18	38	27	24
Religious leaders	7	10	12	3	7	23
Party leaders	54	38	41	30	10	13
Military officers	5	6	6	3	12	9

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2008-2009

Perhaps the most notable figures here is the sharp decline in the belief in party leaders' influence – in 1981 54 percent of respondents believed party leaders were the most influential, in 2006 a mere 13 percent gave the same answer – and the resurgence of religious leaders, who have climbed from 7 percent in 1981 to 23 percent in 2006. Assuming that the data on who is believed to be more influential reflects the standing of each category in society, the implication is that political parties have significantly lost support since 1981. However, this state of affairs does not automatically mean civil society is perceived as the answer – both Zu'ama and religious leaders have gained in

stature since 1981. However, these categorizations prompt a brief discussion. There was clearly overlap between Zu'ama and party leaders (as with Kata'ib and the Gemayels, or the PSP and Jumblat) However, the traditional Zu'ama became more marginalized as the war went on, to the benefit of newcomers like Samir Geagea and Eli Hubeiq. By the early 1980s, local neighborhood residents would essentially be at the mercy of the local militia thug, often a young man who was detested by the local residents. Furthermore, at the end of the civil war, the big "intra-Christian" battle was between Samir Geagea and Michel Aoun, not between old leaders such as Gemayel and Frangiyeh. Similarly, within the Shi'a community, the battles were between Hezbollah and Amal, neither of which was a Zu'ama led organization. Thus, perhaps these numbers show us more about the entry of new elites on the political scene than about 'militia fatigue.'

Nevertheless, the low numbers of religious leaders in 1987 may suggest a lack of confidence in the ability of religious leaders to provide protection and guidance to the population, hence the yearning for a civic state to save them from the influence of Zu'ama and party leaders. Indeed, the boundaries between civil society and the political sphere are not as clear-cut as analytical constructs would suggest. Some civic activists chose to enter the political system; several civil society actors were in 2001 among the founding members of a new political party, the Democratic Renewal Movement (DRM). The DRM, led by Nassib Lahoud, was an early member of the Quornet Shehwan Gathering, the political opposition that formed in the early years of the twenty-first century.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ The fluidity of boundaries between civil society and the political sphere will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

Tapping into the “secular sect” of Lebanon

Given the conflation of communal identities and politics in Lebanon, the issue of establishing a civic state is closely related to that of promoting political secularism, i.e. the separation of religion and politics. Indeed, some have spoken of the new civic constituency as an emerging secular sect.²⁵² In the 2008-2009 interviews, civic activists expressed concern over the political role of some religious leaders. Not surprisingly, civic activists are generally strong supporters of a separation of religion and politics and feel strongly that religious leaders, such as the frequently outspoken Maronite Patriarch, should stay out of politics.

At the same time, they frequently argued that a secular state cannot be established in Lebanon for generations to come, and has to be preceded by a change in the societal ‘mindset.’²⁵³ In other words, the broader population needs to shift from relying on a local patron, family, or religious leader for protection and support, to understanding the *state* as a guarantor of their rights. Hanf’s 2006 study reinforces this image: 79 percent of respondents believed religion and politics should not be mixed – a fairly high number, although lower than the 93 percent who gave the same answer in 1987, in the midst of the civil war.²⁵⁴ At the same time, in 2006, 65 percent believed the solution to Lebanon’s problems would be to create a completely secular state and society.²⁵⁵ Moreover, 70

²⁵² UNDP-HDR 2008-2009. The number of sects officially recognized by the Lebanese state is 18, but only 17 are “institutionalized.” The notion of a secular community with the same rights as the other communities is not new – in 1936 the not yet independent Lebanese state recognized such a community. The law, however, was never ratified. See also Nour al-Qa’samani, “Civil Marriage: Rejection and Acceptance, Opposition and Support,” *an-Nahar*, 17 April 2008.

²⁵³ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 25, 2009.

²⁵⁴ Hanf 2007: 46.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

percent agreed every Lebanese should have the right to join a secular community, with the same rights as the recognized religious communities, (compared to 50 percent in 1987). This result brings up another question; if the polling data is to be believed, civic movements should not only have emerged and managed to survive – indeed, they should be dominating the political scene in Lebanon as the most representative of the Lebanese populations’ beliefs. They do not. The answers to another question posed in the same study may hint at the reasons for this state of affairs: 69 percent believed secularization does not stand a chance in Lebanon and that communal membership is a reality that must be accepted.²⁵⁶

The image that emerges appears contradictory; parallel to a decrease in confidence for the existing system and leadership, a majority of the Lebanese support the separation of religion and politics and believe the creation of a secular state would be the answer, but, at the same time, they do not believe this is possible to achieve. The issue of secularism and politics in Lebanon becomes especially complex because of the distribution of political appointments and slots on electoral lists based on communal identity. Party politics and communal identity are frequently conflated, even in cases such as the FPM (dominated by Christians) or the PSP (dominated by Druze), who claim to represent secular political platforms. Party politics, therefore, are often viewed as inter-communal politics, rather than a battle of ideologies. Hence the natural impulse on the part of secular Lebanese of creating a “*taifat al-haq al-aam*,” a “secular sect,” a suggestion which has been floated several times in Lebanon’s history, but which has never come close to materializing. While officially the FPM at the time of research was

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

still committed to building a strong party structure and work for a “secular” agenda, unofficially even party members would admit that a certain shift towards playing “Christian politics” had in fact taken place. This shift occurred, according to a high-level FPM official, because the sectarian character of the political system “forced” it to play to communal constituencies.²⁵⁷ Civil society activists, on the other hand, are free from such structural considerations. Furthermore, the logic of patrimonialism permeates Lebanon’s political sphere and the game of electoral alliances stimulates, as one interviewee put it, “the trading of principles for power.”²⁵⁸

When asked which political party comes the closest to representing her views, a young civic activist replied: “None of them. Because even if their ideology is close to mine on paper, in reality they are really all the same and do not represent me, they only represent themselves and whoever is in their personal network.”²⁵⁹ By “personal network,” she was referring to those who are part of the clientelist network of the political patron at the helm of the party. The vast majority of the activists I interviewed in the spring/summer of 2009 gave some version of this reply and, as anyone who ever had a political discussion with a Lebanese citizen is likely to know, it represents a commonly expressed view among Lebanese, activists and non-activists alike. Indeed, in itself, it is not a dramatic finding to report when investigating independent associational life in Lebanon. Yet, this attitude does signal the ability of civic organizations to present themselves as vehicles of addressing common grievances and interests, thereby tapping

²⁵⁷ Interview Beirut, August 11, 2008.

²⁵⁸ Interview, CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 9, 2009.

²⁵⁹ Interview Beirut, April 25, 2009.

into the segments of the Lebanese population who have become disillusioned by the promises of party leaders. As several interviewees pointed out, in the months leading up to the parliamentary election of 2009, the discussions did not center around the various political platforms of each candidate, but rather what alliances were made in the various districts: “What kind of democracy is this? ‘Jumblat leaves a seat vacant on his list so Arslan can run unopposed,’ that’s what we read in the paper, not ‘Jumblat proposes serious political reforms.’”²⁶⁰ Indeed, the public discussions before each parliamentary election rarely, if ever, involve the question of what a particular candidate will do if elected, but focus solely on what alliances are struck and how that will influence one or the other political side’s chances.

To be sure, the phenomenon of weariness with the existing political candidates exists in most democratic societies; examples of movements fueled by displeasure with established parties in the United States and elsewhere abound. But in Lebanon, the political system puts independent candidates at serious disadvantage. As was mentioned previously, candidates running outside of the established party lists rarely stand a chance of winning a seat in parliament. Without a clientelist network and the “right” alliances among other political elites, such a candidate is not likely to succeed. But herein lies a perplexing paradox. On the one hand, the Lebanese tend to decry the political system and the obsession with electoral list alliances. On the other hand, most Lebanese are clearly unlikely to vote for independent candidates. Arguably, this paradox is a result of the commonly held view that even if things *should* change, nothing ever *can* change, and

²⁶⁰ Interview, CLOE volunteer, Beirut, May 2, 2009.

therefore it is safer to rely on the traditional leadership for protection and support.²⁶¹ In spite of the FPM's expressed goals of building a "modern" political party, there is no denying the personal cult around Michel Aoun, as illustrated by the comment "I'm with the General," commonly uttered by FPM supporters when asked which what political party they follow. As Samir Khalaf has pointed out, the political dominance of prominent families has given Lebanon's political process a "personalistic, opportunistic, and non-ideological character."²⁶² While the FPM in recent years has worked to develop their party structure and has held internal elections, the perception that Michel Aoun is just like other political leaders, and the FPM just like other political parties, was widespread among civic activists interviewed for this study.

To be sure, the dominating political culture in Lebanon tends to foster the idolization of political leaders, making it difficult for those within the party interested in building a strong organization capable of surviving its leader. Consequently, Lebanon's civic organizations are not only up against a sectarian political system, but also a political culture that tends to promote a strong leadership cult, normally within communal boundaries. Furthermore, they compete with the notion that activism through a political party is the only route to any kind of influence. Thus, the awakening of an insurgent consciousness during the civil war may have created a secular constituency, but this energy was funneled into different routes – some preferred to enter the political system, others civic activism. For civic activists in the mid-1990s, however, the unpopularity of the political class, among which few were openly opposing the unpopular Syrian

²⁶¹ One of the most commonly used titles for papers and panel presentations on Lebanon is likely to be the saying "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" (the more things change, the more they stay the same).

²⁶² Khalaf 2003: 125.

occupation, provided them with an opportunity to carve a space in which to continue their struggle for a civic state. In order to work toward that end, Lebanese civic activists in the 1990s articulated agendas and utilized existing associational structures to build a new kind of movement. The following section examines the organizational strength of the early civic organizations.

Organizational strength – resource mobilization

Thus far this chapter has examined the macro-factors of political opportunities/constraints that faced the emerging civic movement in the 1990s, and the awakening of an insurgent consciousness, which provided the movement with a constituency. This section discusses the micro-factor of organizational strength. Closely linked to the central argument of resource mobilization theory (RMT), the factor of organizational strength pertains to the necessity of strong leadership and sufficient resources in order for a social movement to emerge.²⁶³ Resources include knowledgeable individuals, funding, media strategy, manpower, cohesive movement frames, legitimacy, and elite support. In other words, the success of any social movement depends on the ability of activists to organize and create networks, secure funding, develop media strategies, forging alliances with elites, and develop organizational structures.²⁶⁴ Unlike community based NGOs, which can extract funding from their respective communities

²⁶³ J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory.” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82 (1977): 1212-1241.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

(e.g. the reliance of Islamic NGOs on the *khums*, the *zakat*, and the *sadaka*²⁶⁵), civic organizations lack a clear constituency from which to extract funding. Instead, much of the financial backing for the emerging civic organizations came from the international donor community: international organizations such as the World Bank, the UNDP, foreign aid organizations such as USAID and DANIDA, and (in specific non-controversial projects) from foreign embassies, but also, especially for development projects, from governmental bodies and institutions.²⁶⁶ The post-war reconstruction phase was particularly well suited for access to development funding, as development organizations finally gained access to the country after many years of instability and unpredictability.

On the ground, projects that could fall under the label of “development” cover a broad range – they could include anything from reconstruction of physical infrastructure to inter-faith dialogue. Consequently, the type of activities in which the new organizations in Lebanon engaged, such as democracy development, minority rights, or environmental protection, could be labeled development. As we have seen, in the mid-1990s, Lebanese civic activists actively resisted state attempts to assert authority over civil society, i.e. efforts by the authorities to limit the space in which civic activists could operate. But they did more than push back on state incursions – they engaged in a renegotiation of the civil society-political sphere formula by entering into a realm of

²⁶⁵ See, for instance, Fawaz on Islamic NGOs in the southern Beirut suburbs. M. Fawaz, “Agency and Ideology in Community Services: Islamic NGOs in a Southern Suburb of Beirut.” In S. Ben Néfissa et al. *NGOs and Governance in the Arab World* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

²⁶⁶ Interview LADE activist Beirut, April 24, 2009. The ramifications of heavy dependence on foreign funding to civic organizations will be discussed at length in chapter 6.

advocacy and public mobilization, previously reserved for political actors. Indeed, rather than only protecting the space they had, they were also trying to carve new space, broadening the venues of political participation. Two of the most prominent such “counterattacks” by civic activists, were the Rally for Municipal Elections (RME), launched in 1997, and the Rally for Civil Marriage (RCM), launched in 1998.

Mobilizing for civic causes: the RME and the RCM

In April 1997, upon the request of Prime Minister Hariri, the Lebanese parliament voted to postpone municipal elections originally scheduled for July 1997. Municipal elections, in which mayors and municipal councils are elected for six-year terms, had not been held in Lebanon since 1963. The municipal elections of 1969 were cancelled due to unrest caused by tensions between the government and Palestinian guerrillas allied with leftist Lebanese parties.²⁶⁷ In 1975, the civil war broke out and during the various rounds of fighting municipal elections did not constitute an immediate concern. However, after seven years of *Pax Syriana*, the Lebanese were becoming frustrated with the lack of proper local governance and there was significant popular support for holding them on time. For the authorities, the municipal elections caused concern because of the popular opinion, which they suspected was widely anti-Syrian. The electoral law that governs municipal elections does not offer the same opportunities of manipulation as the parliamentary electoral law – there is no formal confessional distribution of seats (although, in practice, seats in the municipal councils are distributed to reflect the demographics of the municipality), and, in most cases, elections take place according to

²⁶⁷ el-Khazen, 2000.

proportional representation with the municipality as a single district, making gerrymandering to the advantage of pro-Syrian candidates impossible. Furthermore, as municipal council members and mayors elected in 1963 left office, either through death or sheer exhaustion, the government would appoint municipal officials, awarding the central government a level of control over local governments, which elections would eradicate. Meanwhile exiled Christian leaders Amine Gemayel, Michel Aoun, and Raymond Eddé took different stances on the issue. Gemayel painted the issue as one of Christian marginalization, Aoun as one of the authorities' fear of his supporters (whom he had encourage to vote in the municipal elections), and Eddé dismissed the notion of holding elections under occupation altogether.²⁶⁸

In the leading troika, the issue caused serious disunity, as Prime Minister Hariri and Speaker Berri agreed on the convenience of postponement (at least once Berri had received an 8-month extension on his term as Speaker of the House), while President Hrawi was in favor of elections being held.²⁶⁹ There were at the time unconfirmed reports that President Hrawi even had threatened to resign if municipal elections were not held on time.²⁷⁰ Regardless of the veracity of such reports, there was clear elite disunity both in the nation's top leadership and in the legislative body, providing civic activists with a significant opportunity. Thus, the decision to postpone the municipal elections signaled the starting point for what would become Lebanon's first sustained nation-wide campaign by civic organizations.

²⁶⁸ News archive, www.lebanon.com, "News from Beirut, April 9, 1997."

²⁶⁹ Giles Trendle, "Trouble with the Troika," *The Middle East* (IC Publications, 1 June, 1997).

²⁷⁰ News archive, www.lebanon.com, "News from Beirut, April 8, 1997."

The activists acted swiftly to launch a campaign to counter the authorities' move to postpone elections; less than two weeks after the vote in parliament LADE and other civic organizations concerned with a wide range of issues, such as environment, human rights, democracy, and public freedoms, held their first meeting, during which a steering committee was established.²⁷¹ Beyond setting a precedent for how civic activism could be organized in Lebanon, the RME constituted the first time in post-war Lebanon that a civil society movement was mobilized in all regions of the country, using the same slogans regardless of region, one reading “*Baladi, Baldati, Baladiyati*,” – “my country, my village, my municipality.”²⁷²

In addition to LADE, more than 150 associations, political parties, and private companies were involved in the campaign, setting up regional committees and tapping into already existing associational structures in the rural areas.²⁷³ The RME employed a variety of modes of action, including a national petition, public manifestations, weekly meetings, and an aggressive informational campaign in the media. In addition to this campaign being waged on a national scale, the activists involved established the organizational form currently used in campaigns, namely loosely organized networks of local and national organizations, temporarily joining forces for a limited goal.²⁷⁴ Thus, while the RME was ostensibly about democratic practices and political participation, the campaign launched across the country did more than demand municipal elections; it created the foundations for what I call the ‘campaign coalition’ mode of action, which

²⁷¹ Karam 2005.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Karam 2005.

²⁷⁴ Interview LCPS researcher, August 4, 2008.

would become the predominant mode of civic activism in Lebanon after the Syrian departure in 2005.²⁷⁵ However, the government did not remain inactive in the face of such challenges; it reiterated the ban of public demonstrations in 1997 and the Ministry of Interior required any organization wishing to hold a rally to apply for authorization. In August 1997, authorities closed down a location where an RME demonstration was to be held, effectively blocking protesters' access to the venue. Subsequently, security forces were deployed to the secondary site where demonstrators had gathered. However, the security forces remained on the sidelines and did not intervene in the demonstration.²⁷⁶

As was discussed in the previous section on the repressive climate during Pax Syriana, authorities were reluctant to employ violent means to crack down on the RME activists for a number of reasons, including the non-partisan nature of their demands and the presence of prominent political elites. Thus, there were several reasons for the activists' ability to defy authorities and launch a nation-wide campaign for the purpose of forcing the authorities to organize municipal elections. First, they were able to build alliances with political elites and use the political elite rivalry to their own advantage. As one observer noted: "The people involved in the campaign used close connections to politicians, found political allies and probably benefited from rivalry between politicians in the system."²⁷⁷ Indeed, the campaign to hold municipal elections was orchestrated, directed, and sustained by civil society actors, but also enjoyed political elite support; several parliamentarians were involved in the rallies and the campaign gained support

²⁷⁵ The concept of "campaign coalitions" will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

²⁷⁶ Interview Beirut, July 18, 2008.

²⁷⁷ Interview journalist, Beirut, July 24, 2008.

from most major political parties, and even the President of the Republic signaled his support. However, rather than being co-opted by political forces, which was the fate of the trade unions around the same time, it was the civic associations that “led the way” for political parties in the RME.²⁷⁸ Second, by “precisely defining the theme and limits of their mobilization,” the RME activists made it more difficult for the authorities to depict their activities as subversive to the political order.²⁷⁹ After all, it was difficult for the government to present credible arguments for why municipal elections should not be held, especially since local government elections have a much more direct impact on the individual citizens’ lives and consequently tend to be more popular than national elections.²⁸⁰

In addition, the Constitutional Council ruled in favor of the RME, deeming the postponement of elections unconstitutional. The RME, then, had a limited, relatively uncontroversial target, enjoyed fairly broad elite/political support, and was awarded constitutional legitimacy. Under such circumstances, it is not highly surprising that the Hariri government finally gave up its opposition and organized municipal elections. Thus, having achieved its main goal, the RME dissolved on July 18, 1998.²⁸¹ According to one international observer, holding municipal elections was more of a “nuisance to the Hariri government than a serious threat.”²⁸² However, there may have been more to Hariri’s concerns than that of the ability of the central government to control

²⁷⁸ Interview LCPS researcher, Beirut, August 4, 2008.

²⁷⁹ Karam 2005: 325.

²⁸⁰ Interview LADE activist, Beirut, August 22, 2008.

²⁸¹ Karam 2005.

²⁸² Interview journalist, Beirut, July 24, 2008.

municipalities. The municipal elections, because they were more difficult to manage with elite alliances etc., could display real intra-communal electoral battles. Indeed, Hariri, a Sunni, may have been concerned with the possible gains made by rival Sunni groups, namely Islamist groups, which in the 1998 elections for the first time participated in local elections.²⁸³ In addition to the Shi'a Hezbollah, the Sunni al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah (the Islamic Association) actively competed in the 1998 municipal elections. Hezbollah and the Jama'ah both challenged the traditional clientelist system in Lebanon through providing local communities with social services, thus constituting a threat to the Zu'ama in local elections.

Hariri, although belonging to a "new" economic elite, rather than the traditional notables, had clientelist networks of his own and Zu'ama allies in local communities. Hariri and Berri (whose party, Amal, was Hezbollah's main rival for Shi'a votes) both tried to curb the influence of Hezbollah and the Jama'ah in several municipalities by suggesting joint lists. In a few instances where the Jama'ah felt such alliances would maximize their gains, such as in Beirut and Sidon, they assented to joint lists with Hariri, but they also sought to block Hariri wherever they could: "In Shehim, the largest town in the Iqlim, which was difficult for one party to get hold of, the Jama'ah formed a mixed list that included leading figures of the town's large families against the Hariri backed list."²⁸⁴ The election results did indeed reflect great gains for Hezbollah in municipalities

²⁸³ Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Islamists and Local Politics: A New Reality," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (October) 2000, 739-759.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 748.

with Shi'a majorities and for the Jama'ah in municipalities with Sunni majorities.²⁸⁵ In other words, the 1998 municipal elections represented a wake-up call for particularly Sunni leaders, as it became apparent that Islamist forces in the Sunni communities were stronger than they had expected. The irony of this outcome is that the success of the RME may have contributed to the failure of the next prominent civil society campaign, the Rally for an Optional Civil Code on Personal Status – Civil Marriage (RCM), as Hariri now had to contend with a stronger religious current in his constituencies. But the RME activists were not running the campaign in order to bolster any particular political side; they were not an oppositional movement, trying to challenge the ruling majority. Their focus was on the space of political participation itself and on what was perceived as intensified attempts by the authorities to restrict this space.

Indeed, the parliamentary elections of 1996 were widely perceived as the most corrupt in the country's history and the continual postponement of municipal elections offered an opportunity for civic activists to assert themselves vis-à-vis the political sphere. Thus, the RME campaign, more than facilitate municipal elections, the results of which were of no particular benefit to civic activists, set a precedent for how a nationwide campaign could be waged. Moreover, while the RME campaign dissolved once municipal elections were held, its infrastructure, i.e. the networks of local and national civil society organizations, remained. Indeed, the campaign coalition utilized for the RME was re-activated in the service of the RCM, carried out between 1998 and 2000, which aimed at passing legislation to institute civil marriage.

²⁸⁵ The election results as a whole (i.e. when assessing all Shi'a majority districts across the nation), essentially divided municipal council seats equally between Hezbollah and Amal. Similarly, the Jama'ah split the Sunni seats with Hariri and other political forces. Hamzeh 2000.

But, as activists soon became aware, this goal would meet with far stancher opposition than the RME. The issue of civil marriage has been, and continues to be, a contentious issue in Lebanon. While Lebanese authorities recognize civil marriages performed in other countries, the calls to institute civil unions in Lebanon have gone unheeded since the 1930s.²⁸⁶ The reason for this is the separation of authority between state and religious institutions, where the public realm befalls the state, and the private realm befalls the various religious institutions representing each sect.²⁸⁷ Consequently, instituting civil marriage would significantly increase the reach of civic authorities of Lebanon by opening the realm of the family to state authorities and weaken the authority of the religious institutions, which traditionally retain the authority on such matters within the respective communities.

While marriages (as well as divorces) are a significant source of income for priests and sheikhs, the main reason for the resistance to the RCM was the threat civil marriage poses to religious authorities, which were eager to retain family legal matters in their realm. Indeed, the civil marriage law would effectively reduce the authority and involvement of religious authorities in civil life – opening up for the future subordination of religious law to civil law. Moreover, the issue is also perceived as the first tug at a thread that could unravel the entire sectarian logic of the political system. Civil marriage would open up for the issue of personal status laws in general to be “de-sectarianized,”

²⁸⁶ See Edmond Rabbath, *La Formation Historique du Liban Politique et Constitutionnel* (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1970).

²⁸⁷ This clear distinction between the “public” and the “private” realms is a useful analytic construct, but in reality the boundaries are not always as clear-cut. Thus, for instance, religious authorities are frequently involved in the political affairs of the country, such as when the Maronite Patriarch commented on the impending parliamentary elections in 2009, or when political leaders publicly “consult” the main religious leaders before making important decisions.

thus threatening the foundations of a political system, the preservation of which is not only in the interest of religious authorities, but also many political elites. As we have seen, political elites from all communal groups are quite adept at utilizing the system for their own benefit. Consequently, the issue of system reform is not an issue where the fault lines are drawn along communal boundaries, but rather between political elites who benefit from the system and their clientelist networks on the one hand, and political elites and ordinary citizens who believe they would benefit from a reformed system on the other. As a result, the RCM enjoyed some elite support, but also faced opposition from powerful political elites and the majority of religious leaders.

In March 1998, a secular organization, Harakat Huquq al-Nas (Movement for the Rights of Individuals), founded towards the end of the 1980s, organized a conference on civil marriage and civil code on personal status. The conference gathered members of civil society who supported a bill that would make civil marriage legal in Lebanon, drafted by President Elias Hrawi.²⁸⁸ The RCM was formally launched after Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri refused to sign and submit to parliament President Hrawi's bill, which a majority of the cabinet had voted in favor of with twenty-one votes to six (one abstaining). Hariri's decision to reject the civil marriage bill may have been influenced by the new weight carried by religious groups in the Sunni community. It was, in any case "considered by the Jama'ah an Islamic ideological gain."²⁸⁹ The RCM network consisted of seventy-five associations and political parties. It also enjoyed the support of a significant number of politicians, including, as mentioned above, the president. Led by

²⁸⁸ The text of Hrawi's draft law is available in Antoine al-Nashef and Khalil al-Hindi (eds.), *Voluntary Civil Marriage in Lebanon* (Tripoli: al-Mu'assasa al-Haditha lil-Kitab, 1998).

²⁸⁹ Hamzeh 2000, 748.

Harakat Huquq al-Nas, the RCM launched a media campaign, organized sit-ins and demonstrations before the parliament, and organized a national petition gathering some 50,000 signatures.²⁹⁰ The RME and the RCM “stemmed from the same sociopolitical ‘milieu’ – the ‘claiming’ associations of the 1990s – and had almost the same actors, particularly at the level of the organizers and members.”²⁹¹ But while a large part of the organizations from the RME were also mobilized for the RCM, some local associations and family leagues that had been part of the RME actually rallied around their religious institutions *against* the RCM.

In fact, religious authorities from all sects allied with some political elites as a countermovement to the RCM and counter-demonstrations against civil marriage were held in Tripoli and Beirut.²⁹² In other words, the RCM targeted a highly sensitive issue in the political landscape, and failed to build broad enough support among local NGOs, many of which had been instrumental in running the RME on the countryside. President Hrawi’s bill was shelved indefinitely, but a small success came out of the civil marriage campaign. In 2002, two years after the campaign had formally ended, the continuing work of a small group of activists resulted in enough signatures from MPs to introduce in parliament a draft “Voluntary Civil Personal Status Code,” which would provide, on optional basis, an alternative set of personal status laws. The draft, however, was relegated to various bureaucratic instances and delayed indefinitely.²⁹³ Consequently,

²⁹⁰ Karam 2006.

²⁹¹ Karam 2005: 333.

²⁹² UNDP-HDR 2008-2009.

²⁹³ As one of Na-am’s activists put it in a 2009 interview, “the issue of civil marriage remains on the table.” Chapter 4 discusses the more recent efforts further. Interview Beirut, May 20, 2009.

despite high levels of elite support and a well-resourced campaign, the RCM ultimately failed to reach its goal of realizing a civil code on personal status in Lebanon. What the civic organizations in Lebanon had succeeded in doing, however, was carving a space for a new type of organization in civil society, and initiating a renegotiation of the role of civil society vis-à-vis the political sphere. Before the various campaigns of the 1990s (other campaigns involved the rights of disabled, environment, and a youth campaign to lower the voting age), civil society had not operated in quite this fashion in Lebanon. Moreover, the organizational modes, combining traditional social movement strategies with the ad hoc network organizational mode of NSMs, set a precedent for future civic activism in Lebanon.

As such, through the RME and RCM, despite their different outcomes, the civic activists had laid the foundation for the campaign network mode of action and learned important lessons about the political landscape – how to avoid infiltration and cooption – and where the line is drawn for what is acceptable and unacceptable in the political culture of Lebanon. Indeed, the new organizations that emerged in the 1990s have since become far more established and institutionalized. Some of the main actors have even entered the political realm, while others preferred to stay in the civil society realm. Either way, the space that these activists carved out would be further populated by a new wave of grassroots organizations that emerged in the aftermath of the “Independence Intifada” of 2005. Consequently, regardless of their immediate success, the new organizations of the 1990s had a long-term effect on the role of civil society in Lebanon. “I think we laid the foundation for what we are able to do today, even though I sometimes don’t think we have any influence at all over politicians, right now it’s like we’re trying to drain a

sinking boat using a thimble.”²⁹⁴ Indeed, as the following chapters will show, the ability for civic activists to organize and effectively have an impact in policy-making in Lebanon is highly dependent on macro-level developments not only in the institutional realm, but also in the cultural realm.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the development of civic grassroots networks in Lebanon in the post-civil war era. The aim was to examine the structural potential for social movement activity and identify the macro- and micro-factors that allowed for new actors to emerge on the political scene. In this excavation, concepts from SMT have been helpful in constructing plausible accounts on how independent civic organizations were able to emerge and sustain themselves after the end of a devastating fifteen-year conflict. Social movement theory provides us with a useful framework of analysis, namely three key components to the emergence of social movements: political opportunities/constraints, insurgent consciousness, and organizational strength. First, the post-war environment offered both opportunities and constraints for civic activists. The external constraints, such as Syria’s military hegemony in Lebanon, which lasted until 2005, did restrict the sphere of action for the nascent civic organizations of the 1990s, but did not prevent their emergence and proliferation. While on the surface the political restraints of *Pax Syriana* Lebanon were severe, the new civic organizations of the 1990s were able to emerge and proliferate due to a number of key political opportunities. These can be identified as weak elite unity (unity mainly by coercion and intimidation), inefficient

²⁹⁴ Interview, Beirut, August 24, 2008.

repression due to the tensions between Lebanon's traditionally liberal society and a newly imposed Syrian security regime, leading to failed attempts by the government to assert its authority over certain segments of civil society. Lebanon's relatively liberal associational tradition meant that few formal obstacles for the formation of civic movements existed once the civil war was over. However, the Syrian influence and the heavy focus on the physical reconstruction of Lebanon (as opposed to the bettering of the system of governance) by the government imposed some restrictions on civic organizations' field of action, though not to the same extent as on other segments of civil society. The trade unions were a clear threat to the security regime; trade union activism had caused the first post-war government to collapse in 1992 and had potential as a vehicle for oppositional politics. Moreover, the trade unions' concern with comprehensive reform and workers' rights clashed directly with too many important stakeholders and subsequently suffered from total cooptation by political parties aligned with the security regime.

Civic movements, on the other hand, did not mobilize for wholesale reform – they instead mobilized for limited-target campaigns and challenged fewer stakeholders, thus for the most part staying “below the radar” of the security regime, and skillfully used elite disunity to find elite allies. Second, “Militia-fatigue” among the populace gave birth to cross-communal anti-war protests and pro-civic state manifestations during the civil war, leading to a collective sense of injustice and providing the emerging civic organizations of the 1990s with a constituency. By positioning themselves as an alternative to political parties and carving a space in the realms of civil and political society, civic organizations tapped into a segment of the Lebanese population feeling disillusioned and betrayed by the political class. However, while the emergence and proliferation of civic movements in

Lebanon in the 1990s should be understood in light of local developments of distrust in political parties and traditional *Zu'ama'*, it should also be placed in a broader regional context of developments in the Middle East region, as well as a global context of the opening up of Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. Third, Lebanon has a long history of associational life and a substantial educated middle class. Thus, there was significant organizational strength, both in terms of qualified individuals and organizational infrastructure. The early civic activists coalesced around issue-specific campaigns, including, though not limited to, the RME and the RCM. In these campaigns, they linked together and mobilized old associational structures across the nation in new ways. The RME and the RCM also brought civic activists valuable experiences on how to operate on the Lebanese scene – such as the necessity of limiting aims of campaigns, and how to avoid infiltration and cooption.

The failure of the civil marriage campaign, despite the support of President Hrawi and other important political elites, demonstrated clearly where the lines are drawn in the Lebanese landscape. Unlike the RME, the RCM had broader implications that could be perceived as threatening to the religious authorities and, in the extension, could therefore be construed as a threat to each of Lebanon's communities, but more importantly, to political elites who benefited from the political system. Importantly, in the absence of a clear constituency from which to draw resources, Lebanon's civic organizations benefited from the post-war development environment, which gave them access to funding from international and domestic development agencies. On the more abstract level, the events of the 1990s can be understood as a struggle for public space. This struggle can be discerned in a series of different attempts to renegotiate, first, the boundaries within civil

society, and, second, the civil society-political sphere formula. First, during the civil war, civil society actors, mainly trade unions, newly formed peace movements, and victims advocacy groups, stood up against the “uncivil” segment of civil society – the militias. Though these popular mobilizations did not succeed in ending the civil war, they did claim a space for themselves in civil society, and planted the seeds for the new segments of civil society, which would emerge in the 1990s. Then, during *Pax Syriana*, came a challenge from the state against both uncivil and civil society, in the form of the authorities attempting to limit associational freedoms.

Essentially, this can be understood as the new security regime’s efforts to establish a new order between civil society and the political sphere, dismantling the militias (sans Hezbollah), co-opting and neutralizing the trade unions, and attempting to reinterpret the associational law to limit the activities of newly emerging groups. The counter-reaction to this led to efforts by civil society actors to establish a new formula where civil society would be an intermediate realm between the private and the public. While they did not succeed in all their aims, the civic campaigns of the 1990s certainly succeeded in not only claiming a space of operation, but also in moving towards a more cooperative relationship between civil society and the political sphere. In the wake of the Syrian departure in 2005, a “second generation” of civic organizations emerged and proliferated. As we shall see in the following chapters, the civil society-political sphere formula in Lebanon after 2005 is very different from the pre-war situation. In fact, the legacy of the new organizations that emerged in the 1990s can be clearly discerned in the “second generation” civic organizations’ issue focus, strategies, mode of action, and organizational form.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION: CIVIC MOBILIZATIONS AND COALITIONS

My brothers, seek counsel of one another, for therein lies the way out of error and futile repentance. The wisdom of the many is your shield against tyranny. For when we turn to one another for counsel we reduce the number of our enemies.

Kahlil Gibran (1883 - 1931)

Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, popular ‘civic mobilizations’ swept across a number of countries, toppling regimes through relatively non-violent ‘revolutions.’ For instance, in Serbia 2000, Slobodan Milosevic’s regime fell after popular mobilizations, partially driven by student activists; in Georgia 2003, grassroots mobilizations following a widely discredited parliamentary election forced President Eduard Shevardnadze out of office; and in Ukraine from late 2004 to early 2005, the “Orange Revolution” succeeded in preventing the government-supported candidate Viktor Yanukovich from assuming the presidency after a disputed election.²⁹⁵

Then, in the spring of 2005, Lebanon experienced an unprecedented civic mobilization, which successfully ended Syria’s military presence in the country. In neither of the above examples was the outcome solely the result of the mobilization of either civil society or the political sphere, but rather coalitions of civil society and political sphere actors. In Lebanon, a temporary collusion of civic groups’ and political parties’ interests made possible a loosely knit coalition of actors from civil society and the political sphere, which succeeded in ending the Syrian military presence.

²⁹⁵ Anika Locke Binnendijk and Ivan Marovic, “Power and persuasion: Nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine (2004),” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2006), pp 411-429; Charles H. Fairbanks, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 110-124.

The aftermath of such revolutionary events, however, often reveals rifts previously hidden by the focus on one overarching goal. In Ukraine, for instance, post-revolution divisions led to the civic youth movement Pora (“It’s Time”) splintering into a political party and a civil society movement.²⁹⁶ In Serbia, the civic movement Otpor (“Resistance”) tried to transform into a political party, but failed by far to reach the five percent threshold in the 2003 parliamentary elections and was promptly absorbed by an existing party. And in Lebanon, where political parties historically draw from specific sectarian constituencies, the political party actors splintered into different coalitions, and some civic activists saw fit to pursue political activism, while others remained active in civil society.

Thus, while social movements are often understood as being in opposition to the political sphere, essentially operating as challengers to the system, in reality the boundaries between social movements, civil society activism, and political party activism are “fuzzy and permeable.”²⁹⁷ As I will show in this chapter, the end of Syria’s military presence in Lebanon in 2005 may have alleviated some of the political constraints civic activists experienced under the Syrian security regime, but it did not remove the constraints posed by Lebanese political culture and practice. The divergence in interests between some political actors and civil society actors after the 2005 “Independence Intifada” left civic activists feeling powerless and disillusioned as Lebanese politicians appeared to return to “business as usual.” Yet, at the same time, in post-*Pax Syriana*

²⁹⁶ Taras Kuzio, “Civil Society, Youth and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 365-386.

²⁹⁷ Jack A. Goldstone, “Introduction: Bridging Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized Politics,” in Jack A. Goldstone (ed.), *State, Parties, and Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.3).

Lebanon civic organizations arguably became more visible than ever, forming single-issue coalitions and participating in public affairs to an extent never before seen. Whereas the previous chapter identified the proliferation of a new breed of CSOs in Lebanon in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, this chapter examines the way in which civic activists in Lebanon organize their collective action. It does so by engaging with a prominent vehicle of collective action in Lebanon, namely “campaign coalitions.” After the successful ousting of Syria by a loosely coordinated coalition of civil society and political party actors, Lebanon’s civic activists primarily sought to influence policy through single-issue campaigns employed by coalitions, which in some cases included political party actors and even government agencies, thus connecting actors of widely varying character and motivation.

This chapter first traces the developments that culminated in the Independence Intifada in 2005, and outlines the factors that led to the emergence of a coalition capable of ending the Syrian military presence, but which did not achieve the fundamental reform of the political system many participating civic activists had hoped for. A comparison of the Lebanese case to ‘revolutionary coalitions’ elsewhere illustrates the difficulties of detecting clear boundaries between civil society and political activism. This chapter then examines how civic activists organized to effect reform in Lebanon after the Syrian departure, and analyzes the campaign coalitions that gather civil society actors, political activists, and sometimes government agencies. The chapter then elaborates on the significance of their presence in Lebanon and distinguishes between ‘revolutionary’ and ‘evolutionary’ coalitions.

Ending Syrian occupation: constraints, opportunities, and “revolutionary” coalitions

Whereas the 1990s offered both opportunities and constraints for Lebanese civic activists, the following decade would, at least on the surface, appear to offer a major opening for civic activists when Syria was forced to extricate its military forces from Lebanon. Indeed, in the aftermath of the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 came the most significant post-civil war mobilization of civil society groups and political parties when hundreds of thousands of Lebanese joined forces in massive protests against the Syrian presence in the country. These events were popularly dubbed *al-Intifada al-Istiqlal* (the Independence Intifada) in Lebanon, and the “Cedar Revolution” in the West.

However, as I argue in the following section, while the dramatic events in the spring of 2005 are worthy of attention, low-intensity dynamics that preceded and succeeded the Independence Intifada are of far greater significance when trying to understand social movement formation in Lebanon. Revolutionary events do not occur in a vacuum; less dramatic processes always precede (and succeed) the highly contentious public manifestations, although the latter usually garner far more attention than the former. Thus, for instance, the overthrow of Milosevic in 2000 was preceded by massive popular protests in relation to local elections in 1996.²⁹⁸ The following section will argue that Lebanon’s Independence Intifada was the result of a collusion of factors, including unprecedented civil society mobilization, Lebanese elite defection from the Syrian status quo, and regional developments, most notably the withdrawal of another occupying force

²⁹⁸ Tarrow 1998.

and the death of a dictator. These factors combined to make possible the emergence of a “revolutionary coalition” consisting of both civil society and political sphere actors.

The “Independence Intifada” of 2005

Arguably, Syria’s hold of Lebanon had been waning since 2000. In the fall of 2000, I was a student at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and could at that time sense, especially among students on campus, a sense of nationalistic revival and optimism. This was primarily due to two significant events that occurred earlier in the year 2000. In May of that year, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the “security belt” in southern Lebanon, effectively leading to the disbandment of the much-detested Israeli Lebanese proxy militia, South Lebanon Army (SLA). At this time, Hezbollah was widely hailed as a “national resistance,” responsible for forcing Israel to withdraw its troops.

Then, in June, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad died, passing power on to his son, Bashar al-Assad. Syria’s troops, however, were still deployed in the streets of Beirut, much to the chagrin of a growing segment of the Lebanese population, who never missed a chance to, covertly, display their displeasure. Indeed, several of my Lebanese friends gleefully recounted how they had all gone to the beach when a period of mourning was declared for Hafez al-Assad, prompting the Lebanese authorities to close down the beaches the following day, since TV-images of citizens taking joyful advantage of their unexpected leisure time reflected badly (though, perhaps, accurately) on the Syrian president’s popularity in Lebanon. At this time, silent protest was still the main mode of resistance among the broader populace in the face of Syrian occupation; smiling broadly at the Syrian soldier at the checkpoint whilst cursing him out within the security of the

soundproof cabin of the car was a common way for many Lebanese to ventilate their frustration with their neighboring country's military presence. But silent protest gradually became open protest before my very eyes – by the spring of 2001 demonstrations against Syrian occupation were taking place openly, mostly driven by young student activists. These demonstrations on several occasions led to clashes between demonstrators and security forces.²⁹⁹ By the time I began taking graduate courses at AUB in the fall of 2001, the Syrian troops had been redeployed to outside the city limits of Beirut, so as to reduce their visibility and ameliorate some of the opposition to their presence. Protests continued, however, often generated by student activists belonging to Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM).

An underground organization at the time, the FPM made good use of electronic communications, which in the pre-Facebook era was mainly limited to setting up a website, and utilizing emails and text messaging for the spreading of information. The main venues for the FPM activist networks during this time were university campuses, where the revolutionary youths could express themselves relatively free of *Mukhabarat* interference. The young student activists spoke with passion of a new kind of political party, a cross-sectarian, civic-minded party, with a strong organizational structure and internal mechanisms of democracy, which would end the dominance of the typical Lebanese patron-client based political parties. The FPM's grassroots network, as well as civil society networks, would eventually form an integral part of the Independence Intifada. Adding to the legitimacy of their arguments, the end of Israeli occupation of the

²⁹⁹ The repression of protests grew more aggressive in 2001: "In early August 2001, plainclothes security agents arrested some 250 activists from the FPM and other Christian opposition parties." Jaafar and Stephan 2009: 170.

south in 2000 effectively nullified the Syrian argument that they had to remain on Lebanese soil as a “deterrent” as long as Israel maintained an occupational force in the south.³⁰⁰ Moreover, the Syrians were increasingly perceived as harming Lebanon’s economy to their own benefit. Because of the removal of restrictions on overland travel and the lowering of the duties on goods crossing from Syria to Lebanon through the Border Agreement of 1991, the influx of cheap Syrian products flooded the Lebanese market throughout the 1990s.³⁰¹

This forced many Lebanese farmers and merchants out of business, subsequently causing a rise in Lebanese unemployment.³⁰² Simultaneously, Lebanon was flooded with cheap Syrian labor, facilitated by the 1994 Labor Agreement between Syria and Lebanon.³⁰³ As put by one critical voice of the Syrian presence in Lebanon: “Lebanon has become an oasis of opportunity for the unemployed in Syria.”³⁰⁴ This discontent was not limited to Christian communities; it was brewing among Muslim communities as well. In fact, because the Syrian army was most heavily deployed in areas where Muslims formed the majority, the prolonged occupation in some ways had more negative effects

³⁰⁰ Whether the Israeli occupation was truly over was also an issue of contention. Syria and Hezbollah argued that the Sheba’a farms, still occupied by Israel, were Lebanese territory while Israel maintained that they were Syrian territory.

³⁰¹ For the full text of the Border Agreement in Arabic, see *al-Hayat*, October 8, 1991

³⁰² Throughout the 1990s, the Lebanese economy suffered from numerous crises. The seemingly never ending instability, highlighted by Israeli attacks such as the 1996 “Operation Grapes of Wrath”, deterred large scale foreign investment and kept tourism at a low rate, at least from the West. For more on the restructuring of the Lebanese economy, see V. Perthes, “Myths and Money: Four Years of Hariri and Lebanon’s Preparation for a New Middle East,” *Middle East Report*, No. 203 (Spring 1997).

³⁰³ For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see *al-Nahar*, October 14, 1994.

³⁰⁴ Rabil 2001, 29.

on Muslim communities than Christian.³⁰⁵ But perhaps the most important factor in galvanizing opposition in both the political sphere and civil society was the death of Hafez al-Assad and the elite disunity that arose in Lebanon as a result of Bashar al-Assad's (mis)handling of the "Lebanon file," such as prompting the Lebanese parliament to extend President Lahoud's term in 2004. There was undoubtedly conflict brewing among the political elites, reflecting corresponding power struggles in the Syrian leadership strata.³⁰⁶

In September 2002, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) shut down Murr Television (MTV) referring to the station's violation of the Lebanese Law of Publications.³⁰⁷ According to some observers, MTV certainly did break the law - but so did many other TV-stations.³⁰⁸ Consequently, the closure of MTV was widely perceived as a move to silence an outlet used by forces opposing the hegemonic political order. However, perhaps beyond demonstrating an increased pressure on elites critical of Syria, the incident was also illustrative of the pervasiveness of a patrimonial logic in the Lebanese state structures. Indeed, the owner of MTV, Gabriel Murr, was in conflict with his brother, who was the Minister of Interior at the time. Furthermore, according to Marwan Kraidy, Ghazi Aridi, the Minister of Information, was not informed of the decision taken

³⁰⁵ Gambill 2001.

³⁰⁶ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

³⁰⁷ M. M. Kraidy, "Arab Satellite Television Between Regionalization and Globalization," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 2002).

³⁰⁸ Assya Y. Ahmad, "The Closing of Murr TV: Challenge or Corrective for Satellite Broadcasting in Lebanon?" *Transnational Broadcasting Journal*, No. 9, 2002. MTV had also recently aired an interview with Michel Aoun, in which he criticized Syria's role in Lebanon. See, Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

by security authorities to shut MTV down and publicly opposed the move.³⁰⁹ In other words, there was no unitary government decision made on the shutdown. In the end, the Lebanese High Court denied the channel its right to appeal the decision and MTV remained off the air until 2009, when it resumed operation.³¹⁰ The selective punishment of MTV, a channel that had become openly associated with the growing oppositional movement, was according to some observers a clear indication of the increasingly authoritarian media climate in Lebanon. It was in this context that some two years later one final catastrophic event became the key factor to galvanize a “we-feeling” powerful enough to move individuals into the realm of collective action.

Shortly before 1 pm on Monday, February 14, 2005, an enormous blast felt miles away shook the Lebanese capital. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on the Beirut seafront awoke horrible memories of the civil war in Lebanon and while it was certainly not the first car bombing in peace time Lebanon, it was clearly the most ruthless and significant in terms of political consequences, as it killed 23 people and eventually led to the end of 29 years of Syrian military presence in Lebanon. Indeed, the new Lebanese political landscape that emerged when the dust from the St. Valentine’s Day explosion settled, offered political opportunities to those who were willing to perceive them. Hariri had resigned from the premiership a few months earlier as a consequence of intra-elite struggles surrounding the extension of President Lahoud’s term in the fall of 2004, and had reportedly initiated overtures towards the increasingly organized political opposition to the Syrian-backed Lebanese government. Consequently,

³⁰⁹ Kraidy 2002.

³¹⁰ Ahmad 2002.

Syria was immediately implicated in the assassination. Moreover, it was difficult for most Lebanese to believe that such a high-profile assassination could take place without the complicity of the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services, given the sophisticated protection Hariri had at his disposal. In the days and weeks that followed the assassination, anti-Syrian protests erupted in the streets of Beirut and civil society groups as well as youth representatives of oppositional political parties erected a tent camp on Martyrs' Square, located on the former Green Line in the central parts of the city.³¹¹

Hariri's funeral on February 16 saw an estimated two hundred thousand Lebanese take to the streets, seizing the moment to also protest the Syrian presence.³¹² Political elites joined with youths in the streets and media, by and large, gave positive coverage of the protests. Moreover, text messaging was widely used to spread the word on where rallies and marches would be held, and, only five days after the assassination, a coordinating group of sorts took shape.³¹³ This group, sometimes called *la chambre noir* (the black room), consisted of political representatives from the oppositional parties, which by this time included Jumblat's PSP and Hariri's Future Movement, as well as prominent intellectual figures and academics.³¹⁴ The coordination group facilitated support for the youths in Martyrs' Square and effectively delegated tasks, such as assigning a team to be responsible for logistics in the tent camp, which by this time was

³¹¹ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

³¹² Oussama Safa, "Lebanon Springs Forward," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 2006): 22-37.

³¹³ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

known as ‘Freedom Camp.’³¹⁵ The emerging movement also benefited from the involvement of several sectors of civil society; a bank set up an account where donations could be deposited, and a political communications firm together with a marketing company launched a professional branding campaign, centering on the slogan ‘Independence ’05.’ An outside ‘consultant’ with experience in toppling regimes was also brought in; a former activist from Otpor, which brought Slobodan Milosevic’s regime down in the 2000 Serbian ‘Bulldozer Revolution,’ held workshops with Lebanese activists.³¹⁶

In fact, Otpor, which unsuccessfully transformed into a political party following the fall of Milosevic, had by then become known as a “revolution exporter,” training Ukrainian civic activists in the lead-up to the Orange Revolution, and reportedly subsequently trained Egyptian activists from the April 6 Movement.³¹⁷ Indeed, the political coalition, the ‘March 14 Movement,’ which would eventually materialize from the Independence ’05 Movement, adopted Otpor’s ‘clenched fist logo,’ modifying the fist to hold an olive branch.³¹⁸ In addition to the consulting services of Otpor activists, Lebanese activists were significantly inspired by the more recent ‘Orange Revolution,’ in

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ The April 6 Movement was a youth movement involved in the 2011 overthrow of the Mubarak regime. See David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, “A Tunisian-Egyptian Link that Shook Arab History,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011.

³¹⁸ The clenched fist is a popular resistance symbol, which has been employed by several movements in history, including the black power movement, international and national socialist movements, and, more recently, American Tea Party activists in their ‘taxpayer march on Washington.’ Given the involvement of Otpor activists as “revolution consultants” in many of the civic movements of the early twenty-first century, they are widely accredited with popularizing it among twenty-first century civic movements. However, the Ukrainian Pora Movement opted out of the clenched fist logo because it was considered too confrontational. See Kuzio 2006.

Ukraine from November 2004 to January 2005, where a similar coalition of civil society activists and political opposition actors contested the results of the presidential election between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich.³¹⁹ In Lebanon, the emerging Independence '05 Movement represented a similar coalition of political party and civil society actors. Increasingly coordinated, and clearly benefiting from the involvement of professional marketers, the movement was rapidly shifting from a mere security nuisance to a real threat to the authorities. Thus, on February 27, the authorities decided to put an end to the growing movement and announced a ban on public demonstrations. The army and the police were deployed around Martyrs' Square, giving the protestors until 5 am the following morning to evacuate.³²⁰

A stone's throw from Martyrs' Square, in the Parliament building, a vote of confidence in the government was scheduled for February 28. Moreover, the Beirut Merchants' Association, the Lebanese Bar Association, and a number of trade unions (independently of the CGLT), had called for a general strike and demonstrations in Martyrs' Square on that day. In other words, developments were rapidly moving towards conflict. However, as dawn broke on February 28, the vastly outnumbered security forces were not confronted by angry protestors, but embraced by them. Scenes of smiling protestors putting flowers in soldiers' gun barrels and army soldiers 'accidentally' letting people slip through the barricades to join the protesters in the square were broadcast across the world. This non-confrontational approach was, of course, a conscious strategy on part of the protestors, as were the instructions to demonstrators to "sit in tight rows,

³¹⁹ Binnendijk and Marovic 2006. The FPM eventually adopted orange as their official party color.

³²⁰ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

join arms, and form a human chain to make it more difficult for the security forces to carry them away,” in the event of an assault by security forces.³²¹ Before February 28 came to an end, the Karami government had resigned and the Independence '05 Movement had won a very significant first victory. As international pressure on Syria mounted, President Assad finally announced on March 5 that the Syrian troops would be withdrawn from Lebanon. However, the sectarian representativeness of the Independence Intifada was lacking in one significant way; no participating political party or civil society group represented the Shi'a community.

In contrast, on March 8, the Shi'a community were in majority as another significant portion of the Lebanese population mobilized in the nearby Riad al-Solh Square – a rally showing support to the Syrian military, thanking them for their role in ending the civil war and imposing security in the Lebanese Republic. The main organizer of the Riad al-Solh Square protest was the political party/guerrilla movement Hezbollah, which relied to a great extent on Syrian and Iranian support and consequently was cautious about the shifts in the political landscape. However, the rally organized by Hezbollah did not call for the Syrian forces to remain in the country; rather it embraced the Lebanese national flag as the main symbol of the rally and, much like the Independence '05 leaders, Hezbollah discouraged its partisans from bringing party flags to the rally.³²² Rather than trying to launch a countermovement to keep Syria in Lebanon, Hezbollah wanted to assert itself and demonstrate that there was vast popular support

³²¹ Ibid., 175.

³²² M. M. Kraidy, “Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Changing Arab Information Order,” *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 1 (2007), 139-156.

behind them and, more importantly, the arms of the resistance.³²³ This show of force by Hezbollah, and President Lahoud's subsequent move to re-appoint Karami as prime minister, prodded the leaders of Independence '05 to maintain momentum and keep the pressure on Syria, should Assad feel emboldened by the Riad al-Solh Square demonstration and delay the Syrian withdrawal. Thus, on March 14, one month after the assassination, Martyrs' Square was once again transformed into a sea of red, white, and green Lebanese flags as close to a million Lebanese came out to demonstrate their national unity and wish for independence from Syria.³²⁴

The crowd was composed of Lebanese of all sects (though the Shi'a were underrepresented) and came from all over Lebanon, but judging by anecdotal evidence, in terms of socio-economic status there was a clear predominance of the upper and middle classes. Indeed, some of the nicknames for the crowd on Martyrs' Square, such as "the Gucci Revolution" or "the Monot Street Resistance," were not simply humorous, but also reflected its urban and affluent character.³²⁵ Nevertheless, regardless of whether the crowd was socio-economically unrepresentative, there was no denying that it did represent a significant portion of the Lebanese population. With broad popular opposition, key elite defection, and mounting international pressure, *Pax Syriana* could last no longer, and finally, in April the last Syrian in uniform left the country and in May

³²³ The issue of Hezbollah's arms remains a key cause of tension in Lebanon. It will be further discussed in chapter 5.

³²⁴ Safa 2006.

³²⁵ Frances Z. Brown, "My Students, Reveling in the Cedar Revolution," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2005. Monot Street was then the main nightclub area in Beirut; Gemayzeh has since taken over the title.

the first free elections since the end of the civil war were held.³²⁶ It is clear from the above narrative that key internal factors played a role in the success of the Independence Intifada: elite disunity, efficient resource mobilization, and effective framing of the movement.³²⁷ The public outrage that dominated the country in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination led several political elites to rethink their positions vis-à-vis the Syrian presence and allowed for sustained grassroots mobilization through the convergence of civil society and political party interests.

There were also external factors that played a significant role: mounting international pressure and loss of international legitimacy, especially after the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the new political balance in the region after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Importantly, the United Nations Security Council had passed a resolution (UNSC 1559) following the extension of President Lahoud's term in September 2004, calling for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanese territory.³²⁸ Nevertheless, in the end it was the domestic coalition of civil society and political party actors that succeeded in putting enough pressure on the Syrian regime to follow through with the promise to withdraw. But, as the civic activists were to find out, the removal of Syrian troops did not translate into a sudden renaissance of civil society's influence in Lebanese politics.

Instead, Lebanese politicians quickly returned to “business as usual” and abandoned

³²⁶ Questions did arise in the wake of Syria's exit on whether they had actually left Lebanese territory since the Syria-Lebanon border had not been properly demarcated. Furthermore, the question of whether the Syrian *Mukhabarat* truly had lost its influence in the Lebanese intelligence services was subject to further debate. However, for all significant intents and purposes, the Syrian occupation of Lebanon ended in April 2005.

³²⁷ The significance of “resonant movement frames” and the role of collective identity in the Independence Intifada will be discussed in chapter 5.

³²⁸ William Harris, “Bashar al-Assad's Lebanon Gamble,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 2005): 33-44.

those among the activists who were hoping for reforms beyond the removal of Syrian troops: “We were so disappointed, several of us wanted to stay on the square and not give up until we had achieved real reform. But the party members, the same people who had had slept with us in the square just followed their leaders blindly.”³²⁹ Disillusionment among participants in popular mobilizations once the “cycle of protest” is over is common.³³⁰ This disillusionment can stem from several different factors, such as disappointment with the outcome, sheer exhaustion, or a natural “low” after the euphoria of the masses have subsided.

To be sure, the dismantling of the Freedom Camp, and the winding down of the movement was an emotional anticlimax for many of the participants. Some of the civic activists felt used by the politicians: “We started this in the streets, not them. They worked with the Syrians for fifteen years, some even longer, and they used us for their own political aims. It made me sick to my stomach, quite frankly.”³³¹ At the same time, the division between “us” and “them” was not as simple as “us, the activists” and “them, the politicians.” Rather, the activists interviewed for this study were disappointed with the *traditional* politicians and the mainstream political parties, while still feeling sympathetic towards certain actors in the political sphere.³³² As was noted in chapter 3, there were actors among the civic activists of the 1990s who had seen fit to enter the

³²⁹ Interview, Beirut, August 27, 2008.

³³⁰ Tarrow 1998: 165.

³³¹ Interview, Beirut, September 3, 2008.

³³² The two most popular political parties among the civic activists interviewed for this study were the DRM and the New Left. However, there were also individuals who sympathized with the FPM (at least what the party “is trying to become,”) and former members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Lebanese Forces, and Amal.

political system through forming a new political party, the Democratic Renewal Movement (DRM). Others among the activists preferred to stay outside of party politics, since the political system brings constraints and pressures that civil society organizations can avoid.³³³ The DRM was a member of the political opposition that had materialized in the preceding years, and until the 2009 parliamentary election it held one seat in parliament.³³⁴ A great number of grassroots organizations were founded during and after the spring of 2005. For instance, 05AMAM was formed only a few days after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. “AMAM” stands for *al-Mujtamah al-Madani* – literally meaning “civil society.”

In 2006, a number of civic activists founded *Nahwa al-Muwatiniya* (Na-am), Arabic for “Towards Citizenship.” Na-am has as its main goal a Lebanon based on a civic identity and high levels of transparency and accountability in the political process. However, there were divisions within civil society as well; after 2005 some civil society groups were more or less associated with specific political groupings. Thus, some groups claimed impartiality (e.g. Na-am), while others (e.g. 05AMAM) openly sympathized with one particular political camp.³³⁵ Others were inextricably linked to important political figures in the March 14 coalition; the youth organization Nahar al-Shabab, which was affiliated with the an-Nahar newspaper, in particular took a clear political stance after the December 2005 assassination of an-Nahar editor-in-chief and (since 2005) Member of

³³³ The individual considerations of activists regarding party politics and civil society activism will be discussed in chapter 5.

³³⁴ The DRM candidate ran on the Future Movement’s list in the Tripoli district, but was dropped from the list for the 2009 elections because of an agreement struck between majority and opposition candidates (see below).

³³⁵ Interview, 05AMAM board member, July 9, 2008.

Parliament Gebran Tueni.³³⁶ Tueni was a key leader of the Independence Intifada (indeed, he hosted most of *la chambre noir*'s meetings) and his assassination was widely blamed on Syria and its proxies in Lebanon. While in Lebanon a political coalition would emerge, which claimed the symbols and legacy of the Independence '05 Movement, it would not be nearly as broadly representative of Lebanese civil and political society as the independence demonstrations during the spring of 2005. Indeed, beyond the objective of removing the Syrians from Lebanon, the traditional political actors had little in common with the civic actors.³³⁷

The Lebanese parliamentary elections of 2005 saw the usual political bickering and produced two blocs, which some observers named after the dates of the two biggest manifestations of the spring: March 8 and March 14.³³⁸ However, in reality the alliances had shifted since the protests took place; the political force that had formed the core of the March 14 protest lost a significant ally when Michel Aoun's FPM ended their participation in the alliance and instead signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with Hezbollah.³³⁹ The main reason for Aoun's defection was, as so often in Lebanese politics, political elite rivalry and maneuvering:

³³⁶ Nahar al-Shabab was originally the name of the 'youth appendix' to the newspaper.

³³⁷ K. Knio, "Lebanon: Cedar Revolution or Neo-Sectarian Partition?" *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (July 2005): 225-231.

³³⁸ Using the terminology of 'March 14' and 'March 8' was very much a conscious effort of the former camp to claim the legacy of the Independence Intifada, and discredit the latter as a pro-Syrian camp. Not unexpectedly, FPM members (according to this labeling part of March 8) do not appreciate this label since they formed an integral part of the Independence '05 Movement. In this study, I use the self-appointed labels of each camp, which are "March 14" and "the Opposition."

³³⁹ A. R. Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 42, No. 4, (December 2007): 475-491.

The main bone of contention was the refusal of [Saad] Hariri and Jumblatt to amend an occupation-era electoral law designed to disenfranchise Christian voters (Aoun's primary support base) by embedding most of them in large majority Muslim districts. In this way, both had come to control large blocs of Christian MPs dependent on their political largesse (in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, respectively). They were perfectly willing to exchange some of these seats for the loyalty of Christian opposition groups, an offer readily accepted by the LF, former President Amine Gemayel's [Kataib] party, and Qornet Shehwan, an umbrella group of politicians operating under the blessing of Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir. Aoun refused, wagering (correctly) that he could win far more seats in head to head competition with Hariri and Jumblatt than they were willing to offer.³⁴⁰

Furthermore, the Christian leaders in the opposition, such as former President Amine Gemayel, and the recently released leader of the LF, Samir Geagea, were not interested in awarding Aoun a significant role in the March 14 political alliance.³⁴¹ Aoun had since his return to Lebanon from exile presented himself as the true architect behind the Independence Intifada, and, increasingly, as the true representative of Lebanon's Christians. Since the majority of political parties in Lebanon draw their base from specific communal constituencies, the divisions in Lebanon following the 2005 elections could roughly be understood as two opposing camps dividing the country's sects: one Sunni-Druze-Christian coalition (March 14) and one Shi'a-Christian coalition (the Opposition). In other words, many of the participants in the movement from the spring of 2005 appeared to have retreated into their sectarian homes (the Christians split between two camps), while a disillusioned and homeless civil society constituency was left behind. This kind of splintering once a key goal has been achieved is not unusual; it is rather the rule of popular uprisings, since once a main overarching goal is achieved and

³⁴⁰ Gambill 2009. The electoral dealings among Lebanese political elites are discussed in depth below.

³⁴¹ Norton 2007; Gambill 2009.

the movement enters what Tarrow calls the “demobilization phase,”³⁴² differences in specific agendas begin to emerge. In the Serbian case, several Otpor members were criticized for entering the political system, and in Ukraine the main civil society movement behind the Orange Revolution, Pora, splintered into two fractions: Black Pora, which remained a civic activist movement, and Yellow Pora, which formed an oppositional party.³⁴³ Other countries in the Middle East also saw coalitions gathering groups and individuals from a broad ideological spectrum. In 2005, a number of political activists from across the political spectrum announced the Egyptian Movement for Change (EMC), or Kefaya (enough). Kefaya gathered Nasserists, Secularists, Islamists, Liberals, and Marxists in a coalition whose main aim was ending Mubarak’s regime.³⁴⁴

Similar to how the March 14 coalition in Lebanon presented itself more as a social movement than a political bloc, Kefaya claimed to be the manifestation of social currents. However, much like the Lebanese March 14 Movement, political parties formed the core of the coalition: “In reality, Kefaya was a coalition of political parties united by their demand for a shift in the balance of power.”³⁴⁵ In both the Lebanese March 14 case and the Egyptian Kefaya case, the main goal was to change the “rules of the game.” However, a significant difference between March 14 and Kefaya was the institutional setting and extent to which reform of that institutional setting was sought. In Egypt, Kefaya sought a fundamentally different framework for how politics happen, i.e. an end

³⁴² Tarrow 1998: 147.

³⁴³ Kuzio 2006.

³⁴⁴ N. Oweidat et al. “The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative,” RAND Corporation, 2008.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

to the monopoly of President Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP).³⁴⁶ In Lebanon, the main political actors in the March 14 coalition sought an end to Syrian hegemony, but not a completely reformed institutional setting. To be sure, some actors in March 14 *did* seek such changes, but not the established political parties, such as Hariri's Future Movement or Jumblat's PSP, which formed the backbone of the March 14 coalition. The independence frame, i.e. the selling of the Independence Intifada as a nationalistic reaffirmation of Lebanon as an entity, effectively obscured the more fundamental differences among the participants. Consequently, most of the civic activists interviewed for this study, while acknowledging the extraordinary feat of the Independence Intifada, also felt certain bitterness over how it ended.

However, despite the disappointments of the Independence Intifada and the politicking of Lebanese elites, developments in the aftermath of Syria's withdrawal indicated that perhaps there would be a different role for civil society in Lebanon after all. In the midst of political crises, civic activists formed networks, or coalitions, with other associations, political elites, and state institutions.³⁴⁷ Different from 'revolutionary' coalitions, such as the original make-up of Otpor, Pora, Kefaya, or Independence '05, which formed in order to achieve a broad overarching goal, these coalitions were 'evolutionary' in character. That is, these 'campaign coalitions' were formed not to achieve a broad overarching goal, but rather to achieve *limited* objectives that could represent incremental steps towards a broader end goal. Some of these campaign

³⁴⁶ Manar Shorbagy, "Understanding *Kefaya*: The New Politics in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter 2007): 39-60.

³⁴⁷ Chapter 5 discusses the 2006 war and subsequent political crises in detail – for the purposes of this chapter it suffices to point out that the 2006-2008 period was characterized by significant political and societal polarization in Lebanon.

coalitions took the shape of collaborative projects where civil society organizations worked together towards a specific end, such as citizen education in villages, while others were designed to push for a specific policy. The following section turns attention to the low-intensity activities of civic activists in Lebanon that succeeded the highly contentious mobilization of 2005, and examines evolutionary campaign coalitions as a vehicle of collective action.

Choosing vehicle of action: NGO networks and “evolutionary” coalitions

A visitor to Nahwa al-Muwatiniya’s offices in Beirut could easily mistake the large group of activists for friends socializing in a private home; in this young crowd jokes are numerous, spirits are high, and arguments – for the most part good-natured – erupt from time to time. One activist commented on the work environment: “It can get pretty loud...but at the same time, there is a very positive vibe there that makes the organization feel dynamic. And everybody is serious when it counts and cares about the work.” Indeed, the work Na-am’s activists are involved in is serious business; monitoring the activities of Members of Parliament and lobbying for electoral reform and women’s right to pass on their nationality to their child, are only a few of the items on Na-am’s daily agenda. For the activists engaging in the Women’s Right to Nationality Campaign (WRN), the issue of gender and nationality represents yet another site where they can work to strengthen the role of citizenship – for both men and women. In the Lebanese context, this issue is directly linked to the political organization of society. As Suad Joseph has pointed out, the supremacy of patrilineality – that is, kinship descent is only counted through the father’s lineage – is a key substructure to the patriarchal structures

around which Lebanon's political system and culture are constructed.³⁴⁸ Thus, what is on the surface an issue of gender equality in the extension represents a challenge to the very underpinnings of a political culture that is shared across sectarian boundaries. Indeed, the centrality of the family and the emphasis on kinship in Lebanese society can be seen as a culturally unifying factor among the Lebanese. As Suad Joseph puts it:

A nation/state built upon multiple, competing identities assumed to be *a priori* and superior to the nation/state is in dire need of cultural commonalities. Kinship is a site of cultural unity in a society that is politically fragmented and has often seen itself as culturally fragmented.³⁴⁹

The WRN campaign, therefore, is every bit as sensitive as the campaign for civil marriage and presents a challenge to patrons from across the communal spectrum. For projects of such scale and scope, Na-am's network needs to expand beyond the typical "Na-amist," i.e. a young recent or soon-to-be college graduate from the upper to lower middle class, and tap into a broader "social movement community" by connecting with other segments of Lebanese civil society and, whenever possible, members of the political sphere.³⁵⁰ For Na-am, this involves forming networks with representatives from larger professional NGOs and, sometimes, members from the economic and political elite. Indeed, from time to time, CSOs find it in their interest to pool their resources and work together towards a specific goal, sometimes forging alliances with political elites in the process. In order to do so, they need to develop organizational structures to manage relations and regulate the output from the network of different actors engaging in the

³⁴⁸ S. Joseph, "Descent of the Nation: Kinship and Citizenship in Lebanon," *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1999): 295-318.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

³⁵⁰ S. Staggenborg, "Social Movement Communities and Cycles of Protest: The Emergence and Maintenance of a Local Women's Movement." *Social Problems*, Vol. 45, No 2 (1998): 180-204.

campaign. Such organizational structures are sometimes developed within the framework of a permanent or semi-permanent NGO network formed around a broader goal, such as human rights or environmental issues. In Lebanon, however, the most prominent campaigns in recent years have not been launched under the auspices of permanent or semi-permanent NGO networks, be they national, such as the Lebanese NGO Forum (LNF) and the Lebanese Environmental Forum (LEF), or regional, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Nonviolence Network in the Arab Countries (NNAC).

Instead, the more dynamic campaigns have been launched by more or less temporary coalitions, consisting of civic organizations and, in some cases, political elites, for specific issues such as the removal of sectarian identity from Lebanese ID-cards, the right of a Lebanese woman to transfer nationality to her child, or the public's right to access official documentation. Before taking a closer look at the different types of evolutionary coalitions in post-Pax Syria Lebanon, it is important to understand the difficulties that previous efforts of civil society coordination have encountered.

NGO networks in Lebanon

The issue of how to coordinate civil society efforts towards mutual goals has long been problematic in Lebanon. In the midst of Lebanon's civil war, Mouvement Social Libanaise (MSL), founded in 1961, was responsible for an early effort at coordination among NGOs from various sectors in Lebanon.³⁵¹ During the civil war, the MSL

³⁵¹ J. Bennett, "Lebanon: The Lebanese NGO Forum and the Reconstruction of Civil Society 1989-93." In J. Bennett (ed.) *Meeting Needs: NGO Coordination in Practice* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1995): 118-144.

attracted international funding both because of its secular character and because it worked with Palestinians in Lebanon, which was of particular international interest in the early 1980s. In 1986, the MSL, led by Gregoire Haddad, tried to attract funding for a “national coordination network,” which would be divided into sectors.³⁵² However, the proposal met with criticism, because “while claiming to represent a broad-based Lebanese NGO membership, [the MSL] had not fully consulted with [other NGOs]” in developing the proposal.³⁵³ Haddad and the MSL proceeded with support from the United Nations (UN), but the network’s members beyond the MSL saw little of the financial benefits and the first significant effort to coordinate NGO activities in Lebanon failed.

In 1988, a new effort of coordinating NGO activities in Lebanon was launched; “Encounter” was an *ad hoc* committee consisting of the larger Lebanese NGOs, initially including the MSL. However, under the leadership of the Lebanese YMCA, Encounter was transformed into the Lebanese NGO Forum (LNF), and Haddad’s MSL left the initiative. Instead the MSL was involved in creating a rival network; *La Coordination des ONG en vue du Développement au Liban* (CDL-ONG), subsequently more commonly known as *le Collectif*.³⁵⁴ Consequently, in the late 1980s, there were two major NGO networks active on the Lebanese scene: the LNF and *le Collectif*. In the mid-1990s, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) gained first-hand experience of the competitive and politicized world of Lebanese NGOs when it attempted to promote the development of local and regional NGO networks in the Middle East. CIDA’s efforts in

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid., 128.

³⁵⁴ The full name became “*le Collectif des ONG au Liban*.”

Lebanon centered on bringing together the LNF and *le Collectif*.³⁵⁵ The two networks had an antagonistic relationship, not only because of the fierce competition for international funds, but also because of significant differences in their respective character and outlook. The LNF was led by “the skillfully entrepreneurial, if not aggressive, YMCA of Lebanon, which acted as the lead agency for what were largely sectarian social welfare organizations closely linked to the various religious communities.”³⁵⁶ *Le Collectif*, on the other hand, had a “more diverse membership of both sectarian and non-sectarian NGOs and [its] core group was more interested in working toward a non-sectarian path forward for the country.”³⁵⁷

Hence, there were significant political differences between the two networks and their inability to overcome the fragmenting dynamics of the Lebanese political sphere resulted in a failure to transform them into a forum of civil society and political sphere interaction. Undoubtedly, the civil war environment was highly unfavorable for coordination among NGOs; extreme humanitarian need, constant physical danger, and lack of certainty of future developments seriously hampered long-term strategic planning and coordination.³⁵⁸ However, beyond the difficulties caused by external factors, a common occurrence in the early attempts of NGO coordination in Lebanon was the presence of one strong organization, setting much of the agenda for the network – the YMCA in the LNF and the MSL in *le Collectif*. In a polarizing political climate such as Lebanon’s, the dependency of a network’s agenda on one strong organization, or even

³⁵⁵ Kingston 2007.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 127.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Bennett 1995.

one strong individual, clearly makes a permanent network susceptible to cooption and bias. Instead, the campaign coalition format that had developed “organically” in the RME and RCM campaigns proved more amenable to the Lebanese context than the NGO network format of the LNF and *le Collectif*.³⁵⁹ When existing NGO networks, with the aid of foreign actors, failed to materialize a broad forum that could gather different civil society and political sphere actors, socially rooted actors managed to do just that through campaign coalitions limited in both time and scope:

Indeed, in Lebanon, it was clear that the kind of socially rooted civil society networks willing to push for greater social and political accountability were emerging in more informal ways elsewhere in the country – part of a new generation of activists working on more particular issues such as the environment, disability, and a remarkably successful campaign for the holding of municipal elections in the country in 1998.³⁶⁰

Thus, while permanent NGO networks remained a feature in Lebanese civil society, they did not constitute the main vehicle of collective action for the emerging civic movement. Instead, temporary campaign coalitions of the kinds that launched the RME and RCM became the model for future efforts to coordinate and cooperate towards common goals.

Temporary ‘campaign coalitions’

The RME and RCM, despite the failure of the latter to achieve its main goal, demonstrated the ability of Lebanese CSOs to effectively pool their resources and pull towards a common goal – a feat that permanent NGO networks continually failed to accomplish. To be sure, temporary single-issue coalitions perform a different core

³⁵⁹ Kingston 2001, 2007; Karam 2005.

³⁶⁰ Kingston 2007, 128.

function than permanent NGO networks. The latter are formed in order to facilitate broad collaboration between organizations of similar character, while the former emerge to facilitate cooperation between organizations of differing character in joint pursuit of a common limited goal. Naturally, in terms of membership there is overlap between NGO networks and campaign coalitions – many CSOs are members of NGO networks and at the same time participate in several campaign coalitions. Nevertheless, while empirically NGO networks and campaign coalitions are not mutually exclusive or in competition with each other, there is analytical value in making the distinction between the two as different potential vehicles for collective action.

Indeed, it is clear that Lebanon after the civil war saw a growth of temporary campaign coalitions in which actors of different character, temporarily sharing at least one objective, organized in order to achieve this limited aim, whereas the role of permanent NGO networks became less significant as a vehicle for collective action, and instead remained mainly a venue for mutual support and information sharing among NGOs of similar character. To be sure, there are many different kinds of temporary campaign coalitions; actors of different character and motivations form coalitions for a wide range of objectives. Given this diversity, can, for instance, the Independence '05 Movement can be considered the same animal as a network of civil society organizations that work on passing legislation for the public to gain the right to access to state documentation? One involves a highly contentious interaction between a social movement and state authorities, while the other involves a not quite as contentious lobbying and public awareness campaign. Yet, both can be understood to represent aspects of what Tarrow defines as a social movement, namely “collective challenges,

based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.”³⁶¹ Clearly, there are both similarities and differences in the ways civil society actors interact with the political sphere in times of contentious mobilization and in times of ‘normal’ politics, or, to use Tarrow’s terminology, in “revolutionary cycles” and “non-revolutionary cycles.”³⁶² As Tarrow and Tilly have both argued, one must make a distinction between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes.

The former represent “moments of deep fragmentation in state power,” whereas the latter are “effective transfers of state power to new sets of actors.”³⁶³ When the two are combined, we have an actual revolution on our hands. However, not all social movements aim for a full-scale revolution, but rather seek to alter the status quo through engaging with state actors in a collaborative, as opposed to confrontational, mode of action. Traditional social movements are often depicted as challengers to the state, as “a potential rival to the political representation system.”³⁶⁴ Consequently, the entry of social movement organizations in institutional arrangements with the state has generally been seen as a “demobilization” of a social movement.³⁶⁵ However, as ‘new social

³⁶¹ Tarrow 1998, 4.

³⁶² Ibid., 157.

³⁶³ Ibid.; Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

³⁶⁴ J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 5). See also, Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); W. A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990).

³⁶⁵ Goldstone 2003; Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, “Stepsisters: Feminist Movement Activism in Different Institutional Spaces,” in David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) 195-216.

movements' (NSMs) focusing on rights-based and non-material issues gained more attention, the role of individuals who could hardly be cast as "system outsiders" became apparent. Indeed, the central role of professional and intellectual elites and students in NSMs belie the 'outsider' character of social movements. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the boundaries between social movement activism and political party activism are not clear-cut. As Jack Goldstone puts it, "empirical research has repeatedly shown that the actors, the fates, and the structures of political parties and social movements are closely intertwined."³⁶⁶

Thus, I argue, it is useful to make an analytical distinction between 'revolutionary' and 'evolutionary' coalitions. 'Revolutionary coalitions' gather a broad array of ideological actors from both civil society and the political sphere for the purpose of achieving one broad overarching aim of immediately disrupting the status quo, such as the removal of a dictator (Serbia 2000, Egypt 2011), rejection of supposedly fraudulent election results (Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004-2005), or ending a foreign occupation (Lebanon 2005). Because of their potentially dramatic results, these are the types of coalitions that usually gain the most attention in studies of social movements and change.³⁶⁷ 'Evolutionary coalitions,' on the other hand, can also gather a broad array of ideological actors, sometimes including actors from the political sphere, but for the purpose of one relatively *limited* aim, considered an incremental step towards a broader long-term aim. This can be a coalition lobbying the political sphere in order to effect specific policy change (e.g. electoral law reform, nationality legislation, or legislation on

³⁶⁶ Goldstone 2003, 3.

³⁶⁷ See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

public access to state records), or a coalition employing projects targeting civilian society in specific fields (e.g. electoral system education in villages or civil rights education). These coalitions rarely attract the same attention as revolutionary coalitions but are, I argue, essential to understanding the low-intensity dynamics that effect change in a society. In terms of composition, evolutionary coalitions can be of many different types. In the Lebanese case, three types are particularly prominent: 1) Civil society coalitions. These gather civil society organizations of different character (e.g. secular NGOs and confessional charity organizations) to achieve a specific goal. This can be a modest objective, such as completing a local educational project aiming at instilling a sense of active citizenship vis-à-vis municipalities among villagers, or training youth in governance and voting procedures.

2) Civil society-political party coalitions (e.g. local civic NGOs and political parties with a vested interest in a particular issue). In such a coalition, political parties team up with CSOs to achieve a specific aim, such as raising public awareness about a particular issue, or pushing for a specific piece of legislation. 3) State actor-civil society coalitions. Here, the coalition also includes a state actor, such as a government agency or ministry. Unlike revolutionary coalitions, where at least the short-term outcome is usually clear (evaluating their long-term success is another issue, however), evolutionary coalitions generally offer less obvious short-term results. Indeed, when studied in isolation from each other, the overall impact can be viewed as limited. However, regardless of their effectiveness, the mere existence of such coalitions suggests there is an additional factor policymakers must now take into account – a civic movement that due to its potential as a mobilizing force cannot be completely disregarded.

Indeed, collectively, the various campaign coalitions constitute a movement's organization structures, which McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald define as "collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action."³⁶⁸ To illustrate the potential for a more collaborative role for civil society in policy issues of high importance, and how success in one issue-specific campaign could have long-term effects, the following section examines a campaign coalition in Lebanon, which involved actors from both the political sphere and civil society: the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER), which formed in 2006, only a year after the first parliamentary election free of Syrian interference since 1972. The coalition behind the CCER comprised of civil society groups, but it enjoyed the individual backing from several parliamentarians, and it had a representative with the Ministry of Interior, effectively making the CCER a state actor-civil society coalition, rather than a pure civil society coalition.

The Boutrous Commission, the CCER, and the 2009 Parliamentary Elections

Following the parliamentary elections of 2005, newly appointed Prime Minister Fouad Saniora ordered the formation of a commission, which under the chairmanship of Fouad Boutrous would draft a reformed electoral law to replace the Syrian-sponsored electoral law of 2000. With support from UNDP's Electoral Law Reform Program the twelve members of the commission elicited input from actors from both civil society and the political sphere, reviewed previous electoral law proposals, and consulted

³⁶⁸ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996: 3.

international election experts.³⁶⁹ On June 1, 2006, less than a year after its work began, the Boutros Commission presented the government with a draft law containing significant reforms with regards to some of the most pressing problems with the current electoral system. Among the more radical of the proposed reforms were suggestions of instituting quotas for women's representation, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, enabling voting from abroad, and creating an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to oversee elections instead of the Ministry of Interior.³⁷⁰

Perhaps most significantly, while not a full move towards elections through proportional representation, the Boutros draft law represented a first step towards the dismantling of Lebanon's sectarian political system by creating a parallel electoral system whereby 77 of the Lebanese Parliament's 128 seats would be elected through the current majority system on the *Qada'* (small administrative district, also *Caza*, pl. *Aqdya*) level, while 51 members would be elected through a new proportional representation system on the *Muhafazah* (governorate, pl. *Muhafazat*) level.³⁷¹ As was discussed in chapter 2, the majoritarian system, that is, the "first past the post" system, which allots all seats in a district to the list with the largest share of votes, effectively marginalizes minorities in a district and discourages independent candidates from running.

³⁶⁹ P. Salem, "Electoral Law Reform in Lebanon: The Experience and Recommendations of the National Commission," *Arab Reform Brief*, No. 10 (July 2006).

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Salem 2006.

Figure 4. 1: Lebanon's Muhafazat and Aqdy



Source: www.geohive.com.

Figure 4.1 shows Lebanon's six *Muhafazat* and twenty-five *Aqdy* (the Beirut *Muhafazah* is not subdivided). In the 2009 elections, six of these districts were merged into three electoral districts (Hermel-Baalbek, West Bekaa-Rachaya, Hasbaya-Marjaayoun), while Beirut was divided into three districts (Beirut I, II, III), for a total of twenty-six electoral districts. As we shall see, in heterogeneous districts, where the political system would appear to encourage candidates to appeal to voters from across the sectarian divides, since it demands both the forging of cross-sectarian lists and receiving the largest share of the total amount of votes from all sects, elite bargaining and patron-

client structures determine the outcome, not cross-sectarian appeal. A few examples from the 2009 parliamentary elections are helpful in illustrating the main problems of Lebanon's electoral system.³⁷² The Ba'abda district had six seats, with three seats reserved for Maronite Christians, one for a Shi'a Muslim, and one for a Druze. In 2009, both the March 14 coalition and the Opposition ran with electoral lists of that composition. In addition, there was an independent list consisting of one Maronite Christian and one Shi'a Muslim, and eight Maronite Christians, eight, Shi'a Muslims, and six Druze running outside of lists.³⁷³ The Opposition won 56.2 percent of the vote, and the March 14 coalition 43.8 percent.³⁷⁴

In other words, in a proportional system this result would have yielded a 3-2 split of the seats (or 3-3, depending on the rules for remainders). Instead, all six seats were awarded to the Opposition. Furthermore, despite the existence of an independent list and twenty-two candidates running outside of lists, the vote was split between the two main lists. In other words, candidates who are not in alliance with any of the key political elites are not likely to win a seat. As a rule, political actors who are part of the same coalition will negotiate for the slots on the lists where they have a presence. Sometimes, however, agreement cannot be reached even between parties who are part of the same coalition on the national level. Thus, in the southern district of Jezzine, a Christian majority district,

³⁷² The 2009 elections were held with the Qada' (also called Caza) forming an electoral district, but maintained the majoritarian system. Consequently, the so-called "March 14 coalition" won 71 seats in parliament with 44.5 percent of the popular votes, while the Opposition (or "March 8 coalition") won 57 seats with 55.5 percent of the popular vote.

³⁷³ International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), "Lebanese Parliamentary Elections 2009: Candidates by Electoral Lists," 20 May 2009.

³⁷⁴ Official results from Lebanese authorities: <http://www.elections.gov.lb>.

but which under previous electoral laws was merged with surrounding Shi'a majority districts and therefore had a strong presence of Amal, the FPM and Amal could not agree and ran two separate lists.³⁷⁵ While the March 14 coalition abstained from competing in that district, voters had a choice between an FPM list and an Amal list. The FPM ended up carrying the district. Elite bargaining for slots on the lists is not limited to within the different coalitions, but also across the blocs. The Aley district, which in the 2000 election was combined with Ba'abda (see Chapter 2), had five seats in 2009, two reserved for Maronite Christians, two for Druze, and one for a Greek Orthodox Christian.³⁷⁶

In his capacity as the strongest Druze chieftain, Walid Jumblat, the leader of the PSP, which at that time was part of the March 14 coalition, was the main powerbroker in forging electoral lists in the Aley district, despite the fact that he himself ran in the Shouf district. In the 2009 election, in the interest of "intra-Druze" harmony, Jumblat left one of the two Druze slots vacant on his electoral list to the benefit of his main Druze *Zu'ama* rival, Talal Arslan.³⁷⁷ This practice was a remnant from *Pax Syriana*, when Jumblat had been prodded by the Syrians to placate Arslan, but he had broken this "electoral tradition" in 2005, causing a serious rift between himself and Arslan.³⁷⁸ As a consequence of Jumblat leaving one Druze seat vacant, the Opposition list received one seat and the March 14 list four seats, the latter winning 61.2 percent of the vote against

³⁷⁵ Matt Nash, "Districts in Depth: Jezzine," *Now Lebanon*, May 25, 2009.

³⁷⁶ IFES, 20 May 2009.

³⁷⁷ Matt Nash, "Alliances Push Several MPs off Electoral Lists," *Now Lebanon*, April 18, 2009. The rift between Jumblat and Arslan escalated into violence on several occasions. Following the May 2008 civil unrest, they mended fences, the "reconciliation in the mountain."

³⁷⁸ Zeina Abu Rizk, "Damascus' Mediator Role Hampered by Strong Rivalries," *The Daily Star*, April 28, 2004. For more on the Druze intra-elite rivalry, see J. P. Harik, "'Shaykh al-'Aql' and the Druze of Mount Lebanon: Conflict and Accommodation." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (July 1994): 461-485.

38.8 percent to the Opposition list.³⁷⁹ Had the vote taken place according to a proportional system, the March 14 list would have won three seats, and the Opposition list two. Indeed, under the majoritarian system, a split of seats between the lists only occurs as a result of agreements before Election Day, or, at least in theory, as a result of voters splitting their vote between lists. In 2009, out of a total of twenty-six districts, a split of the seats only occurred in two districts besides Aley – the Beirut II district and the Metn district. In the Metn, the Greek Orthodox Michel Murr, running on the March 14 coalition list, struck a deal with the Armenian party Tashnaq, which was in alliance with the Opposition.

In exchange for Tashnaq encouraging its supporters to vote for him, Murr would leave the Armenian Orthodox seat vacant on his list, allowing the Tashnaq candidate on the Opposition list to run unopposed. Subsequently, since splitting the vote between different lists is legally allowed, Tashnaq encouraged its supporters to vote only for Michel Murr, not for the entire March 14 list.³⁸⁰ In Tripoli, politicians forged a “solidarity list,” supposedly after a Syrian-Saudi rapprochement that sought to defuse local tension. In this arrangement, the March 14 coalition made room for Najib Mikati, who in the spring of 2005 had acted as prime minister in the interim government in charge of overseeing elections and was, by some, considered close to Syria.³⁸¹ In making room for Mikati, the Democratic Renewal Movement’s only MP, Misbah Ahdab, lost his slot on

³⁷⁹ Official results from Lebanese authorities: <http://www.elections.gov.lb>.

³⁸⁰ After the election, Murr accused the Opposition of preventing Tashnaq supporters to vote for him, and accused Tashnaq of having reneged on their deal.

³⁸¹ Matt Nash, “Talking to: Tripoli Candidate Misbah Ahdab,” *Now Lebanon*, May 12, 2009.

the list and, although he instead ran as an independent, also lost his seat.³⁸² This foray into Lebanese electoral politics illustrates several points on Lebanon's political system and the environment in which civic activists operate. First, voting in Lebanon has little to do with citizen representation and more to do with political elite bargaining and maneuvering. The deals struck between political elites, and the signals patrons send their clients are what determine the outcome of elections. Consequently, the constitutional rule that candidates must receive a majority of votes across sectarian boundaries has little effect on candidates' efforts to appeal to a cross-section of the populace, and instead stimulates elite bargaining for slots on lists. Second, independent candidates running outside of lists (and who are therefore not beholden to any particular patron) stand little to no chance of being elected.

Third, the majoritarian rule serves to discourage contestation in districts where a particular family and/or party is dominant. Thus, by introducing a proportional representation system to elect at least a portion of the parliamentary seats, as proposed by the Boutrous commission, reliance on elite bargaining would be reduced, there would be greater opportunities for independents to run, more districts would likely see contestation, and a first step towards a more representative system would be taken. Since many civil society actors had been involved in drafting the Boutrous law, the reforms proposed by the commission resonated with civic organizations that had since the 1990s called for reform of the electoral system. Accordingly, in June 2006 the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) launched the Civil Campaign for Electoral

³⁸² Official results from Lebanese authorities: <http://www.elections.gov.lb>.

Reform (CCER), which gathered over fifty organizations from different issue areas to work in support of the passing of the Boutrous draft law. The CCER, and the preceding consultative process of the Boutrous Commission, arguably represented the first time civil society organizations became intimately involved in the electoral legislative process in Lebanon, where in the past electoral laws have frequently been drafted through external interference (e.g. France in 1927 and Syria in 1992, 1996, and 2000). According to its proponents, the CCER set a precedent for how scope and time limited campaign coalitions gathering groups of disparate interests and character could have a role in policy making in Lebanon.³⁸³

The head of the LTA even went so far as to claim that the creation of the CCER ushered in a new era of professionalism in formulating public policy in Lebanon: “[W]ith the creation of this campaign, civil society along with the whole of Lebanon stepped into a new era exemplified by the construction of a network of alliances comprised of academics and researchers in this specific field.”³⁸⁴ The immediate success of the CCER can be debated –the Boutrous draft law was not adopted for the 2009 election, although features from it were included in the electoral law negotiated at Doha in 2008.³⁸⁵ However, the CCER’s representative in the Ministry of Interior continued to put pressure on the authorities to bring individual issues to parliament for a vote, such as the proposal to lower the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen.³⁸⁶ In fact, a youth movement to

³⁸³ Interview LTA representative, August 25, 2008.

³⁸⁴ “The Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform and its Role In Endorsing Reforms in the New Election Draft Law.” Remarks by LTA Director Khalil Gebara, September 26, 2008.

³⁸⁵ The civil strife of 2008 and the Doha Accord will be discussed in chapter 5.

³⁸⁶ Interview CCER volunteer, Beirut, May 10, 2009.

lower the voting age had been growing since 1997, when a coalition of NGOs, political parties, and universities tried to push parliament to amend the constitution to allow voting from the age of eighteen. The efforts of the CCER bore fruit in March 2009, when parliament voted unanimously to lower the voting age. However, because it required a constitutional amendment, the changes would not take effect until the parliamentary elections of 2013.³⁸⁷ The CCER may have been a first of its kind in the field of electoral reform, but it was certainly not the first time a broad coalition of organizations formed to work towards a specific goal; the RME of the 1990s being only one prominent example.

As Kingston has shown in the field of disability advocacy, civil society groups entered in coalitions with government agencies at least as early as 1993, when the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) created the National Council for Disabled People (NCDP). However, as we shall see, such engagements between civil society and government agencies were perhaps more the result of energetic individuals who were able to play the political game and entice the right political patron to act in accordance with their interests, rather than the development of an institutional form of collaborative policymaking between the state and civil society actors. In fact, in a sense, Lebanon's civil society has historically been very influential in policymaking. Indeed, as we have seen the civil war effectively reduced the state's influence and strengthened some segments of civil society, which became the main service providers in lieu of a

³⁸⁷ Interview CCER volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009. As was the case with many other issues involved with electoral reform (e.g. allowing citizens to vote from abroad), the main objection to lowering the voting age was the fear of upsetting the demographical make-up of the electorate. Supposedly, the greater number of eighteen to twenty-one year-olds among the Shi'a community would lead to increased votes for Hezbollah and Amal, though there are no statistics to support this claim. Conversely, because of the higher number of emigrated Christians, allowing citizens abroad to vote would, in theory, lead to more votes for parties with mainly Christian constituencies.

functioning state. Thus, “policy decisions have more often than not been the product of debates and struggles within society than of a bureaucratic decision-making process.”³⁸⁸

As advocacy groups began to emerge and proliferate in the 1980s and 1990s, some NGO leaders also saw in the weakness of the state opportunities for a more consultative policymaking process. For instance, in the field of disability – an area where the state had been almost completely absent during the civil war – influential disability advocacy NGOs successfully utilized their knowledge of the Lebanese ‘political game’ to forward their cause:

With the assistance of foreign donors, conferences on community-based rehabilitation were organized and demonstrations were held in such highly visible locations as the Corniche and the sports stadium to raise awareness about the lack of accessibility. This was combined with efforts at networking amongst influential bureaucrats, the most useful being Kemal Feghali of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1993 and someone with broad contacts and sympathies with the wartime non-violence and civil society campaigns.³⁸⁹

Moreover, these disability activists benefited from the appointment of Elie Hobeika as Minister of Social Affairs in 1992. As a wartime commander of the LF, Hobeika’s reputation was in dire need of repair, and the disability issue gave him an opportunity to reinvent himself.³⁹⁰ Due to the efforts of these disability activists, the MoSA created the NCDP in 1993. The NCDP gathered four representatives from the MoSA, four from the major social welfare institutions, and four from NGOs representing the physically disabled, the deaf, the blind, and the mentally handicapped. The work of

³⁸⁸ Paul Kingston, “Understanding Governance in Lebanon: The Case of Disability Policy-Making,” unpublished manuscript, LCPS.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁹⁰ Ibid. Hobeika was, among other things, accused of having commanded the LF units who entered the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila and massacred civilians during the Israeli occupation in 1982. He was killed by a car bomb in January 2002.

the NCDP eventually led to the passing of a new disability law, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in 1999.³⁹¹ Despite the fact that disability NGOs received a place at the table, they were not entirely satisfied with the structure of the NCDP:

Their first choice had been an inter-ministerial national council more clearly in the public domain rather than one isolated within the MSA where it would be overwhelmed by the byzantine system of confessional balancing whose logic the disability activists were trying to break. Indeed, perhaps Hobeika's main contribution to the emergence of the NCDP was his intuitive understanding of how to make the confessional system work rather than fall prey to its immobilizing dynamic. Without Hobeika, the NCDP has reverted to the more immobile and patronage-driven dynamics of the confessional system as a whole.³⁹²

The NCDP suffered from internal rivalry and bickering, not only between confessional disability organizations, e.g. Beit Shabab (Maronite), the Social Welfare Institute (Sunni), and the Lebanese Society for the Handicapped (Shi'a), and advocacy NGOs, but also among advocacy NGOs with different approaches to their activism.³⁹³ Thus, the NCDP may have suggested increased representation of civil society in the governance process on paper, but, according to Kingston, in reality the "large institutions continue to maintain their independence from the public arena, using the state to demobilize and blocks threats to their autonomy; while the disability activists continue to achieve their greatest political influence through extra-parliamentary activism and demonstrations."³⁹⁴ The lack of transparency that characterizes the Lebanese political system has serious consequences for activists trying to influence policymaking; the actual processes by which policy is formulated in Lebanon remain largely hidden from civil

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid., 4-5.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

society actors and the public. In the words of one civic activist: “How are policies made in Lebanon, what is the mechanism? We still don’t know how. In many cases it’s *ad hoc*, because no one holds officials accountable for them to make efficient policies, so we are dealing with a system that is decayed.”³⁹⁵ This lack of transparency also means it is sometimes difficult to know who is opposed to any particular aspect of a proposed reform. However, political elites are sometimes in agreement on the ‘red lines.’

The differences between the Boutrous draft law and the electoral law that was agreed upon in the summer of 2008 clearly illustrate the difficulty of crossing certain red lines in Lebanon. Indeed, the political elites who agreed on the new electoral law made sure that the most important reforms, such as the pre-made ballot, the combination of proportional and representational systems, and the creation of an IEC were all absent from the 2009 law:

You can see that the political game continues the same way it always did... They don’t want to dismantle the sectarian political system, because most of them depend on communal constituencies and are experts at playing the sectarian game. They don’t want an independent commission to look over their shoulders. This is not a matter of the opposition versus the majority, they are all in agreement on these issues. They don’t want true reform, because it undermines their influence.³⁹⁶

Nevertheless, while an IEC as it was conceived in the Boutrous draft (i.e. as a body independent from the MoI) was not created, a Supervisory Commission on the Electoral Campaign (SCEC) was set up under the auspices of the MoI. The SCEC had a board of ten members (eight men and two women), including three former judges and representatives from the Beirut Bar Association, Tripoli Bar Association, and the LTA.

³⁹⁵ Interview, Beirut, May 20, 2009.

³⁹⁶ Interview CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 9, 2009.

The SCEC was responsible for overseeing campaign spending by election candidate, campaign advertising, and media coverage of candidates.³⁹⁷ While widely acknowledged as an imperfect solution, the SCEC did at least set a precedent for some type of overseeing body that monitors campaign rhetoric and that could call candidates out on their practices. It is noteworthy that this occurred during a time when the Minister of Interior was himself a former civic activist – Ziad Baroud was the former president of LADE and had been active in the campaigns of the 1990s.³⁹⁸ Indeed, finding key elite allies was crucial to achieving the partial reforms that resulted from the CCER.

This was also the main rationale offered by activists who argued for engaging in both extra- and intra-institutional activism: “We can’t achieve everything we want by bringing a bunch of people to Martyrs’ Square, we have to engage with the system in order to change the system. We just have to be careful not to be tainted by the system.”³⁹⁹ Furthermore, the mere fact that the consultative processes took place and the legislative process to some extent was opened up to civil society can be seen as significant in light of the historical role of Lebanon’s civil society. Indeed, unlike the NCDP, the CCER *was* placed clearly in the public domain, albeit with links to the MoI. There are several other, less high profile, examples of civil society actors being successful in influencing public policy in the post-*Pax Syriana* period. For instance, *Kafa* (Enough), a human rights and social justice association founded in 2005, partnered with the MoSA to prepare a national plan to fight sexual molestation in Lebanon. They were able to push for this after

³⁹⁷ Benedetta Berti, “Electoral Reform in Lebanon,” *Mideast Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (July-August 2009).

³⁹⁸ As part of the Doha Agreement, the president would appoint five members of the cabinet. Ziad Baroud, member of the DRM, was one of President Michel Suleiman’s appointees.

³⁹⁹ Interview CCER volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009.

conducting a study showing that 16.1 percent of Lebanese children have been subjected to some type of sexual molestation.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, in terms of *how* collective action is organized, the CCER does illustrate an interesting phenomenon that became common in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon, namely the creation of time- and scope-limited campaign coalitions, consisting of a wide variety of member organizations, including political elites and non-elites, and sometimes government agencies. These instances of state-civic organization collaboration raise the issue of where the boundaries between civil society and the political sphere are drawn. Furthermore, the CCER as a vehicle of collective action is interesting because it not only connected elites with non-elites, but CSOs of a wide array of core interests.

While electoral reform is of obvious significance to the main focus of the three founding organizations, the CCER also includes the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU), grassroots organization Nahwa al-Muwatiniya (Na-am), the think tank *Centre d'études Stratégiques pour le Moyen-Orient* (Center for Middle-Eastern Strategic Studies – CESMO), organizations working on local development and empowerment such as the Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA) and *Baldati*, and peace building organizations like the Permanent Peace Movement (PPM). While one or several organizations will take a leadership position in a campaign, and actors may be also be members of permanent NGO networks, there is no overarching institutional structure encompassing the temporary networks forming around the various civic campaigns in Lebanon. Yet, these organizations tend to draw their members and volunteers from the same constituency – educated, and often urban, youth. Thus, rather than change from the

⁴⁰⁰ See UNDP-HDR, 2008-2009. Kafa is not to be confused with the campaign Khalas!, or the Egyptian oppositional organization Kefaya, the names of which also mean “enough” in colloquial Arabic.

‘bottom-up,’ this is a matter of change from the ‘middle-up.’ Not surprisingly, civic activists display a certain discomfort with the existing political parties, at least with regard to the largest and most influential ones. The civic activists interviewed for this study viewed smaller parties, which do not have a clear communal following and lack a civil war record, more favorably. Nevertheless, attitudes among interviewees would certainly suggest a disdain for the leaders of the largest parties in parliament – many of whom were militia leaders during the civil war.⁴⁰¹ One interviewee summarized the widely held perception as follows: “They are all criminals. All of them, Christian, Muslim, Druze. They have no interest in their community or anyone else’s, they care about their own power and that’s it. If you notice, they all know each other really well personally, no wonder we can’t get rid of them.”⁴⁰²

By and large, civic activists perceive the existing parties on the Lebanese stage as mere vehicles for patrons, new or old, to perpetuate their own influence and power through pursuing a sectarian clientelist tradition that is believed to be deeply rooted in Lebanon’s history. “If you do not have *wasta*, if you are not connected to influential leaders, chances are slim you will ever benefit from a political program.”⁴⁰³ The issue is essentially one of political parties losing their legitimacy among the populace; the authenticity of their claim to represent their constituency comes into question. However, while a loss of legitimacy on the part of existing political parties may have brought

⁴⁰¹ A notable exception among the major party leaders today is Prime Minister Saad Hariri of al-Mustaqbal (Future Movement). Moreover, Michel Aoun of the FPM was never the leader of a militia, but did command a part of the Lebanese army and is therefore, by some, considered one of those with “blood on their hands.”

⁴⁰² Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 11, 2009.

⁴⁰³ Interview CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 5, 2009.

people out in the streets for anti-war protests in the 1980s and helped increase the number of civic activists in the 1990s, the country's voter turnout in parliamentary elections reached record levels in the two post-*Pax Syriana* elections of 2005 and 2009, the latter reaching a record high of around 55 percent.⁴⁰⁴ High voter turnout would not be expected to occur in a context where voters suffer from a lack of faith in the existing parties, but nor does it necessarily prove the opposite. Indeed, among civic activists, the act of voting is in itself a source of pride. In fact, taking part in the democratic process is a key principle of civic organizations and the disdain expressed for political parties among interviewees in this study did not prevent them from casting votes: "Even though I don't really support the existing political parties, it is important to use the democratic right we are struggling to maintain and expand. I vote for a party that at least in words stand for the same things I do, although I don't necessarily think they will transform words to action."⁴⁰⁵

Moreover, while expressing doubts about the honesty of politicians across the board, most activists suggested there were at least some individuals in parliament or local government that they regarded with some level of respect. In these instances, the "system" was usually to blame for these supposedly more honest politicians to live up to their words. Whatever the levels of sympathy toward one or the other established party among civic activists might be, the general consensus was that through activism in civil society, many of the issues party activists struggle with (such as compromising on principles when their party leader "plays the sectarian card" or strikes a deal that appears

⁴⁰⁴ Official results from Lebanese authorities: <http://www.elections.gov.lb>.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview Na-am activist, May 20, 2009.

contrary to declared doctrine) were avoided. As activists in civil society, they are not fully outside, nor fully within the existing system. They can criticize and lament, untainted by the corrupt system, but still have enough access to the inside to be able to actively contribute to reform. When choosing a vehicle for action, the civic activists had come to the conclusion that the only way to circumvent the “sectarianization” of a movement is by activism in the civil society sphere, where there is freedom from the constraints of the sectarian structure of the political system. The CCER and other evolutionary coalitions, whether they include state actors or not, exemplify significant developments on two different levels: on the concrete level it suggests there are particular organizational forms that are more suitable to the Lebanese terrain than others (temporary coalitions over permanent networks).⁴⁰⁶ On the abstract level, it suggests the existence of a civic movement community, where actors are connected through broader common markers than the convergence of interest in any single issue, but rather in a cluster of issues that together can be understood as incremental steps toward a ‘civic’ state. It is to these shared understandings of their environment, and the processes by which they become a collective the next chapter turns.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined collective action in revolutionary and non-revolutionary contexts. It identified an important vehicle of collective action in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon, namely campaign coalitions, which focus on a single issue and exist for a limited period of time. It has distinguished between ‘revolutionary’ coalitions and

⁴⁰⁶ Chapter 6 will go into more detail on the tactical advantages of temporary coalitions when examining the relationship between a civic movement community and the political sphere.

‘evolutionary’ coalitions, emphasizing the differences in civil society-political sphere coalitions building in revolutionary situations and in non-revolutionary situations. Furthermore, this chapter argued that ‘revolutionary’ coalitions of the type that effectively produced dramatic political change in cases like Serbia, Ukraine, and Lebanon, and more recently in Tunisia and Egypt, are preceded and succeeded by low-intensity processes of social networking. Through the example of the 2005 Independence Intifada, this chapter illustrated the macro and micro factors that preceded the dramatic events of that spring, and led to the collusion of the interests of political party and civil society actors.

It further identified another manifestation of low-intensity networking processes as the development of ‘evolutionary’ coalitions, which are often limited to CSOs, but sometimes also include political party and state actors. These coalitions are less far-reaching in its objective and not as broadly based as ‘revolutionary’ coalitions. The example of the CCER illustrated several important points about Lebanon’s political environment. It demonstrated a potential change in how civil society was involved in the legislative process in Lebanon, as civil society actors were enlisted to weigh in on potential reforms of the electoral system. As such, it illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between social movement activism, traditionally conceived of as activism outside and in conflict with the state, and political party activism inside the structures of the state. Indeed, actors often move between social movement activism and political party activism, and some actors even opt to participate in government functions. Thus, while there is a general distrust and dislike of political parties among activists, in reality the distinction is sometimes difficult to make. The CCER and the proposed reforms

suggested by the Boutrous Commission also offers an opportunity to illustrate the dynamics of Lebanon's electoral system. The political system in Lebanon should, in theory, facilitate inter-communal cooperation, thus promoting crosscutting solidarities. In reality, however, the political system is characterized by elite maneuvering and forging of elite alliances, effectively marginalizing the ability of non-elite aligned candidates to gain access to public office. Finally, this chapter argued that the interactions of various actors in campaign coalitions render them the organizational structures of a broader movement community, the members of which employ a common vision of the future and share fundamental understandings of the environment in which they operate. Delving further into this notion, the following chapter will turn to examining the collective identity dimension of collective action in Lebanon.

CHAPTER FIVE

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND MOVEMENT FORMATION

Choose your enemies carefully, 'cause they will define you
Make them interesting, 'cause in some ways they will mind you
They're not there in the beginning, but when your story ends
Gonna last with you longer than your friends

U2, Cedars of Lebanon

Introduction

On July 13, 2006, I woke up in my west Beirut apartment to the news that Israeli fighter jets had bombed the airport. About a week later, as it had become clear that it was not a matter of limited airstrikes, but a full-blown war, I came home to find a humorous, but ominous, note from my British roommate, reading: “I have evacuated in my private helicopter to my island...J’ad may come to pick up my stuff for storage...it’s a small private helicopter.” As foreigners were being evacuated (the British airlifting some of their subjects to waiting warships) in the anticipation of a possible ground invasion, Lebanese civic activists quickly had to rearrange their priorities and go into relief mode.

In the words of a disability advocate: “We had just had a meeting on the Alternative Budget Project [LABP – discussed below], and stepping out of the meeting we were at war. Then everything changed, all the work and planning was just out the window and new priorities took over.”⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, the circumstances for Lebanon’s civic organizations can change literally overnight, putting all their long-term projects on halt and forcing them to divert their energies to relief activities. However, while such redirecting of resources and energy can be stifling in the short-term, arguably the more dangerous long-term threat to the Lebanese civic movement grew out of the

⁴⁰⁷ Interview, LPHU activist, Washington, DC, March 7, 2010.

psychological effect the war had on the Lebanon's various communities. Indeed, the time period of 2006-2008 was characterized by political and sectarian polarization in Lebanon, presenting civic activists with difficult challenges in terms of gaining and maintaining membership. As the work of Benedict Anderson and Anthony Smith would suggest, ethnic 'nationalism' and religion have historically been more successful in creating sustainable movements, than have crosscutting solidarities of class or, as is the case here, citizenship.⁴⁰⁸ Arguably, the reason for this is that "leaders can only create a social movement when they tap more deep-rooted feelings of solidarity or identity."⁴⁰⁹ The case of post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon allows us to engage with these collective identity processes involved in movement formation, as civic activists were trying to establish a movement identity in the midst of war and political crises that fomented sectarian and political polarization.

Thus far, this dissertation has examined 'traditional' political opportunities and constraints – i.e. external factors in the political structure that encouraged Lebanese to engage in collective action, such as emerging elite disunity and shifting regional dynamics – and only tangentially engaged with the notion of a movement identity. In this chapter, I unpack the concept of 'insurgent consciousness' (Chapter 3) further and examine the role of collective identity in movement formation. I argue that opportunities and constraints must be understood as emanating from society as well as from the state – I call these 'social opportunities and constraints' – as the fragmentation of the societal fabric will affect a movement's ability to develop a collective identity through social

⁴⁰⁸ Anderson 1991; Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995). See also Tarrow 1998.

⁴⁰⁹ Tarrow 1998: 6.

interaction. Movements need to develop ‘resonant movement frames;’ the way they present their claims must resonate to some degree with the understandings and perceptions of their audience, i.e. potential movement members and sympathizers.⁴¹⁰ In a situation of heightened societal fragmentation, the various collectives employ multiple diverging ‘cognitive frameworks,’ i.e. cultural filters through which individuals interpret their surroundings. Because of Lebanon’s historical development of multiple ‘*asabiyyat*’ (sing. ‘*asabiyyah*) within the same polity, its society is especially vulnerable to such fragmenting forces. Thus, in Lebanon, identity processes can constitute a major constraint for civic activists, presenting them with the difficult task of constructing movement frames that can bridge societal divides.

This chapter begins with a discussion on the role of collective identity in movement formation. It argues that rather than solely focusing on cultural factors, such as resonant movement frames and movement identity, *after* a movement has emerged, societal factors that encourage or discourage social interaction *prior* to movement formation must also be included in the analysis of social movements, much like opportunities and constraints emanating from that states. Doing so, I argue, would help in avoiding a state-centric analysis that fails to capture dynamics on the sub-state level. The following section delineates the concepts of ‘social opportunities and constraints.’ The chapter then turns to the forces of social fragmentation through an examination of the cycle of political party mobilization 2006-2008 and the dynamics of individual identities. Finally, the chapter discusses the civic movement’s constituency and engages with the

⁴¹⁰ Snow and Benford 1988.

‘movement frames’ employed by the activists in order to bridge the social fragmentation and have their cause resonate with as broad a layer of the population as possible.

Movement formation: collective identity and culture

On a warm May evening in 2009, a group of about thirty young men and women awaited the arrival of the speaker of the day in a smoke filled café in Beirut’s Gemayzeh district. “I haven’t been to a *Hiwar* before,” said one young woman, “but from what I have heard they think like me here.” She was referring to Nahwa al-Muwatiniya’s al-Hiwar, which was a weekly dialogue/speaker series, frequently on, but not limited to, topics of political participation and citizenship. Beyond being a venue for the scheduled speaker of the day, the “Na-am lil-Hiwar” was an inconspicuous space for civic activists to spread awareness on their causes and for Na-am to gain exposure to potential sympathizers.

In the spirit of inclusiveness and to break the “psychological cantonization,” which tends to separate many Lebanese living in different geographical locations of the capital (a consequence of sectarian isolationism escalated by the civil war), the Beirut Hiwar alternated between Gemayzeh, a bustling bar district just on the east side of the former “Green Line,” which during the civil war divided the eastern (predominantly Christian) and western (predominantly Muslim) sides of Beirut, and the Dahiye, the Shi’a dominated southern suburbs which gained tragic fame during the summer war of 2006 when the area was heavily targeted by Israeli bombers. The Hiwar was only one of many venues where Lebanon’s civic activists articulated their understandings of their goals, possibilities, and obstacles. As such, it was also a venue where the collective identity of

civic activists was defined and negotiated in a continuous process, fully visible and accessible to potential members. Staging the Hiwar in the Dahiye was intended as a message of inclusiveness – the civic cause is a *national* one, not limited to particular sects or political camps. To be sure, in the polarizing climate following the 2006 war, many sympathizers of the Opposition (which was dominated by Hezbollah, but also included Aoun’s FPM) felt suspicious of CSOs propagating for a civic state. This suspicion was in part based on the effective appropriation of the language of the Independence Intifada by the March 14 coalition, which frequently used the civic state argument to discredit Hezbollah’s possession of a weapons arsenal.⁴¹¹

Furthermore, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, many CSOs that emerged in the aftermath of the Independence Intifada were more or less openly affiliated with, or at least sympathized with, the March 14 coalition. Hezbollah, on their part, argued that their weapons were necessary to protect not only the Shi’a community – which historically had been neglected by the Lebanese state – but also the entire nation, since the Lebanese army was not capable of taking on the Israeli enemy.⁴¹² Consequently, Hezbollah’s alliance with Aoun’s largely Christian-based FPM notwithstanding, the political polarization translated into sectarian polarization, with the Shi’a community, by and large, feeling under siege. At the same time, other communities in Lebanon also appeared to revert into their sectarian camps, relying on their political patrons rather than

⁴¹¹ As a “national resistance” against Israel, Hezbollah was the only militia allowed to maintain a sizable weapons arsenal at the end of the civil war (see Chapter 2). The ending of the Israeli occupation of the south in 2000 and the departure of the Syrians in 2005 brought the issue of the legitimacy of Hezbollah’s arms to the forefront of the agenda of those claiming to work for a Lebanese state with the monopoly of the use of force.

⁴¹² Phone interview, Hezbollah activist, January 9, 2009.

the state to defend them from the growing threat of Hezbollah.⁴¹³ “It’s difficult to convince some people that what we do is worthwhile,” said one activist, “because the state hasn’t been a source of security for them, they would rather turn to whatever family they are tied to.”⁴¹⁴ Thus, it was in the context of a renewed potency of what Makdisi has called a ‘culture of sectarianism’⁴¹⁵ that civic activists were trying to build crosscutting solidarities between the country’s various communities in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon. Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s a weakening of the traditional leadership’s influence had provided the civic movement with opportunities to attract members, and the main constraints had emanated from the growing securitization of the state, in the post-*Pax Syriana* context, Lebanese civic activists faced far more constraints from society than they did from the state.

Indeed, during this time, despite launching a large number of projects and arguably being in the public eye to a greater extent than ever before in Lebanon’s history, civic organizations had difficulty gaining broad recognition as a potential vehicle of action and, as we shall see, political parties – not civic organizations – were responsible for the most prominent street mobilizations and protests. Assuming that the development of a strong collective identity is key to the long-term success of a movement (i.e. it succeeds in forging solidarities that last beyond ‘contentious cycles’ and become incorporated in the social fabric beyond the immediate movement community), I argue, the cultural context in which collective action takes place becomes *yet another arena*

⁴¹³ One sign of this was the sudden appearance of ‘hybrid’ flags, made up of the Lebanese and Saudi Arabian national flags – Saudi Arabia being the Lebanese Sunni community’s main international patron.

⁴¹⁴ Interview LADE activist, Beirut, July 22, 2008.

⁴¹⁵ Makdisi 2000 – see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

where opportunities and constraints must be identified. In other words, opportunities and constraints can arise from other arenas than the political system, (where social movement scholars traditionally seek political opportunities such as elite disunity, and constraints such as high repressive capabilities of the state). Naturally, this is especially the case where society is stronger than the state. Before elaborating on this notion, the following section takes a closer look at how culture has been incorporated in social movement scholarship in the past.

Culture and social movements

A fundamental question concerning social movement scholars is when – under what circumstances and motivated by which impulses – individuals decide to act collectively. While there has been general agreement on the fact that the mere existence of injustice is not enough to mobilize individuals in collective action – examples of people suffering injustice without engaging in collective action to rectify the situation abound – there has been far less agreement on whether structural macro factors, organizational “meso” factors, or individual micro factors should be emphasized in explanatory models. Inevitably, micro-macro and macro-micro relationships will be active in movement formation, but the causal flow – exactly which processes impact the others and how – is more difficult to determine. Trying to untangle these processes can result in, as Tilly puts it, “a vicious, vibrating megrim, a massive headache occupying fully half your brain.”⁴¹⁶ Thus, structuralists have emphasized broad forces of structural

⁴¹⁶ Tilly 2002: 69.

change that alter political opportunities and constraints,⁴¹⁷ resource mobilization theorists have emphasized access to resources and the significance of dense social networks in determining activists' ability to harness them,⁴¹⁸ while others coming from a social-psychological tradition have focused on the individual level and examined the behavior of seemingly "irrational actors," who with their activism take greater risks than the potential rewards rationally should warrant.⁴¹⁹

Organizational theory and decision-making models, heavily influenced by the notion of the "rational actor," dominated the study of social movements until the early 1980s, when the micro level of the individual was brought back through a renewed focus on interpretive processes involved in collective action.⁴²⁰ However, far from being a return to the "irrational actor" of the social-psychological tradition, this re-introduction of the micro-level brought a focus on cognitive processes, which influence the cost-benefit analysis involved in the individual's choice to participate.⁴²¹ In other words, until the

⁴¹⁷ See, for instance, Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Skocpol 1979.

⁴¹⁸ R. Gould, "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56 (1991); D. McAdam and R. Paulsen, "Social Ties and Activism: Towards a Specification of the Relationship," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 99 (1993), 640-667; Carol M. Mueller, "Collective Identities and the Mobilization of the U.S. Women's Movement, 1960-1970." In E. Laraña, H. Johnston, and J. R. Gusfield (eds.), *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

⁴¹⁹ W. Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (New York: Free Press, 1959); N. J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1963); R. N. Turner and L. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972).

⁴²⁰ W. A. Gamson, B. Fireman, and S. Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1982).

⁴²¹ See, for instance, A. Melucci, "Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements," in B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi and S. Tarrow (eds.) *International Social Movement Research, Volume 1* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1988), 329-348; Melucci 1989; A. Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in H. Johnston and B. Klandermans (eds.) *Social Movements and Culture* (Minnesota: University

1980s little attention was paid in social movement scholarship to the role of cultural factors as they relate to the identity dimension. To remedy this situation, social movement scholars sought to incorporate culture in the analysis of movement formation. These efforts resulted in a rich field of studies on the individual motivations for activism and organizational processes of ‘framing’ and the production of movement culture, i.e. a collective identity shared by movement members. In Chapter 3, the concept of “insurgent consciousness” was introduced as a major factor in social movement formation in post-civil war Lebanon. That is, before resources or opportunities have any significance, individuals must become aware of sharing certain grievances and aims.

Furthermore, they must become convinced that acting collectively can actually rectify these shared grievances. Put differently, a “we-feeling,” or a collective identity, must arise among individuals before they turn to collective action. Melucci understands collective identity as an “action system” and defines it as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.”⁴²² From this perspective, collective identity, more than simply a “we-feeling” and a sense of common aims, is built on the constant renegotiations of actors’ understandings about the surrounding environment, and as such is dynamic and dependent on iterative interaction of individuals. According to rationalist accounts, actors perceive and evaluate their opportunities and constraints in order to decide for or against

of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41-63; J. A. Noakes and H. Johnston, “Frames of Protest: A Road Map to a Perspective,” in H. Johnston and J. A. Noakes (eds.) *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 1-29.

⁴²² Melucci 1989: 34.

becoming involved in collective action. However, this presupposes the objective existence of common understandings of what is or is not possible in the current environment and neglects to take into consideration the dynamic development of common cognitive frameworks among collective actors. Thus, for instance, rationalist models lack the ability to explain why actors perceive political opportunities in some instances, but not in others. To be sure, political constraints and opportunities are not necessarily objective factors, but are in need of interpretation. In this interpretive process, cognitive frameworks are key in translating events on the macro level into either a perceived constraint or opportunity:

Collective action is rather the product of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints. Individuals acting collectively construct their action by defining in cognitive terms these possibilities and limits, while at the same time interacting with others in order to ‘organize’ (i.e., to make sense of) their common behavior.⁴²³

In order to present themselves as alternative vehicles of change, movements need to harness the collective sense of injustice and desire to rectify whatever problem is perceived to cause the injustice. They can do this by linking their cause to the cognitive frameworks employed by individuals. In other words, to be successful, movements to some extent have to adapt their message to their environment. Moreover, “people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem.”⁴²⁴ Thus, several tasks befall the movement; it must ‘sell’ its cause as recognizable, worthy, and realistic. The process of linking the individual to the structure can be conceived of as a process of “framing.” In social

⁴²³ Melucci 1989, 25-26.

⁴²⁴ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 5.

movement literature, a “frame” is understood as an “interpretative schema that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there.’”⁴²⁵ Or, put differently, “framing functions in much the same way as a frame around a picture: attention gets focused on what is relevant and important and away from extraneous items in the field of view.”⁴²⁶ In terms of function, a frame identifies a political or social problem, assigns blame for the problem, and offers a solution.⁴²⁷ When studying framing processes, it is important to make a distinction between the level of social-psychological processes whereby individuals become involved in collective action,⁴²⁸ and the strategic framing processes employed by organizations and social movement actors in order to attract potential members.⁴²⁹

Central to the 2005 Independence Intifada, for instance, were the efforts to communicate a coherent message. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the Independence Intifada, which it shared with other civic mobilizations, was the highly strategic practice of ‘branding.’ Movement actors did this through employing marketing techniques to take ownership of the interpretation of the protests and determine what image should be broadcast across the world. As the many witty English language signs seen in revolutionary movements of recent years (e.g. Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt),

⁴²⁵ Snow and Benford 1988: 137.

⁴²⁶ Noakes and Johnstone 2005: 2.

⁴²⁷ Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism* (Boston: South End, 1991).

⁴²⁸ See, for instance, Gamson 1992; W. A. Gamson and D. Stuart, “Media Discourse as a Symbolic Contest: The Bomb in Political Cartoons,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 7 (1992), 55-86; W. A. Gamson and A. Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 95 (1989), 1-37; W. A. Gamson and G. Wolsfeld, “Movements and Media as Interacting Systems,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (1993): 114-125.

⁴²⁹ See, for instance, Benford 1993; R. D. Benford, “An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective,” *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 67 (1997), 409-430; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988.

would suggest, embarking on revolution in the information age means pleading your case to the world, not just your ruler. The branding project was certainly aimed outwardly, to an international audience, but it was also as much directed inwardly, to the participants on Martyrs' Square and potential participants around the country. Indeed, the television images from the demonstrations prompted many Lebanese to travel far distances to Beirut to participate.⁴³⁰ Thus, the branding project really served two purposes – showing an external audience what this was about in order to increase international support, and second, a mobilizing call to the “silent majority” around Lebanon.

However, since individuals may have many different reasons for participating in a movement, a ‘movement identity’ does not simply come into existence through people ‘discovering’ they share a particular aim. As Melucci points out, a collective identity is produced through interaction and exchanges of views and understandings of their environment.⁴³¹ The more heterogeneous the movement constituency, the more contentious these negotiations can be expected to be, and, arguably, the longer it will take to forge a durable collective identity. Thus, the kind of revolutionary coalitions discussed in Chapter 4, which consist of actors from a broad spectrum of political and civil society, could not be expected to produce durable collective identities. In the makeshift camp that was set up by youths in Martyrs' Square a few days after the assassination, activists of different political persuasions “negotiated” their understandings of the current environment, seizing on key commonalities. In fact, a “dialogue tent” was set up in order

⁴³⁰ Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

⁴³¹ Melucci 1989.

to facilitate the meeting of activists from various camps.⁴³² While there will always be differences between participants in a movement, the cognitive frameworks of participating individuals and the movement frames strategically designed by movement entrepreneurs are likely to overlap and align with each other, because “movement actors must incorporate or respond to critical discursive elements in the broader cultural environment.”⁴³³ In other words, organizations adjust their frames to resonate with potential membership by tapping into a “hegemonic discourse,” or, put differently, connect with a broader “common sense,” while simultaneously challenging it.⁴³⁴

Hence the statement of the young woman attending the Hiwar for the first time: “they *think like me* here.” While frames are dynamic and constantly evolving, there must be a core of overlap between a frame employed by a movement and cognitive frameworks employed by individuals. Gamson has argued that “collective identity is a concept at the cultural level, but to operate in mobilization, individuals must make it part of their personal identity.”⁴³⁵ Thus, an individual who understands the world through the prism of, say, “my race is superior to others” is not likely to join a movement that employs an equality frame. In order to maximize membership of a movement, then, movement actors must find ways to repackage their grievances in terms that resonate with a broad segment of the populace. According to Gamson, whether an individual will

⁴³² Jaafar and Stephan 2009.

⁴³³ H. J. McCammon, C. S. Muse, H. D. Newman, and T. M. Terrell, “Movement Framing and Discursive Opportunity Structures: The Political Successes of the U.S. Women’s Jury Movements,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (2007): 726.

⁴³⁴ McCammon et al. 2007; M. Billig, “Rhetorical Psychology, Ideological Thinking, and Imagining Nationhood,” in Hank Jonston and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁴³⁵ Gamson 1992, 74.

join a movement depends on how well a frame resonates with personal experiences, popular wisdom of their communities, and media discourse.⁴³⁶ On the side of movement actors, according to Snow and Benford, frame resonance is affected by several factors, including frame consistency (whether tactics, diagnosis, prognosis, core values and beliefs are logically complementary), empirical credibility (whether the frames reflect the reality as the potential constituency perceives it), and the credibility of the frame's promoters.⁴³⁷ Thus, the processes of framing effectively link the individual to the structure, utilizing components from existing identities in order to produce new collective identities. Taking a step in the direction of conceptually acknowledging a middle ground between the political opportunity and framing perspectives, Koopmans and Statham distinguish between 'institutional' and 'discursive' opportunities.

In their schema, movement outcomes depend not only on political opportunities in the institutional sense, but also on "political-cultural or symbolic external constraints and facilitators of social movement mobilization."⁴³⁸ This "discursive opportunity structure," they argue, determine "which ideas are considered 'sensible,' which constructions of reality are seen as 'realistic,' and which claims are held as 'legitimate' within a certain polity at a specific time."⁴³⁹ This conceptualization helps explain why the same frames can be successful in one context but not another, and why some movements, despite not gaining access to institutions, can have a significant outcome on public policy. Koopmans

⁴³⁶ Gamson 1992.

⁴³⁷ Snow and Benford 1992.

⁴³⁸ R. Koopmans and P. Statham, "Ethnic and Civic Conceptions of Nationhood and the Differential Success of the Extreme Right in Germany and Italy," in M. Guigni, D. McAdam, and C. Tilly (eds.), *How Social Movements Matter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 228.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

and Statham's focus, however, is on the *outcome* of a social movement. That is, they are not concerned with potential shifts in cultural settings that can actually encourage or discourage movement *formation*, but rather with the trajectory of the movement once it has been formed, that is whether it is successful, marginalized, or neutralized. But while culture in these schemes is considered important in terms of the ability of a movement to mobilize, they do not acknowledge shifts in the cultural contexts that can either encourage or restrict the emergence of a movement.

Culture is usually assumed to be a relatively static concept that, to the extent it changes at all, only does so through infinite-slow evolution.⁴⁴⁰ As such, it is not examined as a field where factors encouraging collective action would emerge, but rather taken as a more or less static environment to which movement entrepreneurs have to adapt. However, if culture is understood as an aggregate of individuals' cognitive frameworks, it becomes clear that cultural shifts that alter the cost-benefit analysis of potential participants *can* occur relatively rapidly. Put differently, culture, understood as a system of meaning, which organizes social life and filters individuals' perceptions of their surroundings, is as much a dynamic and evolving factor as individual collective identities. To further explain this line of thought, I turn now to a definition of what I call "social opportunities and constraints."

Social opportunities and constraints

As the brief review above suggests, social movement theorists generally regard culture, first, as an *external* environment that must be at least partially tapped into in

⁴⁴⁰ Tarrow 1998.

order for a movement to attract members. Movement frames that will resonate with hegemonic discourses in that environment are thus constructed – the better the resonance, the more likely the movement is to attract members. Culture is then regarded, second, as *internal* to the movement because in the course of movement mobilization, new collective identities are borne out of the interactions and negotiations among movement members – a movement culture is produced. In these understandings, then, framing processes are part and parcel of the mobilizing of a movement; they are intermediary links to political opportunities.⁴⁴¹ While I do not dismiss the traditional understanding of the function of culture and collective identity processes in social movement formation, I argue that especially in contexts where society is stronger than the state, culture needs to be elevated to the level of opportunity structure. That is, culture also serves as a permissive or restrictive context to movement formation, as well as shapes the collective identity of the movement itself.

This is especially true in contexts where the state does not necessarily embody a hegemonic culture of society, i.e. in polities of high social fragmentation. By ‘social opportunities,’ then, I mean shifts in the societal sphere that make people more open to alternative collective identity signifiers. In order to encourage participation in a movement, potential members must be convinced that the aims of that movement will redress their grievances more efficiently than another collective, such as existing political parties or, for that matter, the state. An example of this was the loss of legitimacy among traditional leaders and political party leadership during the Lebanese civil war, which led thousands of Lebanese to join in collective action, first to end the militia rule, and later

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

for other ‘civic’ causes (see Chapter 3). By ‘social constraints,’ I mean factors in the societal sphere that discourage joining a particular movement. This can be a hegemonic discourse that is in direct conflict with a movement’s *raison d’être*, such as an understanding of particular groups as Western implants, or the perception of other collectives as being more effective in addressing their core concerns. In the Lebanese case, the sectarian character of the political parties and reliance on local patrons for protection and support constitute such a constraint for the civic movement. Because religious identities generally pervade routine social interaction, religion can be a powerful base for mobilization, if the authorities are not successful in appropriating the ‘religion frame.’⁴⁴²

The traditional framing perspective is still highly useful in understanding why some frames become hegemonic in revolutionary situations. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, for instance, was not originally a strictly Islamic revolution. The secular elements of the opposition, however, did not reach the same level of cohesion and organization as the Khomeini elements and the ‘Islamic framing’ of the situation had better resonance in the population. However, the rapidly dwindling legitimacy of the Western-backed Shah’s secular leadership can also be understood as a social constraint for the secular elements in the revolution, whereas it constituted a social opportunity for the Islamic elements of the revolutionary movement. Thus, social constraints and opportunities are highly subjective concepts – one group’s opportunity is another group’s constraint. However, so are institutional political constraints and opportunities. Following Tarrow, I suggest that the

⁴⁴² Rulers have been known to reinvent themselves as ‘spiritual’ leaders. For instance, Saddam Hussein tried to make his regime ‘more Islamic’ after the first Gulf war, incorporating Qur’anic script on the national flag.

timing for contentious action depends on political opportunities. But, I argue, for political opportunities to be perceived as such, collective identity processes that happen through social networking, exchanges of ideas and perceptions, and practices of framing by movement entrepreneurs, need to precede any emerging opportunity on the macro level. Moreover, for a political opportunity to be useful at all, a mobilization infrastructure needs to exist at the time of opportunity. Thus, political opportunities are not the sparks that light the fire, but merely the oxygen that allows the fire to spread. Social opportunities and constraints, on the other hand, operate in the realm of society and relate to the cognitive frameworks of individuals. Therefore, social opportunities are what may encourage individuals to seek each other out and begin the processes of renegotiating cognitive frameworks in the first place. Conversely, social constraints prevent the kind of social networking and interaction that need to precede opportunities on the political level.

Though the significance of social opportunities and constraints may vary depending on the type of polity and even between different geographical regions *within* a polity (depending on levels of social fragmentation and cognitive dissonance among communities), I argue that the role of culture is more important in the success or failure of movement formation than traditional framing perspectives would suggest. Culture, then, does not only link the individual to the structure once a movement is taking shape, but also functions as a permissive or restrictive structure for movement formation. Through a discussion of the cycle of political mobilizations that overshadowed Lebanon's civic organizations 2006-2008, the following section will engage with the forces of societal fragmentation. It examines the processes that link the individual to a

collective, and explains the significance of Tilly's concepts of 'detached' and 'embedded' identities in this context.

Political mobilizations 2006-2008: Israel strikes again and the return of the 'asabiyyat

As we have seen, there is widespread agreement among social movement scholars that the success of movement formation depends on political opportunities on the macro level, mobilization of resources on the meso level, and the successful linking of a movement's cause to cognitive frameworks among potential constituents. How these factors combine and when which level should be emphasized, however, is cause for some discord. I argued above that political opportunities determine the timing for popular mobilizations, but that processes of collective identity formation and resource mobilization must precede these opportunities. Accordingly, I argued that in addition to understanding culture as an intermediate link between the individual and the structure, individuals' cognitive frameworks, which are informed by culture, should be understood as structures of opportunities and constraints.

This section examines the level of individual identity and the processes by which individuals perceive of themselves as part of a collective, and argues that more attention to shifts in the cultural contexts before and during movement formation is warranted. Individual identities, that is, the set of signifiers that individuals perceive as integral to their sense of *self*, are in this context important because they determine how they situate themselves in an environment with multiple overlapping identities. Indeed, an individual always carries multiple identities, e.g. woman, mother, Christian, etc. There is, of course, no inherent conflict in multiple identities. In fact, it is a universal part of human life and

different identities will be activated at different times. For instance, an individual will identify as a daughter when interacting with her parents, and as a mother when interacting with her own children. Dramatic shifts in the context caused by external factors can also activate different layers of identities. In times of unrest, for instance, individuals are likely to seek refuge in the identity that provides the best sense of security and ‘togetherness.’ The 2006 war initially appeared to galvanize a Lebanese national identity in the face of an external enemy. While Israel was ostensibly fighting Hezbollah, Lebanon as a whole was targeted, and Hezbollah initially succeeded in presenting itself as the “defenders of the nation.”

The support for Hezbollah’s efforts was tangible even in the part of Beirut where my apartment was located, a district predominantly populated by sympathizers of the March 14 coalition and where both Saad Hariri and Fouad Saniora had their residences. When news broke that Hezbollah had succeeded in hitting an Israeli warship with a rocket launched from the mainland, cheers echoed from the balconies along the street. Indeed, since the Lebanese army remained relatively passive during the onslaught, Hezbollah appeared as the only line of defense; as one Lebanese Christian put it, “at least someone is defending us.”⁴⁴³ The fallout of the conflict, however, led to a very different situation. Many Lebanese would modify their views on Hezbollah in the months to come after the war, as the Lebanese society suffered increased political polarization.⁴⁴⁴ Those who felt that Hezbollah had dragged Lebanon into an unnecessary war, and had

⁴⁴³ Private conversation, Beirut, July 2006. The reasons for the Lebanese Army’s passivity will be discussed below.

⁴⁴⁴ See S. Telhami, “Lebanese Identity and Israeli Security in the Shadows of the 2006 War,” *Current History*, Vol. 106, No. 696 (January 2007): 21-26.

previously kept a fairly low profile, now openly began questioning the role of the “national resistance” in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon. With the typical Lebanese tinge of black humor, people made jokes about Hezbollah’s self-declared victory, saying “If this is their victory, I don’t want to be around for their defeat!” alluding to the massive destruction that had been inflicted on Lebanon during the thirty-four days of fighting. After the war, the two main opposing political camps, the March 14 coalition and the Opposition, engaged in a ‘framing battle’ over the outcome. The Opposition, i.e. Hezbollah and allies, framed it as a victory for the resistance, whereas their local (and international) opponents framed it as a Pyrrhic victory (or, rather, defeat) in which the Lebanese paid a much too high prize for the resistance’s reckless ‘adventurism.’ The struggle that Lebanese politicians engaged in following the war effectively led to individuals seeking refuge in their respective communities.

The issue soon went beyond the framing of the outcome of the war and escalated into mutual accusations of treason and foreign agendas. In the March 14 coalition’s version of reality, the Opposition parties were acting as ‘foreign agents’ to thwart the gains of the Cedar Revolution, acting on behalf of Syrian and Iranian interests, whereas the March 14 coalition was the defender of the nation’s sovereignty. The Opposition, on the other hand, made the claim that the March 14 coalition acted on behalf of Israel and the United States in an effort to neutralize the resistance. Moreover, the Opposition accused the March 14 camp of widespread corruption and lack of real interest in reform. In this struggle, the rhetoric sometimes took on a sectarian character not seen since the civil war, further polarizing Lebanon’s various communities.

“Detached” and “embedded” identities

Melucci’s definition of collective identity cited above implies the centrality of sustained social interaction for people to begin perceiving themselves as part of a group.⁴⁴⁵ This emphasizes the importance of social networks and ability to forge crosscutting relationships in collective identity formation. While addressing a glaring deficiency in social movement literature, namely the lack of attention to the question of why individuals decide to act collectively, and offering an important contribution to the study of social movements, Melucci’s definition of collective identity is quite vague and leaves room for interpretation. Judging by Melucci’s definition, temporary episodes of collective action are subject to processes of collective identity production, just as centuries of interaction within, for instance, a religious community, produces a shared sense of *self*.

While it is reasonable to assume that the processes of negotiating and developing shared cognitive frameworks are present in any type of sustained interaction between individuals, arguably the differences in level of interaction and the time spent negotiating and renegotiating a collective identity should matter in terms of how a collective identity functions in movement formation. The case of the 2005 Independence Intifada illustrates the importance of a “we-feeling” and negotiations of cognitive frameworks – without the collective sense of injustice and defiant crossing of previous “red-lines,” the movement would have been unable to produce such a massive momentum. While the involvement of elites, extensive media exposure, and a sophisticated marketing campaign subsequently sustained the movement, the driving force of the Independence Intifada appears to have

⁴⁴⁵ Melucci 1989.

been the “we-feeling” which developed over the first weeks following the assassination. But while this nascent collective identity was crucial in rewriting the understandings of political opportunities and placed new issues within the realm of the possible (namely the removal of the Syrian presence), the movement clearly failed to produce a collective identity able to survive once the resources and elite support were withdrawn. Indeed, once the Syrians had left and the first free elections were held, political elites returned to their usual mode of operation and those among the activists on Martyrs’ Square who had envisioned more far-reaching reforms of the political system found themselves lacking in both resources and elite support. Despite months of interaction and “negotiations” on the various perceptions of the Lebanese reality, the “we-feeling” so important to the emergence of the movement was unable to survive the removal of resources and elite support.

A collective identity is not a finished product, available for activists to either opt in or out of – rather it is produced and reproduced in the interactions of the individual actors over time and internalized to the personal identities to different degrees, rendering it both dynamic and unstable. In the Independence Intifada, interactions were not sustained beyond a few months and the focus on the immediate aim of removing the Syrian influence superseded other broader points of reference. Consequently, this brief collusion of factors was not able to penetrate other collective identities with conflicting cognitive frameworks and collective action frames, developed over years of political fragmentation and pervading routine social interaction of the individuals involved. In other words, it is not enough to acknowledge similarities; the differences in character between different collective identities must also be recognized. For instance, it is unlikely

that anyone would consider a collective identity produced by the common efforts and interactions of a six-month political campaign the same animal as a collective identity produced by six centuries of interaction and negotiation. In Chapter 2 we saw that Ibn Khaldun regarded the strongest form of *'asabiyyah* to be based on blood and kinship. However, Khaldun conceded that other types of group solidarities could emerge, particularly in urban environments where the ties of kinship can become weakened and an urban *'asabiyyah* can take shape. Similarly, Charles Tilly conceives of collective identities varying along a continuum between a “detached” identity, which is the kind of superficial identity connected to social movements (provided it is not a movement formed around a particular ethnic or religious identity), and an “embedded” identity, which is the kind one would find among, for instance, communal groups.⁴⁴⁶ An embedded identity is formed over a long period of time, pervades routine social interaction, and is much more difficult to dislodge than a detached identity. As one activist explained it:

People who are completely immersed in this mentality...the family really is the safety net, not only economic, but emotionally and socially. Break with your family, go against your family, and you become an outcast. It's not always that dramatic of course, not everyone has that extreme view, but definitely it is more like that in the villages than in the city.⁴⁴⁷

The labels ‘embedded’ and ‘detached’ are thus relational in character; they “do not describe the contents of identities, but their connections with routine social life.”⁴⁴⁸ Political identities, such as “socialist,” “liberal,” or “citizen” tend to fall in the “detached” end of the continuum because they do not pervade daily social interaction in the same

⁴⁴⁶ Tilly 2002.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, April 29, 2009.

⁴⁴⁸ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 135.

way as personal identities, such as “woman” or “Christian” pervade social interactions and understandings of an individual, and thus fall in the “embedded” end of the continuum. There are clearly advantages in building a movement around an embedded identity, in that it “does much of the work that would normally fall to organization.”⁴⁴⁹ However, as Tarrow has argued, “it cannot do the work of mobilization, which depends on framing identities so that they will lead to action, alliances, interaction.”⁴⁵⁰ For instance, Hezbollah, understood as a social movement, mobilizes and frames grievances around a distinct communal identity (Shi’a Muslim), which informs a wide range of routine social interactions – an embedded identity.⁴⁵¹

But they did not simply recycle old identity narratives; they reinvented and created a new identity around recognizable themes within the Shi’a Muslim community. Through its many channels into the everyday lives of its constituency, Hezbollah has reinvented what it means to be Shi’a in Lebanon – building an *umma mujahida* (combative community) on an Islamic identity, which transcends artificial national borders, and relying on cultural frames that stand in contrast to Western conceptions of democracy.⁴⁵² They do this not by suppressing an embedded identity, but by reframing and reinventing existing understandings of *self* among Lebanon’s Shi’a population.⁴⁵³ Lebanon’s civic

⁴⁴⁹ Tarrow 1998, 119.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly 2002.

⁴⁵² Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

⁴⁵³ Using survey data from 1993, Judith Harik has argued that Hezbollah’s supporters were not as religious as expected, and were to a much greater extent motivated by socio-economic factors than religion. J. P. Harik, “Between Islam and the System: Sources and Implications of Popular Support for Lebanon’s Hizballah,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 40, No. 1. (March 1996): 41-67.

organizations, on the other hand, try to build a movement identity around the concept of citizenship – an identity that generally falls in the detached end of the embedded-detached continuum. In Lebanon, where the state institutions have been structured around the communal fabric of society, citizenship matters only in relation to the sect:

In Lebanon multiple civic myths overlay each other and manifest themselves in different legal arenas – myths of economic liberalism, of social conservatism, of communalism, of individualism, of the autonomy of state and religion, of the state as patron of religious institutions, of gender equality, of the primacy of patriarchal authority, and the like. The hegemonic civic myth of the Lebanese nation, however, has been the myth of sectarian pluralism.⁴⁵⁴

Indeed, the “civic myth” of communal pluralism is central to the Lebanese national identity, essentially locking in sectarian denomination in the civic identity. Thus, “people do not perceive themselves as having rights as a result of their being citizens of a state. They perceive themselves as having rights because they are embedded in communities.”⁴⁵⁵ Despite the gains civic activists have made since the end of the civil war in their struggle for a new role for civil society in the Lebanese formula, it appears civic activists lose the battle against embedded communal identities every time crisis engulfs the country. It is very clear that in times of crisis – as, for instance, in 2006 and 2008 – the civic movement’s peripheral constituency quickly dissipates and only a core of dedicated activists remains. Instead, people reverted to their political and sectarian homes. Indeed, while 2005 was the culmination of a cycle of civic mobilizations since the 1990s, the time period of 2006-2008 was the era for political mobilization along political party lines and, because of the sectarian character of most of Lebanon’s political parties,

⁴⁵⁴ S. Joseph. “Civic Myths, Citizenship, and Gender in Lebanon,” in S. Joseph (ed.) *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000): 108.

⁴⁵⁵ S. Joseph and J. Stork, “Gender and Civil Society: An Interview with Suad Joseph,” *Middle East Report*, No. 183, (July-August 1993), 26.

to a great extent also along sectarian lines. Between 2006-2008 the Opposition staged a series of sit-ins and protests, which in contrast to the non-violent popular mobilizations of 2005 would culminate in the deployment of armed militiamen and a violent end to the deadlock. In October 2006 the United Nations drafted a plan for the Special Tribunal of Lebanon (STL) to investigate and bring to justice the culprits in the Hariri assassination. The Opposition viewed the STL as a tool by the West to incriminate Syria and Hezbollah in the assassination, thus adding to the tension between the March 14 coalition and the Opposition. The Opposition demanded a 'blocking third' of the government, effectively seeking veto power to protect the Resistance against 'western plots,' such as the STL. The March 14 camp, on their part, was seeking the early termination of Syria-backed President Emile Lahoud's term, which would be up in 2007.

In November, the five Shi'a ministers in the government, one independent, two Hezbollah, and two Amal, resigned in protest of the government's impending endorsement of the STL, leaving an eighteen-member cabinet with no Shi'a representation to approve the formation of the STL. The Opposition regarded the approval unconstitutional because of the absence of sectarian representation in the government. All this was happening in the context of a series of assassinations and assassination attempts on pro-March 14 politicians since 2005. These included Gebran Tueni, Samir Kassir, and Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel (son of former President Amine Gemayel). On December 1, 2006, an estimated 800,000 people gathered for a non-violent sit-in outside of parliament, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Fouad Saniora and the formation of a national unity government. Two days later, violent clashes erupted between pro-March 14 groups and Opposition supporters, leaving one

member of Amal dead. Protests and counter-protests continued into the spring of 2007, but the deadlock remained. When President Lahoud's term was up in November 2007, the country was left without a president and with a government that was considered illegitimate by approximately half the population. Finally, in May 2008, the situation came to a violent end, as gunfire again echoed across the streets of Beirut in the worst civil strife since the end of the civil war.

2008: Internal crisis and civil unrest

In July 2008, I arrived in the area I usually call home in Lebanon – West Beirut's Hamra district – for my first visit in almost two years. Arriving in the middle of the night as usual, I could only barely make out the *zawba'a* (the 'red hurricane' emblem of the SSNP) spray painted on almost every wall along the streets.⁴⁵⁶ These political 'tags' were, along with some fresh bullet holes in the walls, the only visible signs of the 'civil unrest' that had gripped Lebanon two months earlier. However, as I would soon find out, the emotional scars among those who had seen their streets overrun by militants from Opposition parties were quite tangible. The civil unrest of 2008 began when on May 8 the CGTL had called a strike to protest the government's economic policies. But the men who blocked the highway to Beirut's international airport with burning tires were not primarily interested in the conditions of workers, they were reacting to the Lebanese government's decision to declare Hezbollah's telecommunication system illegal. Hezbollah perceived this decision as a direct attack on their defensive capabilities and perfectly in line with their view of the government as representing US/Israeli interests.

⁴⁵⁶ The *zawba'a* is according to some an imitation of the Nazi swastika, and according to others a combination of the crescent and the cross.

The government not only ordered the dismantlement of Hezbollah's telecommunications network, but also the removal of the head of airport security at Rafiq al-Hariri International Airport, for allegedly allowing Hezbollah to place cameras on the airport premises. According to the government, the cameras could be used as preparation for more assassinations of politicians in their camp, essentially implicating Hezbollah involvement in the series of assassinations and assassination attempts that had terrorized Lebanon since 2005.⁴⁵⁷ As street protests grew more violent on May 8, CGTL President Ghassan Ghosn called off the trade union strike the same day, citing the inability of the authorities to guarantee the security of protesters. According to Ghosn, the strike had been planned since before the government decisions, but the opposition parties had seized the opportunity to mobilize at the same time.⁴⁵⁸

The mobilization in the streets continued, eventually leading to gunfights around the country and in the streets of Beirut where opposition forces, mainly from the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), allied with Hezbollah, overran the neighborhoods of Saad Hariri's (the leader of the largest March 14 bloc in parliament) and Prime Minister Fouad Saniora's residences. Unlike the 2007 battles between the Lebanese Army and militant group Fatah al-Islam in the Palestinian camp Nahr el-Bared, the 2008 civil strife represented an intra-Lebanese conflict, the likes of which had not been seen since the end of the civil war. Unlike many other Middle Eastern polities where the military has played an integral role in developing authoritarian regimes, such as Syria, Iraq, or Egypt, the

⁴⁵⁷ The accounts of the reasons for the government's decisions vary – some claim it was a matter of the state taking real action to reassert itself against a powerful non-state actors, others claim it was a move encouraged by the United States.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Ghassan Ghosn on the website of Tricontinental Centre (CETRI), 27 August, 2008: <http://cetri.domainepublic.net/spip.php?article798&lang=en>.

military in Lebanon is kept in check by its character as a reflection of the social diversity of society – it must remain neutral in power struggles for fear of disintegrating along sectarian lines. Thus, the army refused to comply in 1958, when President Camille Chamoun requested that it intervene in a popular uprising against his alignment with the West, and it stood on the sidelines again in May 2008. From May 16 to May 21, a national dialogue conference was held in Doha, Qatar, resulting in an agreement that awarded the Opposition a blocking third of the government and nominated military commander Michel Suleiman to the presidency.⁴⁵⁹

Despite the polarized environment in the years between the 2006 war and the 2008 civil strife, a community of civic activists continued their work tirelessly. They tried to cut through the loud and divisive political discourse and formed campaigns like “Khalas!” (“Enough!”), aiming at breaking the political deadlock and get their politicians talking again. Clearly, they did not succeed. This was a time period of political mobilizations in the streets, not civic. When a movement identity is constructed around already embedded identities, movement leaders have much more room for maneuvering. Indeed, in such situations individuals may even go to great lengths to align their cognitive frameworks with the movement frames employed by their movement, instead of the other way around. For instance, the case of the alliance between the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah, where the predominantly Christian (but philosophically secular) FPM formed an alliance with the predominantly Shi’a Muslim (and Islamist) Hezbollah, shows

⁴⁵⁹ The elevation of army commanders to the presidency in Lebanon (this has happened three times in Lebanon’s history: Fouad Chehab in 1958, Emile Lahoud in 1998, and Michel Suleiman in 2008) has, with the exception of Lahoud, which came about due to Syrian maneuvering, been the result of the army’s standing as a neutral and unifying force after a time of crisis, rather than being a reflection of its political power.

how members adjusted their understanding of a constituency they had previously viewed as the ‘other,’ selectively finding historical references to construct affinity between the two constituencies.

Constructing affinity: the FPM – Hezbollah alliance

While Lebanon certainly saw sectarian polarization during this period, cleavages were not entirely along sectarian boundaries. The alliance between the FPM and Hezbollah demonstrates a reversed form of framing, in the sense that political activists who had previously felt little affinity with each other suddenly found themselves in the same political camp and appeared to adjust their cognitive frameworks to the movement frames. In February 2006, the predominantly Christian, although touting a secular agenda, Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Shi’a Hezbollah signed a “Memorandum of Understanding.”⁴⁶⁰

In the summer of 2006 it became clear that this alliance went beyond mere words on the part of the leaderships of the FPM and Hezbollah. Indeed, activists from the FPM were instrumental in bringing aid to the embattled south and Christian schools were opened up for Shiite refugees. Undeniably, during this summer Hezbollah intensified its practice of invoking a nationalist – as opposed to Islamist – framework for its actions, and as a result this was a time when the Lebanese broadly sympathized with the Islamic/national resistance. In this context, a Maronite Christian sympathetic to the FPM explained to me how the Shi’a and the Christians have a long common history – Christians fleeing Druze massacres in the nineteenth century were given shelter in Shi’a

⁴⁶⁰ For an English language transcript of the Memorandum of Understanding see Mideast Monitor, Vol. 1, No 1 (February) 2006 (available online: http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0602/0602_3.htm).

villages. Not long thereafter, a Shiite sympathetic to Hezbollah invoked the exact same historical events to “prove” the kinship between Shiites and Christians in Lebanon. These were historical references no FPM or Hezbollah members had ever offered me in past years; if anything FPM activists would scold Hezbollah and reject the “Iranization” of Lebanon’s Shi’a community, while Hezbollah sympathizers would sneer at the FPM for their stubborn resistance against Syria. For the remainder of the war and its aftermath I constantly found myself on the receiving end of similar history lessons on the close ties between Lebanon’s Maronite and Shi’a communities; there was suddenly a tendency to seek out cultural commonalities and a conscious attempt of constructing affinity between Maronites and Shiites sympathetic to particular political groups.

Supporters of the FPM, particularly Maronite Christians, had suddenly found reason to study parts of their country’s history they rarely paid attention to before the agreement with Hezbollah: “You can really go back to the Sunni Mamluk Empire, in the thirteenth century, we can go that far, they massacred Maronites and Shiites” a Maronite supporter of the FPM told me.⁴⁶¹ He was not alone in presenting historical “evidence” in support of the FPM-Hezbollah Memorandum of Understanding, although most interview subjects referred to the Druze massacres of Maronites in the nineteenth century rather than the Mamluk era: “Christians were given refuge in the homes of Shi’a back then, there has really been a long history between the communities.”⁴⁶² This notion of Maronite-Shi’a historical affinity was encouraged from the party leadership, though it was not part of a conscious “brotherhood campaign” between the two communities.

⁴⁶¹ Interview, Beirut, August 11, 2008

⁴⁶² Interview, Beirut, July 28, 2008.

Nevertheless, the FPM leadership was very conscious of how important it was to alleviate Christian fears of Hezbollah's Islamic agenda. A member of the top leadership in the FPM explained that it was very "helpful" that there were no significant examples of battles between militias of the two communities during the civil war of 1975-1990.⁴⁶³ According to him, this made the task of finding common ground with Hezbollah's constituency much easier, despite the close relationship between Syria and Hezbollah: "We were on opposite sides in the last few years because of the war on Syria. But lately, what has happened between Tayyar [FPM] and Hezbollah, all the relationships that have evolved politically, this had a positive impact on the relationship between the two communities on the popular level."⁴⁶⁴

Despite this "positive impact," he acknowledged that many FPM supporters had a very difficult time accepting Hezbollah politically because of the fundamental principles of statehood – the FPM had long promoted the view that Hezbollah's arms were a challenge to the sovereignty of the state. During the time of research, the views on Hezbollah's arms did not seem to have changed among FPM supporters; several FPM activists expressed clear opposition to arms in the hands of a non-state actor. However, instead of unconditionally calling for the disarmament of Hezbollah, which was a view FPM supporters frequently expressed in the past, the reply I received from all FPM interview subjects followed the same logic: Hezbollah had proven itself a worthy defender of the homeland and any disarmament of the 'Islamic Resistance' had to be achieved through negotiation and preferably through incorporating Hezbollah's arms in a

⁴⁶³ Phone interview, FPM official, January 8, 2009.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

national defense strategy under the command of the Lebanese army.⁴⁶⁵ This was seen as a long-term goal; all FPM supporters I interviewed considered themselves realists who acknowledged the current power dynamic in the country. On the cultural level there was some discomfort for Christian supporters of the FPM with regards to the particular brand of Islamist agenda espoused by Hezbollah and the “Iranian attire” often preferred by Hezbollah party officials. Interestingly, it seemed the cultural aspects were more difficult for the FPM interview subjects to handle; the practical aspects of Hezbollah’s role as a state within a state could be dealt with “rationally” by forwarding arguments about the Lebanese state’s neglect of the Shi’a community, the threat from Israel, the heavy burden the Shi’a of the south had carried in Lebanon’s conflict with its southern neighbor, and how all these issues needed to be addressed in order to bolster state authority.

However, when cultural aspects, such as clothing and adherence to ‘Iranian religious tenets,’ and the conflation of political and religious discourse were discussed, the historical “memories” would often be brought up as “proof” that the two communities are very closely related after all.⁴⁶⁶ Hezbollah supporters used the same historical episodes, predominantly the Druze massacres of Christians in the 1860s, to express their affinity with Lebanon’s Maronites. Interestingly, affinity on the socio-economic level was a theme more commonly expressed from Hezbollah supporters than FPM supporters, perhaps because of the emphasis on social disenfranchisement in the Shi’a political

⁴⁶⁵ The responses from interviews with five FPM supporters in August 2008 and three FPM supporters in January 2009 all followed the party line, as laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding, which treats Hezbollah’s arms in somewhat fuzzy language about the “formulation of a national defense strategy” to protect Lebanon from “Israeli dangers.”

⁴⁶⁶ Hezbollah’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah is often perceived as both a religious authority and a political leader, making many FPM supporters uncomfortable, given their ideological commitment to the separation of religion and politics.

discourse. Indeed, large segments of Christians in Lebanon were living under very poor conditions and many shared the feeling of political disenfranchisement with Lebanon's Shi'a community, especially since the end of the civil war when the president's power was significantly reduced. As expressed by one Shi'a Hezbollah supporter: "Hariri's Lebanon has not been beneficial to the broad populace of Christians, and this is why the Hariri camp has a problem getting their support."⁴⁶⁷ The strong focus on the charismatic leaders of the two parties, Michel Aoun and Hassan Nasrallah, resulted in attempts to find affinity between the two men as well: "The General [Aoun] and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah practically grew up on the same block – of course they will share the same outlook on the Lebanese society and understand the plight of the common man better than any of the old feudal families."⁴⁶⁸

That this is not an accurate statement is less interesting than the proliferation of the myth; not only did my interview subjects "remember" historical roots of Maronite-Shi'a affinity from the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also from the modern history of the Lebanese Republic. The interviews with Hezbollah members were more clearly dictated by the "party line" than those of FPM members. In particular, the often-repeated Lebanese credo "coexistence" dominated the interviews with Hezbollah members; the Memorandum of Understanding "proved" that Hezbollah was a Lebanese national movement, and not exclusively Shi'a. This was a message Hezbollah officials

⁴⁶⁷ Interview Hezbollah activist, September 5, 2008.

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Hezbollah party official, August 14, 2008. This was a recurring story; four out of five interviewed Hezbollah supporters told me about the General's childhood in the mixed Christian-Shi'a area Haret Hreik, which is today a Hezbollah dominated district in southern Beirut. In addition to the fact that Hassan Nasrallah is 25 years younger than Michel Aoun, and is likely to have been shaped by very different political dynamics than his elder partner, he did not grow up in Haret Hreik, but in Bourj Hammoud in east Beirut.

made sure to repeat as often as possible, no doubt in order to ease the anxiety of their allies from other communities; the events of May 2008 were still very fresh in the minds of interview subjects. Indeed, there was acute awareness in the FPM and Hezbollah ranks of the public relations nightmare the May events constitute and conversation would often turn to justifications for those particular events. These justifications would often involve pointing out that the government had made an attempt to dismantle Hezbollah's telecommunications network, an act that amounted to a direct attack on the resistance's ability to fulfill its defensive duties. In these discussions, the "othering" of the so called March 14 camp by drawing attention to the influence Saudi Arabia and the United States had on the Lebanese government also became apparent.⁴⁶⁹

In other words, the FPM and Hezbollah interview subjects would depict themselves as "true" Lebanese, by reminiscing about the historical ties between the two communities, while painting the Hariri led coalition as a foreign tool working to disarm the only strong military defense Lebanon has at its disposal. In this context of severe societal polarization and high levels of social constraints, how did civic organizations try to bridge the fragmentation and attract members to their cause? Based on interactions and interviews with Lebanese civic activists in 2008 and 2009, the following section examines the activists themselves, who they are and what shapes their understandings of the environment in which they operate. To this end, the purposes and aims of civic activists in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon are probed and common understandings and perceptions among them are identified and related to the movement frames and stated goals of civic organizations.

⁴⁶⁹ Interviews with Hezbollah activists, September 2, 2008 and January 12, 2009.

Trying to bridge the fragmentation: constructing civic movement frames

The absence of major public manifestations by civic organizations between 2006 and 2008 does not, of course, mean they were not active during this time period. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 4, they were quite active in forming campaign coalitions and trying to influence the political sphere on a wide range of topics. In fact, despite the difficult social constraints of aftermath of the Independence Intifada, new civic organizations were able to emerge and engage in projects on their own as well as together with more established organizations. However, while there was a conscious effort of engaging in projects on the countryside, the center of civic activism was clearly urban centers, particularly in Beirut. Indeed, as the above section suggests, the environment was not conducive to large crosscutting civic mobilizations in the streets.

Who, then, were the activists able to attract during this time period? This section identifies the social opportunities available to Lebanon's civic movement during this time period. It identifies educated, urban youths as the main constituency for the civic movement and examines the reasons for why hegemonic culture of sectarianism has faced its main challengers in urban centers. It argues that an urban '*asabiyyah*' based on different social ties and interactions (less dependent on family allegiances etc.) provided the civic movement with a core group of activists. Moreover, it suggests that while political constraints, because of their conceptualization as institutional in character, have a national impact, social constraints can have regional variations. However, the claim that the urban environment facilitates crosscutting social interaction requires a caveat; there are also variations *within* urban centers in terms of communal intermingling in city neighborhoods. Indeed, some neighborhoods are quite homogenous, while others are

more heterogeneous. The urban environment does, however, offer more opportunities for crosscutting social networks to develop, not least on mixed university campuses.

Change from the ‘middle-up’: the civic ‘*asabiyyah*

The vast majority of civic activists in Lebanon are young, urban, and educated. For example, in the grassroots organization Nahwa al-Muwatiniya (Na-am), founded in 2006, which at the time of research consisted of sixteen full-time employees and a varying number of volunteers, college students formed the core of the volunteer pool, while full-time employees were either college graduates or had completed some level of higher education.⁴⁷⁰ Furthermore, the activists are primarily drawn from Lebanon’s substantial middle class, every interview subject self-identified as either lower middle class or middle class. However, their activism was not rooted in class identification, nor was it, broadly speaking, based on youth-specific issues. Indeed, there is a youth movement in Lebanon that has been working on issues such as lowering the voting age to eighteen since the late 1990s, but the civic movement as a whole is not restricted to youth issues. Instead, other common signifiers were much more frequently forwarded as motivations for activism. These signifiers took the shape of shared cognitive frameworks – shared core principles and understandings of the environment in which they were operating. These are the cognitive frameworks civic organizations plug into and reshape, and which, in turn, play a role in reshaping the collective action frames of organizations. As we have seen, the family has a very central role in Lebanese society. But from the 2008-2009 interviews, it appeared most of the activists developed these understandings of

⁴⁷⁰ For the historical role of student activism in Lebanese politics, see H. Barakat, *Lebanon in Strife: Student Preludes to the Civil War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

their environment in social interactions with peers from outside the family sphere. To be sure, several interviewees did attest to growing up in family situations where their parents' social networks were communally mixed, and suggested that their world view had been shaped to a great degree by their parents' values. Most interviewees, however, developed their cognitive frameworks in social interaction with individuals from Lebanon's various communities, especially in educational institutions such as communally mixed high schools and universities. Some of the interviewees were actually first made aware of 'alternate' readings of Lebanese history only after entering college. This does not mean, however, that communally mixed educational institutions are immune to the polarizing effects of society – student elections, for instance, are usually direct reflections of national elections, with every bit as much maneuvering and alliance forging as on the national arena.

Nevertheless, university campuses are inevitably centers of youth networking and have historically therefore been a natural terrain for grassroots movements to find their activists, in Lebanon and elsewhere. This was true during *Pax Syriana*, when student protestors were instrumental in efforts to organize protests against the Syrian occupation. The Aouni movement (which later evolved into the FPM) was particularly skilled at organizing on campuses and tapping into the energy and idealism of youth. While civic organizations like Na-am did not from the outset employ a conscious strategy to target campuses, the nature of their recruitment strategies (e.g. social events at cafés and bars and online social networking) has still resulted in a large number of college students in their ranks. However, unlike the FPM, the civic organizations suffer from the polarizing character of campus politics in Lebanon.

The following narrative describes one civic activist's search for a vehicle of influence. Her interest in politics started when she was about twelve years old, when following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon she became a staunch Hezbollah supporter, secretly studying the Qur'an because her father was opposed to religion. The events following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in 2005, however, would completely alter her perspective:

[W]hen 2005 came, that was the huge change in Lebanon. You would go to school.... and during all the breaks we would discuss politics. We had diversity at my school. Forty percent Shi'a, 40 percent Sunni, and 20 percent Christians, we had supporters of all the political groups in the class, it was very active. I'd argue with my friends with opposite views; in the beginning I used to defend Hezbollah of course. Then I started questioning my beliefs, when I heard from my friends about the Syrian *mukhabarat* [secret intelligence service] and what they used to do, I really wasn't aware of that before, how much people were affected by the Syrian presence.... all my beliefs where shattered... After a year I had become a March 14 supporter, I even started going to the monthly manifestations...and was active in Nahar al-Shabab.⁴⁷¹ Especially after the July war [of 2006] I was very strongly March 14, I used to live Dahiye and I really felt it was Hezbollah's fault that 3,000 people died. But then when I started at AUB, I saw how everyone in Lebanon was polarized; they don't think about these things, they just go with what their family tells them. If you are Sunni – Future Movement, Druze – you are with Jumlat. So I said, 'wait, I don't want to be part of this!' I started questioning everything again. Around that time I went to a Hiwar and met Nahwa al-Muwatiniya... Since then I've been active in many different NGOs, I jump on any civil society project I can find.⁴⁷²

I have chosen to reproduce this somewhat lengthy quote because it illustrates several key points about the path to being recruited into a civic organization in Lebanon. First, her journey to civil society activism appears completely isolated from her family's

⁴⁷¹ Nahar al-Shabab is not formally affiliated with any particular political party, but is the youth organization of an-Nahar newspaper, whose owner Gebran Tuani turned politician and was killed in the string of assassinations that targeted politicians from the so-called March 14 camp after the Syrian exit from Lebanon. In the polarizing climate that followed these events, some former members of Nahar al-Shabab felt the organization had become too political and clearly aligned with one political camp after the principles of March 14, 2005, had become "hijacked" by political actors.

⁴⁷² Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 16, 2009.

influence. Her father was a supporter of Nabih Berri's Amal, and was, as she put it, "a communal follower, but not religious." Amal and Hezbollah both draw the majority of their membership from Lebanon's Shi'a community and, while ostensibly politically allied, compete for the same constituency, hence her need to hide her support for Hezbollah from her father. Second, her beliefs were challenged when she was exposed to different views in her school, indicating the importance of social networks in shaping her understandings of her environment. Third, after being a supporter of the two main political camps in post-2005 Lebanese politics, her disillusionment with traditional politics led her to opt for an alternative vehicle of influence through Nahwa al-Muwatiniya and other civic organizations.

While this particular interviewee experienced extreme shifts in her readings of the Lebanese reality, other interviewees demonstrated some or all of these key experiences: limited family influence; sustained exposure to various communities and political opinions; and disillusionment with traditional vehicles of influence. Civil society activism, then, can give politically homeless individuals an opportunity to feel like they are making a difference in constructing their country's future. In this way, the space carved out by the first generation civic movements becomes occupied by the disillusioned youth of the middle class – those who have lost faith in the political system of their parents and want to make a difference for future generations. However, the question is whether "attitudinal affinity," i.e. a sense of common aims and understandings, or "structural availability," i.e. access to collective action structures, is the key factor in determining sustained activism in Lebanon. In theory, Lebanon should have high structural availability since a multitude of civic activism networks are constantly in

operation and no major deterring factors exist. In other words, Lebanese civic activists are not forced to operate in underground networks and should therefore be perfectly able to provide access to mobilizing structures. But while civic organizations do not face political constraints in the form of an authoritarian state, the difficulty of cutting through the polarized political climate and offer an alternative vehicle of influence is in itself a structural constraint because it emanates from the *societal* structures and institutions. In other words, structural availability is more than simply a matter of the existence of mobilizing structures, it is also dependent on activists interacting on a regular basis and being able to communicate their message to people outside the movement.

In Lebanon episodic popular mobilizations for civic oriented goals have seen great numbers take to the streets, but not a corresponding number that continued their activism through individual campaign organizations. For instance, the Laïque (Secular) Pride demonstration, which originated on Facebook seemingly independently from any established civic organization, drew thousands of demonstrators to the streets in 2010.⁴⁷³ Judging by comments made by the Laïque Pride instigators, they were largely unaware of the many activities of Lebanon's civic organizations and only after the Facebook campaign had begun taking shape were civic organizations involved. This prompts two important observations on the Lebanese case; first, there are more sympathizers than there are activists (the 'free-rider problem')⁴⁷⁴ and, second, awareness of civic organizations' activities is low. In other words, there seems to be high attitudinal affinity but low structural *visibility*. This state of affairs illustrates civic organizations' difficulties

⁴⁷³ See, for instance, Borzou Daragahi, "Lebanese March for Secularism," *the LA Times*, April 26, 2010.

⁴⁷⁴ SEE LICHBACH 1998

in competing with embedded collective identities' action frames and cutting through the political discourse in Lebanon. In effect, political polarization, which in Lebanon takes the shape of a heightened activation of embedded identities, becomes a social constraint for civic organizations, in that it marginalizes their ability to present themselves as alternative vehicles of change, thus altering the cost-benefit analysis of potential members. It also highlights the importance of structural factors – if a potential activist is not in contact with a recruiting agent, her level of attitudinal affinity is irrelevant. Clearly, one without the other will not lead to collective action. Consequently, while it may appear obvious that structural availability and attitudinal affinity will have an impact on the cost-benefit calculation of whether or not to become active, it is not quite as obvious how the environment in which activism takes place is redefined and delineated, that is, how political opportunities and constraints are identified by potential activists.

According to Melucci, existing social networks can function to decrease the costs of individuals' investment, thus facilitating the processes of involvement in collective action.⁴⁷⁵ Informal social networks do appear to be the main pathway for Lebanese civic grassroots organizations to recruit their members. Since urban social networks tend to involve iterative interaction between individuals across various constituencies, an alignment of understandings and perceptions within such networks can be expected to occur. Thus, the civic activist quoted at length above adjusted her cognitive frameworks as her social network shifted. Immersed in a community dominated by Hezbollah, she first found points of overlap in Hezbollah's "resistance frame." As she started attending a

⁴⁷⁵ Melucci 1989.

school with a more diverse population her social network changed, she was introduced to new points of reference and her cognitive frameworks adjusted accordingly.

When her perceptions of reality were adjusted to the point where Hezbollah's collective action frames no longer resonated with her cognitive frameworks, she rejected the resistance frame and adopted another group's collective action frames. As she started college, she once again suffered from discrepancies between her own cognitive frameworks and the collective action frames of the organization in which she was active, prompting her once again to seek out a "better fit," which she found when she attended Na-am's Hiwar. In the Internet age, however, social interaction does not only occur through face-to-face interaction. In recent years it has become common knowledge that social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, are widely used among youths throughout the Arab world, effectively changing the field of opportunities and constraints for social interaction.

Indeed, the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt have been called the "Facebook Revolutions," and all across the region, in Jordan, Yemen, and Bahrain, Facebook and Twitter are utilized to connect and mobilize grassroots activism. Lebanon is no exception; in fact, my own introduction to Facebook was through Lebanese friends, long before any of my European or American friends had discovered this electronic medium. Perhaps partly as a result of the widespread Lebanese Diaspora, the Lebanese were pioneers in social media usage, as it allowed families and friends spread across the world to stay in touch not on a daily basis, but on an hourly or even minute-by-minute basis.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁶ The Lebanese Diaspora is estimated to comprise of over twelve million people. In other words, far more Lebanese live abroad than within the borders of Lebanon. See www.iloubnan.info for more on the Lebanese Diaspora.

Thus, one would expect electronic social media to play a central role in the civic movement. However, as I was conducting research for this study, I did not find such a central role. To be sure, the civic activists were connected via Facebook and Twitter, and created Facebook groups for their various campaigns, email bulletins were widely used as a way to maintain a relationship once first contact had been made, and online petitions circulated in members' email inboxes, but it did not appear to be a central venue for either recruitment or mobilization. However, there were exceptions, such as the Laïque Pride event in 2010, which drew thousands of Lebanese to the streets of Beirut demonstrating for secularism and an end to the confessional political system. In this event, Facebook was indeed the main venue of mobilization. I believe the reason for this ambivalent status of social media in Lebanon's civic movement can be explained by a number of factors. First, Lebanon, especially since the departure of the Syrians, did not present the same obstacles to social gatherings and public assembly, as did Egypt and Tunisia. Consequently, face-to-face interaction, especially in the urban centers, was still the main way of networking and organizing.

In other words, while social media did constitute an important tool for Lebanese civic activists, due to the difference in political constraints, it was not the *key* tool, as it may have been in more authoritarian contexts. Second, as has been noted above, the time period in which the bulk of research for this study was conducted constituted a period of low-intensity issue-specific campaigning for civic organizations, as opposed to high-intensity popular street protests. There were few calls to public protests emanating from civic organizations during this time period. Furthermore, in the most prominent instance where social media was used as the key venue of mobilization, the cause was a broadly

formulated general call for secularism, not a targeted campaign to pass a specific piece of legislation. Similarly, in more authoritarian contexts, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the cause was a broadly formulated general call for regime change. In Lebanon after the departure of the Syrians, such general causes are difficult to achieve, since there is no *single* target for demonstrators. People can protest against the sectarian system, but the odds of achieving such far-reaching reform through sustained popular mobilization are slim because no one individual politician can be pressured into a specific action, as is the case when pressure is put on an authoritarian leader. Yet, these protests did attract quite a large number of people through its Facebook campaign. The reason for this, most likely, is the general dislike of sectarianism (see Chapter 6). Indeed, when the call is framed around broad common denominators, such as shared opposition against the role of religion in politics or against an authoritarian ruler, social media calls to mobilization are more likely to be heeded because its general and broad enough to resonate with a high number of people.

A more limited call, such as ‘pass legislation on the woman’s right to pass on nationality to her child,’ when posted on Facebook is likely to attract less attention, since the importance and benefits of the campaign are not immediately recognizable. For that kind of mobilization, individuals must be given a broader rationale, they need to see the full picture beyond the one-line slogan, and they must be convinced that this is the first step of many to achieve a greater end. And that kind of “convincing” requires sustained social interaction, not a one-time click on a Facebook page. Social media could become more significant for the Lebanese civic activists to reach the countryside, however. The Laïque Pride protests were actually attended by (and initiated by) actors with limited

previous involvement in civic activism. Thus, it may be suggested that social media has an important future role in reaching previously ‘untapped’ constituencies and, crucially, as Internet connectivity spreads, help in breaking the urban-rural divide that still plagues the Lebanese civic movement (see Chapter 6). However, before this can happen, Internet connectivity needs to become more widespread; in 2008, less than half the Lebanese households had a computer at home and only 31 percent of them had an Internet connection. In terms of demographic and geographic spread, the highest concentrations of Internet connections were found in the upper socio-economic classes ages 15-35 in urban areas, predominantly Beirut. However, the growth rate was also very high, with 14 percent of respondents who did not have a current Internet connection planning on acquiring one within the next six months.⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, data on the spread of Internet connections outside urban centers does not include the number of people who access Internet through cyber cafés, which are widespread across the country. Thus, the potential for a more central role for social media in the future is certainly present.

Rather than web based social media, there were two main avenues to activism within the realm of social networking that stood out as the most common among the 2008-2009 interviewees: the “organization avenue,” whereby activists had become involved through exposure to a specific organization via social events or friends, and the “campaign avenue,” whereby they had begun their activism through interest in a specific campaign. In the first category, the entry point could be a fundraiser, workshop, or dialogue session, hosted by the organization in question, or simply by individuals having friends in their social network who were active for a specific organization. For many Na-

⁴⁷⁷ Telecommunication Usage Patterns and Satisfaction in Lebanon, Report from Republic of Lebanon Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, December 3, 2008.

am volunteers, social events such as fundraisers or the Hiwar were their first introduction to the organization and their activities. Moreover, this was recognized by those within the organization trying to attract potential members: “It is much easier to get people to show up for an informal gathering in a bar or café, than it is to get them to come for some sort of formal ‘recruitment meeting,’ so this is how many people first meet Na-am, just by socializing.”⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, activists often expressed having felt a sense of loneliness before finding a home in the civic movement: “When I first went to the Hiwar and met all the people from Na-am, I thought to myself, ‘these people say what I have been thinking!’ It was a very nice feeling to find like-minded people.”⁴⁷⁹ The social events then, are more than simply a fundraiser or speaker’s session, they are also an opportunity for civic organizations to be seen and heard.

While many attendees remain on the sidelines, perhaps never getting more involved than paying a ten dollar cover charge for a fundraiser, or simply attend one of the many free public events Na-am organizes every month, some of them end up volunteering on a regular basis for various projects. In terms of “In Real Life” social networking, the café and club culture is widespread among Lebanon’s urban youths. However, while grassroots organizations such as Na-am did often schedule events in bars and cafés, it would be wrong to suggest that the clubs and bars around Beirut, for the most part, constitute significant political forums. To be sure, some cafés and bars have more of a politically aware clientele, but by and large, there is more dancing on the tables than planning of public protests going on in, for instance, Gemayzeh. Nevertheless, such

⁴⁷⁸ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 17, 2009.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 22, 2009.

environments do constitute a venue for crosscutting social interaction and relaxes the bonds of family and religion. Thus, the urban environment offers more opportunities for crosscutting social networking than do homogenous villages or regions. Rather than first coming in contact with an organization, some activists were introduced to civic activism through a campaign. The entry point for the “campaign avenue,” then, would be through attraction to a specific campaign topic that interests the potential activist, e.g. legislation on campaign funding, electoral reform, or the right of a mother to pass on her nationality to her child. Several of the interviewees had “pet projects,” which were the main reason they had joined in the first place. Once in the campaign, the volunteer is introduced to all the campaign member organizations, gaining first hand insight into their activities and goals. This also has the effect of providing smaller organizations with exposure to individuals outside of the members’ personal social networks, especially if the campaign gains media attention.

Consequently, the National Network for the Right to Access to Information (NNRAI) campaign, pushing for legislation that would allow citizens access to official documentation, for instance, which contains over 30 organizations including ministries, syndicates, and NGOs, provides public exposure to small grassroots organizations such as Na-am. However, while recruiting volunteers for campaigns may lead organizations to look beyond their immediate surroundings, it remains a largely informal process, which much like organization recruitment takes place through social networks. In recruiting volunteers for the NNRAI, project coordinators reached out to their existing network in order to find people with specialized skills: “We started by calling the regular volunteers, and they directed us to other people. Then we did it through personal networks, someone

knew someone at the university who definitely would be interested in such a topic, and so on. For many of them it's the first time they are really volunteering."⁴⁸⁰ In this way, campaign activities can be a way for organizations to expand their own membership, especially when they are involved in campaigns that are of a new type for the organization. Thus, a small grassroots organization like Na-am is exposed to a new category of potential members when recruiting volunteers for the NNRAI project:

It's a new project, because we are lobbying MPs, it's a different target that Na-am usually focuses on. We have had advocacy and lobbying projects before, but this is the first one where you need people who are able to work more independently and have specialized skills... We wanted them to be older than 21, preferably with a political science or law background. So what we have now is a totally different team working only on this project for now.⁴⁸¹

However, there is no guarantee the volunteers are interested in remaining active once they finish a particular campaign; some projects may hold greater interest than others, particularly when they are more "high-profile" projects: "We are hoping that we can involve them in more than that, but they may be here for only this project. There are always volunteers that only come in for one project. They are meeting with MPs, so this could be a reason they are interested too."⁴⁸² The social and campaign avenues to activism roughly correlate with the findings of other studies on the motivations for social movement activity:

There seem to exist two independent pathways to social movement participation or at least to willingness to participate. One pathway appears to be calculation of the costs and benefits of participation... The second pathway seems to be

⁴⁸⁰ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 13, 2009.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

identification with the movement or, in other words, adoption of a distinct activist identity.⁴⁸³

Arguably, the “campaign avenue” could be construed as a matter of a “cost-benefit calculation,” in that it presumably pertains directly to the specific interests of a potential member, while the “organization avenue” could be understood as “identification with the movement,” because it emphasizes the feeling of finding a “home” in a broader set of principles espoused by an organization. However, as Opp has pointed out, distinguishing between a “cost-benefit calculation” and “identification with a movement” suggests that a cost-benefit calculation involves the weighting of objective facts (rational), whereas identification with a movement is a subjective factor, external to a cost-benefit calculation (irrational).⁴⁸⁴

In this scheme, purpose-oriented activism in general would likely fall in the “irrational” category, since it does not depend on tangible results, but rather emphasizes the psychological reward involved with acting collectively for issues that are perceived as meaningful. But a “rational-irrational” distinction is flawed, since it can be argued that a cost-benefit calculation is always involved regardless of which motivations are given as reasons for joining. Identification with the movement’s goals and purposes intersubjectively lead the cost-benefit calculation to end in the plus column *for* activism. In other words, purpose-oriented activism does not necessarily preclude a cost-benefit calculation; it simply affects the outcome of such a calculation. Furthermore, once inside a movement, individual members will inevitably be part of the negotiations and

⁴⁸³ B. Simon et al. “Collective Identification and Social Movement Participation,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (March 1998): 656.

⁴⁸⁴ K. Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

renegotiations of the movement's identity – they are not just recipients of a packaged movement identity; they are parties in its constitution. The movement frames that are constructed have different purposes; in addition to diagnostic (identifying the problem) and prognostic (identifying the solution), movement entrepreneurs also have to employ *motivational* frames.⁴⁸⁵ In other words, they employ frames that will convince potential members that their cause has a chance of success. The final section of this chapter will take a closer look at some of the key frames employed by civic activists in Lebanon. As we shall see, in reality, movement frames frequently contain elements that diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational all at once.

Constructing frameworks and action frames

In addition to providing a hint of the importance of psychological factors when individuals decide on becoming involved in civic activism, the motivations interviewees provided were reproduced in the broader *raison d'être* for organizations, as expressed by leadership figures in interviews – and incorporated in the collective action frames of organizations. Moreover, these collective action frames are adapted to the environment in which civic activists operate in that they defuse direct confrontation with competing collective action frames employed by more embedded collective identities. Indeed, despite not running for public office, Lebanon's civic activists are in part vying for the same constituents as the political parties. While civic organizations are primarily concerned with the framework for politics through, for instance, arguing for the constitution to be fully respected, it is inevitable that their actions from time to time

⁴⁸⁵ Snow and Benford 1988.

challenge the interests of powerful individuals with a loyal constituency at their disposal. In order to defuse such conflict, civic organizations must construct non-confrontational but still effective collective action frames in order to attract support from across the political spectrum – they must provide a diagnosis and a suggested remedy of the problem while simultaneously avoiding being tagged as biased towards specific political camps. Consequently, collective action frames are constructed both with attention to an environment where political and communal identities are frequently conflated, and existing discourses among Lebanese across the political spectrum. In my interviews and interactions with activists, four interrelated movement frames that can be said to form the cornerstones of the civic movement identity could be discerned: 1) a non-violence frame (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational); 2) a coexistence frame (diagnostic and prognostic); 3) an incremental change frame (prognostic); and 4) an idealism frame (purpose over impact - motivational).

1) *The non-violence frame.* Activists in the interviews consistently emphasized the non-violent character of their activities. A pragmatic motivation for a non-violence approach was frequently forwarded; violence failed to bring results in the past and is only likely to do so in the future.⁴⁸⁶ But primarily, this was a matter of principle – violence is morally wrong, and therefore not acceptable. Thus, when presented with an alternative reality where a militarily powerful actor could impose a civic state in Lebanon where all

⁴⁸⁶ For in-depth studies of the use of strategic nonviolence in contentious politics, see, for instance, G. Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973); P. Ackerman and C. Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); S. Zunes, L. R. Kurtz, and S. B. Asher (eds.) *Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999); P. Ackerman and J. DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); R. L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals* (Boston, MA: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2004).

their proposed reforms were implemented, all interviewees stated that they would not agree to such a development, since it was contrary to the fundamental principles of their cause. In other words, non-violence was perceived as more than a tactic – it was an integral part of their understanding of *self*. Unlike the participants in the peace movements of the 1980s and the civic mobilizations of the 1990s, the majority of Lebanese civic activists in the early twenty-first century have little or no *personal* memory of the 1975-1990 civil war, yet it has clearly had an impact on their understanding of the society in which they live. What they did have, however, was a vivid *secondary* memory of a conflict they were either not born to experience or too young to grasp. In other words, they live with the civil war as a clear memory through their parents' experiences. In the interviews, activists frequently emphasized the non-violent character of their activism, often citing the example of a fifteen-year civil war in which no clear “winner” could be declared.

To be sure, there is a general tendency among older generations in Lebanon to glorify the pre-war era and describe this period as a “golden age,” which ended abruptly with the outbreak of violence in 1975. While all is certainly relative, Lebanon's post-independence period did in fact see civil unrest and increasing levels of social tension, particularly following the rapid influx of armed Palestinian guerrillas starting after the 1967 war. Yet, in the absence of a coherent historical narrative taught in Lebanese schools, most youths are dependent on oral histories from older relatives and acquaintances. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that several young activists who never experienced Lebanon before the war motivated their choice of non-violent activism, and indeed non-party activism, with the notion that the political parties and militant groups

had derailed their country's path of positive development by trying to impose their vision of Lebanon with forceful means. The sense that the older generations had failed in avoiding the destruction of the country underpinned a feeling of disillusionment with conventional methods, i.e. political party activism and reliance on protection from influential families. Moreover, in their analysis, the war ending with the formula "no victor, no vanquished," gives proof to the futility of violent means. Furthermore, the generational gap was also displayed through the fact that several of those interviewed for this study claimed their parents had limited or no influence on their own views on politics and what the concept of "citizenship" should mean. Instead, the majority of activists claimed to meet with a *lack* of understanding from their families with regards to their activities, especially those whose parents had clear party affiliation. Accordingly, civic organizations employ modes of action that are thoroughly non-violent and make non-violence a key component of their understanding of *self*.

2) *The coexistence frame.* The notion of coexistence, i.e. people from various cultures and communities living together free of conflict and persecution, is clearly central to the understandings espoused by civic activists in Lebanon. However, unlike the centrality of non-violence, this is a matter of pragmatic adjustment to the environment rather than a normative belief in coexistence as a principle. Indeed, contrary to the aims of civic activists, coexistence in itself does not address the underlying socio-psychological causes of communal conflict.⁴⁸⁷ Rather, it implies an agreement between

⁴⁸⁷ See, for instance, J. Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); J. Burton, *Conflict Resolution, Its Language and Processes* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990).

various communities to pursue parallel developments, each with its own dialectic.⁴⁸⁸ While many civic activists interviewed for this study self-identified as secular and “Lebanese first,” a vast majority also stated that since the Lebanese think in communal (or family) terms, the immediate abolition of the sectarian system is unrealistic. “When something has been around for such a long time, you can’t dictate to people they should suddenly stop thinking about their sect or family. No one will listen to you if you say that, but coexistence people understand, it’s an old concept for us.”⁴⁸⁹ While Lebanon’s long experience with a power sharing system has met with varying levels of success, and a majority of civic activists interviewed wanted to see the Lebanese brand of political coexistence abolished in the future, they acknowledged that communal identities clearly hold currency in Lebanon and therefore cannot be “wished away.”

The overwhelming majority of interview subjects were from an early age exposed to Lebanese of varying sects, either through their parents’ social sphere or through their educational environment. Exposed to the various narratives of Lebanon, these civic activists emphasized the necessity for dialogue and a slow process of community building across communal boundaries. Their approach is built on the idea that various religious sects can coexist within one national framework provided the “signature identity”⁴⁹⁰ is the citizenship, not sect or tribe. Hence, they focus their energy on strengthening a civic identity as the signature identity, in the hope that other allegiances will become marginalized in time. Moreover, by tapping into existing narratives, the civic activists are

⁴⁸⁸ Andrew Rigby, “Unofficial nonviolent intervention: Examples from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (November 1995): 453-467.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview LADE activist, Beirut, July 30, 2008.

⁴⁹⁰ Harik 2003.

spared the task of constructing new frames, instead linking their cause to an existing discourse that already enjoys legitimacy among the populace. Indeed, the coexistence frame employed by civic organizations is borrowed from Lebanese nationalist narratives, the mythology of *tay'yush* (coexistence), which frequently emphasize the uniqueness of the Lebanese “mosaic.” Thus, while the civic movement is not ostensibly a nationalist movement (in fact, the vast majority of interviewed activists did not consider themselves “nationalists,” based on how they understood nationalist ideology), it nevertheless seizes on the narratives found in Lebanon’s historical nationalist discourse (see Chapter 2). In this vein, few organizations openly propagate for the erasing of communal differences, as they are understood to exist, but rather for the principle of inclusiveness – the notion that with proper separation of religion and politics, Lebanon’s mosaic of communities can coexist peacefully. Accordingly, rather than calling for the immediate abolition of the sectarian system and lobbying parliament to that end, many organizations focus on the grassroots level of local communities, organizing workshops and running awareness campaigns with the purpose of creating a “we-feeling” across communal and political lines.

For instance, in 2008 the organization Youth for Tolerance ran a series of TV advertisements targeting the culture of “forgetfulness,” political dogmatism, and blind allegiance to parties and politicians. The “forgetfulness” advertisement likened Lebanon to a goldfish, swimming in circles in its bowl, never facing its past and therefore never achieving reconciliation. The political dogmatism advertisement featured a weather map with single-colored rainbows, pushing the point that expecting people always agree is like expecting single-colored rainbows to appear in the sky, and encouraging people to

accept differing points of view. Reflecting the feeling expressed by many Lebanese, the advertisement targeting blind allegiance to parties and politicians featured a poker game being played with Lebanese ID cards, highlighting the sense of being a pawn in the games of the political elite. The three advertisements highlight different aspects of the central theme of coexistence from a grassroots perspective – reconciliation with the past, tolerance of difference, and shared suffering under political elites’ cynical maneuvering. Of course, it is important for the organization’s credibility that it practices what it preaches. Within an organization like Na-am, which contains activists with different political leanings and perspectives, the understandings of constraints and opportunities are likely to clash from time to time. Nevertheless, political affiliations of colleagues did not appear to be a major concern of the activists interviewed; several interviewees pointed out that knowing the political leanings of colleagues was a more a matter of deduction based on random statements, rather than a matter of anyone openly declaring their political views. “We tease each other about politically sensitive issues if we know someone leans toward a certain party, and we can argue, but never to the point where we forget that we all share a belief in stronger citizen influence and holding our leaders accountable.”⁴⁹¹

In this regard, the leadership of Na-am is consciously creating an environment in which no one feels disenfranchised or alienated because of his or her communal or political background. To be sure, the offices of Na-am are not immune to the tensions of Lebanese society at large, but by espousing an attitude of “all inclusiveness” Na-am’s leadership defuse major fractionalization within the organization. In other words, political

⁴⁹¹ Interview, Na-am activist, Beirut, May 12, 2009.

views and affiliations are irrelevant as long as certain fundamental principles are agreed upon. 3) *The incremental change framework*. While Lebanon's civic activists are very much motivated by idealism, it would be a mistake to therefore assume, as some do, that they are also naïve about their ability to have an impact. Indeed, the most striking commonality among the activist interviewed was the almost cynical realism they espoused regarding the environment in which they were active. None of the interviewees displayed any illusions about their ability to reach immediate results. In fact, they were quite aware of "the way politics work in Lebanon," meaning they had little faith in bottom-up initiatives gaining broad support either among the populace or the politicians anytime soon. Yet, they believe things *can* change but only very slowly, and it has to happen on the levels of both society and politics. Far from being naïve idealists, these activists displayed a sophisticated sense of the complex interplay between state and society, understanding the political *culture* and political *system* as constitutive of each other:

It's really not enough to only do legislative lobbying, because the mindset of people has to change. There has to be a parallel track of changing the culture and understanding of citizenship, that it is also about personal accountability, not just accountability for MPs and politicians. But it has to happen slowly...when you're working in such an environment, you don't want in the beginning to scare everyone away and turn them against you.⁴⁹²

Hence, they promote an incremental approach, "boiling the frog" so slowly that immediate results are difficult to perceive, unless viewed through a long-term perspective. This approach is an adaptation to the environment in which they operate, but also reflective of the cognitive frameworks of the activists. In the interviews, activists would constantly point out that the Lebanese people are at once the victims and the

⁴⁹² Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 25, 2009.

enablers of the political system. The tendency to be loyal to a specific family and the lack of critical evaluation of your own politician is, in the view of the activists, a matter of long-term socialization. Consequently, the “cure” is a long-term civic socialization, whereby a citizen learns what his responsibilities are in a democratic society. For instance, central to Na-am’s philosophy is the notion of a “social contract” – the idea that democracy is a two-way street where citizens have responsibilities as well as rights. Lebanon is by no means a new democracy; the area saw various forms of popular representation during the Ottoman period even before the modern state of Lebanon was proclaimed. Nevertheless, as interviewees constantly pointed out, a civic culture is yet to materialize on the societal level. “The Lebanese are always complaining about the corruption of their politicians. Always! But you will note that it is usually the other camp that is corrupt – your own guy is a perfect champion of your rights! Of course this is not true, but this lack of critical eye to your own local patron, it has to change.”⁴⁹³ Due to this state of affairs, Lebanon’s civic organizations frequently adopt modes of action that have no immediate political impact, such as workshops and educational projects. These projects are meant to slowly socialize the Lebanese population into a more active and demanding citizenry, prompting politicians to adapt to the demands of their constituency, thus forcing them to transform from local patrons into public officials.

4) *The idealism framework (purpose over impact)*. Civic activism in Lebanon today cannot be regarded “high-risk” activism.⁴⁹⁴ Indeed, state repression of civic activism is not a common occurrence and the activists interviewed for this study did not

⁴⁹³ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut May 20, 2009.

⁴⁹⁴ D. McAdam, “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 92, No. (July 1986), 64-90.

attest to any sustained instances of harassment or serious negative effects as a result of their activism.⁴⁹⁵ Since an individual stands to lose very little by becoming an activist, it could be argued that the choice of being active for a campaign in that realm is not a difficult one, provided there are opportunities to do so, in effect rendering structural factors more important than psychological factors, such as collective identity. Indeed, some studies suggest that attitudinal affinity is made irrelevant by structural availability in cases of low-risk activism.⁴⁹⁶ However, civic activism in Lebanon is at the same time widely perceived as “*low-benefit*” activism; a common perception in Lebanon is that grassroots activity is unlikely to have any “real” effect on the way politics are carried out. One may therefore ask why anyone chooses to be active in a civic campaign in Lebanon. Several interviewees attested to being dismissed by friends and acquaintances active in political parties, and told they were wasting their time on something that will never translate to “real” power.

In this view, which was echoed by several party activists interviewed for this study, the only vehicle to real power, and thus real impact, is activism in an established political party or access to a powerful individual. The activists, for the most part, took this argument with ease, reiterating that they are not interested in “power” in the traditional sense. Instead, their interest is in trying to influence the framework for politics through advocating for certain principles and doing so awards their life with meaning,

⁴⁹⁵ There was one significant exception where an activist had suffered from harassment because of her activism. This was a matter of elements from a political party harassing the activist because of her involvement in propagating for secularism, which is to be considered a “red-line” issue. The “red-line” issues and the significance of how they are approached by civic organizations will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁴⁹⁶ McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1215.

even in the event of low-impact. One activist explained her participation in several campaigns as follows: “It is not that I believe I will see the results of my actions, in fact I think perhaps the real impact will not be until my grandchildren are around. But to be working for these issues, like a mother’s right to pass nationality to her child or for a person’s right to marry outside of the church or mosque, gives me a sense of purpose. I feel good about myself.”⁴⁹⁷ In an environment where the occurrence of bottom-up influence is regarded as rare, and the tangible impact of grassroots activism is difficult to detect, civic activists’ motivations can be classified as “purpose-oriented” rather than “result-oriented.” That is, while end results are certainly part of their calculation, the main motivations for their activism are more likely to be found in the realm of “meaningfulness,” in terms of gaining a sense of personal fulfillment. The theme of “I feel like I’m doing something meaningful” was often repeated in interviews when pressed on the reasons for activism – doing something is better than doing nothing, even if the perceived impact can be expected to be low.

The nurturing of this sentiment is very much a part of the collective action frames of civic organizations; this sense of purpose and feeling of accomplishment was frequently utilized by the leadership of organizations in order to maintain activists’ motivation. For instance, at a fundraiser held in the spring of 2009, Nahwa al-Muwatiniya celebrated the accomplishments of employees and volunteers by calling them up on stage one by one and presenting them with diplomas for their various activities over the year. For purpose-motivated activism, ceremonies such as these become important “reminders” of what has been accomplished, in lieu of widely published successes. But beyond the

⁴⁹⁷ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, June 10, 2009.

simply motivational function of such ceremonies, they reinforce the feeling of a collective sense of purpose and as such are part of the process of defining and reinforcing a collective identity. The interaction between the individual and the collective is a two-way street; individuals' cognitive frameworks and organizations' collective action frames are mutually constitutive, constantly evolving through reiterative interaction. However, this process does not only happen through harmonious mutual encouragement, where activists pat each other's backs. Some organizations, particularly the smaller ones with less hierarchical organizational structures, from time to time have passionate disagreements on the framework for their activities. For instance, one Lebanese activist attested to frequently engaging in heated discussions during meetings, particularly regarding the understandings of the environment in which they operate. On one occasion he felt that his fellow activists displayed a somewhat "rosy view" of reality and took it upon himself to enlighten them to the harsh reality.⁴⁹⁸ The discussions could become passionate enough for him to leave the room in anger.

Despite these disagreements, however, he never considered leaving the organization, since he felt such discussions were an important part of keeping the organization "dynamic." In other words, he felt they contributed something towards the achievement of the organizations end goals, since he "reminded" his fellow activists of what they were up against. Viewed from the perspective of collective identity production, incidents such as these can be understood as instances of delineating and adjusting cognitive frameworks and collective action frames; they are very tangible examples of the process of negotiating and renegotiating the collective identity. In other instances that

⁴⁹⁸ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut June 11, 2009.

were brought up in the interviews, activists had experienced similar discussions regarding the understandings of the organization's aims when drafting a declaration of their goals for the organization website. Organizations that allow for disagreements such as these provide ample space for the declaring and negotiating of the common perceptions of reality, thus making the organization dynamic and evolving. The above discussion suggests that the interaction of the individual and the organization is a two-way street. Organizations must tap into the "cultural stock" that is "out there" to attract members, but members on the inside of the organization are also actors in constructing new frames and, thus, a movement identity. The role of culture, then, does not only work in one direction. It sets limits to a movement's ability to formulate goals and objectives, because if the movement wants to attract members (which presumably most movements do), they must tap into existing hegemonic discourses and construct frames that resonate with people. But in the iterative interaction with a movement, the cultural environment itself can be transformed.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an account of the complex role of identities, individual and collective, in movement formation. In doing so, it argued that the concepts of social opportunities and constraints are helpful in elevating the role of culture to a permissive or restrictive structure, rather than only active in the mobilization phase of a movement. Melucci's view of collective identity as an action system suggests that collective identities are produced through iterative interaction. Furthermore, political opportunities must be interpreted and recognized as such if they are to have any impact

on a movement's formation. Thus, if we accept that a sense of common grievances, a sense of collective identity among a movement's members, is a necessary condition for a political opportunity to be recognized and seized, cultural factors that prevent or encourage social interaction must be understood as constituting a structure permissive or restrictive to movement formation. In light of this, individuals' cognitive frameworks, that is the cultural filters they employ in order to make sense of their environment, become important not only as mobilizing factors once a movement seizes a political opportunity, but as the building blocks from which movement identities are forged *prior* to the identification of political opportunities. Identities of individuals, however, are also of varying durability, or, to use Tilly's terminology, 'embeddedness.' Thus, while large-scale shifts in cognitive frameworks can lead to the dislodging of 'hegemonic discourses,' as widespread militia fatigue led to a loss of legitimacy of the traditional forms of participation during the civil war, 'detached' identities are much more vulnerable to external pressures.

The 2006 war between Hezbollah and Lebanon, for instance, combined with the lingering resentments from the 2005 Independence Intifada, in which the Shi'a community was largely absent, to create a sectarian threat spiral, effectively polarizing society, especially between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. In this context, individuals by and large retreated into more embedded identities and sought the 'protection' in their communities and the political parties that have become their main vehicles of influence. In other words, the level of social constraints were high for the civic movement in the 2006-2008, with limited ability for a civic movement to construct movement frames that would resonate with the cognitive frameworks employed by the various communities. For

movements based on embedded identities, however, social *opportunities* were plentiful during the same period. Even under normal circumstances, movements based on embedded identities have an advantage in that they are less dependent on the constant reinforcing of a movement identity – the pervasiveness of the embedded identity in individuals’ routine social interaction does much of that job for them. Moreover, regardless of whether the movement is built on a detached or embedded identity, movement entrepreneurs try to align their frames to ‘hegemonic discourses’ among their potential constituency in order to increase the level of ‘frame resonance.’ However, as the example of the FPM-Hezbollah alliance would suggest, when the movement identity is strong and formed around embedded identities (the FPM had after all taken a sectarian turn, despite its secular platform and origin) the practice of frame alignment, that is, adapting frames to ‘hegemonic discourses,’ is not restricted to the movement entrepreneurs, but movement members will make an effort to align their cognitive frameworks with the movement frames, and essentially ‘construct affinity’ with other collectives, which they have previously understood as ‘others.’

If 2006-2008 constituted a time period of severe social constraints for the formation of a civic movement, how does one explain the level of activity that nevertheless did take place among civic activists? Indeed, civic activists did during this period take a much more active role in public affairs and many new organizations were founded during this period, especially in urban centers. This can be explained, I argue, by the higher level of social opportunities in urban centers, where social interaction among communities is generally higher and an urban *‘asabiyyah* is allowed to take shape. Moreover, the political stalemate and heightened sectarian tensions alienated some

segments of the population, especially educated youth with diverse social networks. These segments found a home in civic activism, albeit a low-intensity, campaign coalition form, rather than big popular mobilizations. However, even in urban centers there is a certain level of geographical compartmentalization and broad-based civic mobilizations did not materialize during this time. Indeed, political parties, not civic organizations, employed the major popular mobilizations during this time period. Thus, social constraints and opportunities are highly relational – what constituted constraints to civic organizations were opportunities for political parties organized around sectarian identities. Moreover, the regional variations of social opportunities and constraints are important factors to take into account when studying movement formation. The concepts of social opportunities and constraints, I argue, can be highly useful in providing comprehensive accounts for the emergence, duration, and decline/success of a movement.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CIVIC MOVEMENT COMMUNITY AND THE POLITICAL SPHERE

Sometimes I don't know who we are supposed to convince – a minister or some local *Za'im*? Often they are one and the same, of course, but then there are times when we try to convince the government to adopt a certain policy, when the real ability to change practices on the ground lies elsewhere. It is all very frustrating.

Civic activist, Beirut

Introduction

A college student at the American University of Beirut (AUB) I interviewed in the summer of 2009 kept a very busy schedule. While studying full time, she also worked with Nahwa al-Muwatiniya on their weekly Hiwar (town hall meetings) and the Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor (LPM), edited papers for the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), and attended weekly meetings with the Civil Center for National Initiative (CCNI) for their campaign on removing the sect from Lebanese ID cards. In addition, she founded and headed a student club at AUB.⁴⁹⁹

These different projects not only brought her in contact with other grassroots activists, but also with professional NGOs and political elites, linking her to multiple levels of both civil society and the political sphere. The networks that have developed in Lebanon in recent years not only link grassroots, professional NGOs, and political elites; they also connect groups from a broad spectrum of issue areas and roles in civil society and the political sphere, providing disability advocates, environmentalists, parliamentarians, and government ministers with a forum for interaction on a level unprecedented in Lebanon's history. Notably, while acknowledging the absence of a coherent "civic movement" in terms of organizational structures, the temporary

⁴⁹⁹ Interview, Beirut, May 16, 2009.

volunteers and full-time activists interviewed for this study clearly saw themselves as part of a broader civil society community, whose members may have different immediate interests, but share common visions of what role civic engagement can play in a society. While there was diversity among the interviewed activists in terms of political opinions and leanings (although a majority self-identified as left-leaning), they all subscribed to the liberal understanding of civil society as an intermediary between society and the state, a kind of buffer zone between the population and the potentially arbitrary rule of the power holders – a formula quite different from that of Lebanon’s traditional civil society, which has mainly focused on the social services sector and taken on a complementary role vis-à-vis the political sphere.

In other words, while attempting to reform and change the democratic system in Lebanon, whether advertently or inadvertently, these activists are essentially involved in transforming the role of civil society itself. In this final chapter, I turn to the broader civic movement community and its evolving relationship with the political sphere. In this excavation, the role of civil society in terms of an arena for political participation and its (in)ability to function as an intermediary between society and the state in Lebanon will be delineated. In highlighting the roadblocks such an attempted transformation of Lebanon’s civil society encounters, this chapter provides an understanding of the political dynamics in a context often viewed through a “sectarian lens.” Instead of reverting to arguments of primordial identities, the argument forwarded here is based on an understanding of collective identities as evolving and fluctuating along a detached-embedded continuum. This chapter begins with a discussion on a broader civic movement community in Lebanon. I argue that the various campaign coalitions form the dissemination structures

for a common collective identity and have resulted in a kind of “activism exchange,” where activists offer mutual support to each other’s pet projects. This is followed by an examination of the shift in civil society – political sphere interaction since the end of *Pax Syriana*. I argue that the developments in Lebanon since the end of the civil war represent an ongoing transformation of Lebanese civil society, in which a broader social movement community is staking a claim for a new role for civil society in Lebanon, essentially engaging in a renegotiation of the role of civil society in relation to the state and political sphere. In this context, the tactical advantages of campaign coalitions in the political environment are discussed. The chapter then turns to a discussion on the legitimacy issues that arise from the civic movement’s dependence on foreign funding.

While civic organizations have achieved a certain level of independence from local patrons, dependence on foreign funding and the perception of them as Western constructs risks “uprooting” formerly socially rooted actors, complicating civic activists’ efforts of making “citizenship” an embedded identity. Consequently, the civic movement community becomes ineffective in times of crisis, when local leaders mobilize support through embedded identities. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the problems of implementing a Western liberal construct of civil society in a context where the state structures are less important than parallel patron-client structures of power that often trump those of the state. Broadening the space for political participation in such a context, it argues, is not only a matter of opening channels between citizens and the state, but of breaking parallel power structures and transforming the dominant political culture.

The civic movement community

On a sunny day in late May 2009, men and women in blue vests swarmed on Sanayeh garden, one of Beirut's few public parks. They came from all over Lebanon to participate in the general rehearsal for the domestic election-monitoring project employed by a coalition of local CSOs – *Coalition Libanaise pour l'Observation d'Elections* (CLOE). The initiative, spearheaded by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), included fifty-five NGOs and eight universities; on Election Day, June 7, a total of 2,500 volunteers were sent to 5,181 polling stations around the country, for the first time in the Middle East utilizing a text messaging system to report incidents.⁵⁰⁰

However, this domestic election monitoring campaign had much deeper significance than the mere function of observing the elections. According to a LADE organizer, for several months before Election Day, CLOE organized training sessions for volunteers and monitored every aspect of the political campaigns, ranging from issues of campaign funding to what type of rhetoric was used by politicians.⁵⁰¹ In effect, a campaign of this kind provides civic organizations with an opportunity for civic education, membership recruitment, and media outreach. When interviewing civic activists in Beirut in 2008 and 2009, I soon found that the boundaries between different civic-oriented NGOs in terms of their membership and volunteer pool were quite fluid, and that volunteers frequently saw themselves as members of a broader community of likeminded activists, rather than partisans of one particular organization. Indeed, there

⁵⁰⁰ Interview CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 13, 2009.

⁵⁰¹ Interview LADE/CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 5, 2009.

was significant overlap in the ranks of NGOs, and volunteers easily crossed over between organizations and projects. In this way, the organizational structures for each individual project become the infrastructure for the dissemination of a broader civic movement community. The following section argues that campaign coalitions can be understood as dissemination structures of a civic identity within the activist community, but also among the broader populace.

An infrastructure of dissemination

Campaign coalitions, more than simply vehicles for collective action, become sites for civic socialization and facilitate the creation of informal activist networks that survive beyond a specific campaign. When various CSOs collaborate and develop strategies together, the movement frames discussed in Chapter 5 are disseminated through the structures of informal networks, solidifying a broader sense of *self* among activists of quite different orientations and core interests. No movement is homogenous, but for the sake of convenience, “movements” are often discussed as distinct entities defined by their core constituency or ideology. Accordingly, we speak of *the* women’s movement, *the* civil rights movement, or, as is the case in this study, *the* civic movement, when in actuality, these labels contain a wide variety of campaigns and actors.⁵⁰² Thus, “the women’s movement” does not represent one time-limited campaign for a specific political objective, but houses a multitude of different campaigns ranging from, for

⁵⁰² D. S. Meyer. “Opportunities and Identities: Bridge-Building in the Study of Social Movements.” In Meyer, David S., Whittier, Nancy, and Robnett, Belinda. *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); D. della Porta and D. Rucht. “Left-Libertarian Movements in Context: A Comparison of Italy and West Germany, 1965-1990.” In J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds.). *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives of States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 229-272.

example, providing education to women in the countryside to advocating for parliamentary quotas for women, or even campaigns on issues that can only tangentially be related to the core issue of women's rights. These campaigns are carried out by individuals and organizations of widely different backgrounds and reasons for their activism: "A social movement community includes diverse individuals and groups whose primary focus at any one time may vary tremendously, but who are united by a generally shared view of the world and their place in it."⁵⁰³ Hence, specific "movement campaigns" represent a reflection of a broader "social movement community," which is based on more fundamental commonalities than simply belonging to the same constituency or agreement on a specific political issue – they have a common understanding of the environment in which they operate.⁵⁰⁴

The civic-oriented segment of Lebanese civil society, i.e. groups concerned with issues of good governance and citizen participation, is a heterogeneous collection of organizations; there is a marked difference between an organization like, for instance, the LTA, which is a national chapter of an international organization (Transparency International) and Na-am, which is a small local grassroots organization with a "core team" of between ten to fifteen individuals. Undeniably, they operate under vastly different conditions in terms of financial resources, organizational structure, and access to political elites. In other words, their common cause is based on certain core aims and beliefs, rather than belonging to the same sect, class, or, for that matter, gender. While all these activities take place in widely disparate fields (e.g. conflict resolution, civic

⁵⁰³ Meyer 2002: 12.

⁵⁰⁴ S. M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

education, advocacy, watchdog functions), and on the surface may appear to have little in common, they are all part of concerted efforts to make citizenship count and, in the extension, build a civic state in Lebanon. While organizations like the LTA and Na-am operate with very different resources and internal organizational structures, they are nevertheless part of the same movement community, as are other organizations with different core aims, such as the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) or the Permanent Peace Movement (PPM). Thus, despite the absence of an overarching organizational framework encompassing the multiple civic-oriented campaigns employed in Lebanon in recent years, and despite the heterogeneity of the membership in the campaign coalitions, they can, I argue, also be understood to reflect a broader movement community: “These networks do more than organizing activity and sharing information. *They are the actual producers, and distributors, of cultural codes.*”⁵⁰⁵

But to the civic activists, it is also crucial to spread their core ideals and understandings beyond the activist community. Through campaign coalitions civic activists also try to disseminate their worldviews and understandings of their surroundings in the non-activist population. Among the activists interviewed for this study there was a broad recognition that a culture of sectarianism permeates the population: “On the level of the politician, it is about power, they don’t care about sect, but among the population I think sectarianism is an issue. It’s a lack of knowing the ‘other.’ That probably comes from the politicians not wanting them to...it probably also comes from your family and your background.”⁵⁰⁶ In this context, it is also important to

⁵⁰⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 362 (italics in original).

⁵⁰⁶ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 20, 2009.

consider other dissemination structures in Lebanon. While geographical compartmentalization and limited crosscutting social interaction in villages and regions of a high degree of communal homogeneity are one factor, Lebanon's media landscape also reflects (and, I would argue, reinforces) the sectarian divisions in society at large. Indeed, the sectarianization of Lebanon's media landscape provides embedded identities with dissemination structures with which Lebanon's civic campaigns can hardly compete. Cultural production is integral to the creation of a national identity; it is imperative in the defining and redefining of the *imagined community*. Indeed, according to Benedict Anderson's classical work, it was the advent of new print technology that allowed for a spread of new senses of self among previously disconnected populations.⁵⁰⁷

Television and other media are key outlets for cultural production in the contemporary world and as on all levels of Lebanese political life, media becomes a scene of identity politics; each outlet espousing its own vision of Lebanon's past, present and future.⁵⁰⁸ Civic activists, then, are not only up against an entrenched political culture among elites, but deep-seated perceptions and belief systems of the population at large as well, reconstituted and reinforced by media outlets that cater to specific constituencies. Accordingly, activists do not only lobby politicians for their cause, they also "lobby" citizens, employing projects in citizenship education in attempts to socialize the public into a democratic mold; in Charles Tilly's language, they are trying to embed a detached

⁵⁰⁷ Anderson 1991.

⁵⁰⁸ M. M. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also M. M. Kraidy and S. Mourad "Hypermedia and Global Communication Studies: Lessons from the Middle East," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (2010).

identity, while detaching an embedded identity.⁵⁰⁹ Between 2008 and 2010, the PPM and its six partners ran the Citizen Lebanon (CL) project. This network brought together the PPM, the Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA), civic education organization *Hayya Bina*, think tank CESMO, disability advocate LPHU, *Baldati*, and monthly magazine *Sho'un Janoubiya*. The CL project aimed at educating local populations in democratic principles and active citizenship. In workshops and discussion group forums, implementing organizations encouraged citizens in villages to organize and identify policy issues and bring them to the attention of their local governments through advocacy and citizen action. Though directly geared towards citizen contact with municipality governments, the project had a broader aim, seeking to increase popular interest in democratic processes in general, thereby encouraging them to also become more active on the national level.⁵¹⁰ While the CL project was packaged and sold as an educational exercise in active citizenship, other projects, such as Na-am lil-Hiwar, are subtler in introducing the idea of active citizenship.

The Hiwar first and foremost purports to be a forum where individuals can meet and share ideas on a specific topic, but on another level it also serves to instill a sense of active engagement with the issues that affect the people directly. In other words, the Hiwar is also a project of citizen education and empowerment, based on the notion that dialogue and the exchange of ideas will not only lead to greater understanding of the “other,” but also to a more engaged citizenry: “Dialogue should not be exclusive to political leaders; as citizens of an allegedly democratic nation, we have a responsibility to

⁵⁰⁹ Tilly 2002.

⁵¹⁰ Phone interview, PPM activist November 4, 2010.

educate ourselves and improve our lot.”⁵¹¹ “National dialogue” is a tired concept in Lebanon, a frequently used term to describe talks between political leaders, many of whom already know each other well from many years of being in the limelight as members of the political elite. “Dialogue,” in this context, is little more than elite bargaining and an opportunity for patrons to show their supremacy as representatives of their communities. On the grassroots level, however, dialogue between individuals from various communities does not necessarily happen on a day-to-day basis. To be sure, some of Beirut’s districts are quite mixed, and when spending time in West Beirut’s Hamra district, which prides itself in a cosmopolitan identity, it is easy to forget that in other parts of the country (or even the city), Muslims and Christians of various sects do not interact naturally on a daily basis.

To counter this compartmentalization and create space for a sense of affinity to emerge between youth of the various communities, the location for the Hiwar varies from one week to the other. One week, the Hiwar will be held in Gemayzeh, a trendy bar district just east of the former Green Line that separated Christian East Beirut from Muslim West Beirut, another week it will be held in al-Dahiye, the southern suburbs of Beirut. Al-Dahiye is a predominantly Shi’a area and became known in the Western media as a “Hezbollah stronghold” when it was heavily bombed during the 2006 war, the scars clearly visible several years after the bombs stopped falling. The educational, or “socialization,” aspect of the Hiwar is less obvious than that of projects like CL; its character as a free forum naturally invites dissent, critical thinking, and engagement with not only social issues, but political issues as well. For instance, in the months leading up

⁵¹¹ Na-am website, accessed May 25, 2010.

to the 2009 parliamentary elections, the Hiwar featured politicians seeking to be elected into office as guest speakers. The special guest speaker at one evening's Hiwar was Nayla Tueni, daughter of slain March 14 icon Gebran Tueni. Nayla was at that time running for parliament, in spite of voices raised against her youth and political inexperience. One of the organizers explained that inviting Nayla Tueni provided attendees with the opportunity to engage with a very common occurrence in Lebanese politics: "We invited her so people could question the way children of politicians seem to think they are entitled to a place in parliament."⁵¹² Nayla's father, Gebran Tueni, was the son of Ghassan Tueni, the newspaper magnate and influential op-ed columnist.

While the Tueni family is not exactly part of the group of notable families that have dominated Lebanese politics for decades – in some cases centuries – this issue was considered important to some attendees I spoke with after the Hiwar: "I liked her father, and I don't have anything directly against her, but on what qualifications does she want to represent me in Parliament? And she was so vague on the issues, this is so typical of Lebanese politicians: 'I have no position on issues – but elect me for my name!'"⁵¹³ Indeed, the family name matters in Lebanon; despite criticism of lacking a solid political platform, Nayla went on to win in her Beirut district and at twenty-six became one of the youngest Members of Parliament.⁵¹⁴ During this time period, Na-am made sure to invite guest speakers from across the political spectrum and hosted parliamentary candidates from most political camps so as to avoid accusations of bias. Importantly, local chapters

⁵¹² Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 26, 2009.

⁵¹³ Interview Hiwar attendee, Beirut, May 25, 2009.

⁵¹⁴ Official results from Lebanese authorities: <http://www.elections.gov.lb>.

in Tripoli, the Shouf, and a joint chapter for *Jbeil* (Byblos), Keserwan, and Metn replicate the Beirut Hiwar sessions in their regions. As in the Beirut sessions, the topics range from purely social to political; the week before the 2009 election, Na-am lil-Hiwar's Tripoli chapter hosted a session discussing the differences between the Boutrous draft law and the electoral law finally adopted by parliament. This attention to the countryside is crucial, especially given Lebanon's history of uneven development in the cities and the surrounding areas. However, the progress on the countryside was halting; the local Hiwar committees did not see the same level of participation as the Beirut based Hiwar. As I argued in the previous chapter, the urban environment offers more opportunities for sustained social interaction across communal boundaries.

Indeed, as both Ibn Khaldun and Charles Tilly's work would suggest, it is not a coincidence that the majority of civic activists are found in the urban centers: "Embedded identities can detach, as when divisions by occupation or locality start superseding divisions by lineage, and lineage relations therefore shrink in scope and impact."⁵¹⁵ Embedded identities, such as sect and community, have less impact on routine social interactions when an individual is exposed to communally heterogeneous surroundings, such as multi-communal university campuses in the city. Although Na-am's focus is nationwide, Beirut naturally becomes the focal point as a "melting pot" of youth from all parts of the country arriving in the city to attend university or find a job. While Na-am's Hiwar sessions are small-scale in comparison to mass-rallies of political parties, this setting allows for an exchange of ideas and perspectives between youths who may otherwise not have had a chance to interact. This aspect of Na-am's work is an area

⁵¹⁵ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 135.

where secular-liberal groups often interact with confessional organizations. Indeed, confessional organizations are often involved in projects on intra-communal dialogue, community building, and conflict resolution.⁵¹⁶ It is not surprising then, that this is an area where Na-am finds partners and sponsors that come from that sector of civil society. Sponsors include international confessional networks such as *Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et Pour le Développement* (CCFD), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Finn Church Aid, but also secular sponsors such as the Finnish and Norwegian Embassies. But as much as Lebanon's civic activists work to disseminate their movement frames among the broader public, and while opinion data suggests that their core objectives find much support amongst the Lebanese (see below), their pool of activists remains limited. Hence, as the next section will show, the activists run a danger of forming a new class separate from the broader public from whence they came, both through extensive recycling of actors in the various campaigns, and an increased interaction with the political sphere.

Nodes of civil society and political sphere interaction

The National Network for the Right to Access to Information (NNRAI) was formed in April 2008 for the purpose of creating legislation that would give citizens the right to request access to public documentation. The network includes several ministries, a parliamentary association (Lebanese Parliamentarians against Corruption – LebPAC), local established NGOs (LTA; *Association pour la Défense des Droits et des Libertés* – ADDL), local grassroots organizations (Na-am; Nahar ashabab), a private foundation (the

⁵¹⁶ For instance, in 2008, the American Islamic Congress (AIC) office in Cairo, Egypt, published a comic book in Arabic entitled “The Montgomery Story.” The comic book, telling the story of the African-American civil rights movement’s famous bus boycott campaign in Montgomery County some fifty years earlier, was part of a socializing campaign on non-violence.

Safadi Foundation), and an international association (the American Bar Association – Rule of Law Initiative in Lebanon – ABA-ROLI). Campaign coalitions not only link organizations with different core objectives (e.g. organizations working for the empowerment of disabled people with organizations working for political transparency), but also become sites that link grassroots with elites. Table 6:1 shows the spread of organizational types involved in the Right of Access to Information campaign (steering committee members in bold).

Table 6.1: National Network for the Right of Access to Information

<i>Local grassroots organization</i>	<i>Local established NGO/Association</i>	<i>Government/Parliament</i>	<i>International association</i>
Na-aM	LTA	LebPAC	ABA-ROLI
Nahar ashabab	ADDL	The Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR)	
Maharat	Beirut Bar Association	Ministry of Justice	
	National Audio-Visual Media Council	Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities	
	The Press Syndicate	Ministry of Finance	
	The Syndicate of Journalists	Ministry of Economy and Trade	
	ALEF		
	The Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture in Lebanon		

Source: NNRAI website

The immediate network of activists are at the same time part of networks cutting across different strata of society, leading to sites of elite cooperation where civic activists from grassroots organizations like Na-am work on specific campaigns alongside “elite” organizations like LebPAC and more established and internationally linked organizations like the LTA. Through such campaign coalitions, ordinary citizens in Lebanon, at least in theory, become linked to established international actors, such as the American Bar Association (ABA). Although the list of participating organizations in table 6:1 is not exhaustive, it illustrates the variety of actors involved in the campaign. Not only do network members represent different levels of organizational development, but also political allegiances, even among entities representing the Lebanese state.

For instance, at the time of research, a Hezbollah-aligned minister led OMSAR, while allegiances among the members of the parliamentary group involved in the NNRAI may be entirely different.⁵¹⁷ Beyond supposedly facilitating the efficient pooling of resources toward achieving the stated goal of the campaign, the networks can, in theory, become important nodes of civil and political society interaction, which link grassroots to elites (both in and out of power) and professional NGOs and INGOs. Moreover, networks like the NNRAI become sites for linking actors across multiple strata of the playing field, as the network includes members ranging from loosely organized grassroots organizations to well-established NGOs and international actors. The network also includes groups that more clearly fall into specific political camps, such as, for instance, Nahar al-Shabab, which is an ostensibly independent youth organization, but is widely seen as aligned with the so-called March 14 alliance. The presence of politically aligned

⁵¹⁷ The dilemma this poses to a clear understanding of the role of the state in Lebanon is discussed at length below.

members in a campaign coalition could signal political motivations for the campaign, but Na-am deals with this issue much the same way they deal with the political affiliation of individual members – they focus on the end game. If the project’s ultimate goal is in line with the core principles of Na-am, they do not have reservations about who else is involved in the campaign. According to a Na-am board member, there have been occasions when they have refused funding because a project appeared too politically “tainted” and not clearly in line with the core objectives of the organization.⁵¹⁸ Of course, the question of whether a campaign coalition is politically tainted is often in the eye of the beholder.

Since networks can contain actors who are more or less openly aligned with specific political parties, it is not uncommon that opponents of a campaign will accuse civil society actors of being biased towards one or the other side. According to one Na-am activist: “It is inevitable in Lebanon, we have been accused of being biased by every side. But if every side accuses you of being biased, that means you are probably not.”⁵¹⁹ Because of the polarized political climate in Lebanon, Na-am makes a conscious attempt to “balance out” projects that are supported by one political side, with projects that are supported by the other side.⁵²⁰ While a key strategy to avoid cooptation by political actors is to only accept support from political parties if the project is run on their terms, Na-am understands the importance of elite cooperation. That is, they do not shy away from the support of figures in the establishment, provided the core objectives of the project are in

⁵¹⁸ Interview Na-am board member, Beirut, April 16, 2009.

⁵¹⁹ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut July 27, 2008.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

line with Na-am's agenda and remain so for the duration of the campaign. Furthermore, as I pointed out in Chapter 4, should a project deviate from its original objectives, the costs incurred by an organization for ending the collaboration are relatively low. According to some activists, limiting the time of the campaign coalition's existence reduces the risk of corruption of the network itself: "I think its good these coalitions don't last forever, maybe it would stagnate, take on a political taint if it was a permanent thing. This has happened before with groups that started for a good cause – they become infiltrated and co-opted. For us, we don't exist long enough for that to happen."⁵²¹

Whether or not civic grassroots movements are able to have an impact, that is if they are able to influence the societal and political spheres in the direction they want, is very difficult to evaluate. But there are indications that they are able to both create and seize moments of opportunity. Indeed, there are signs that the political sphere has become more attentive to the role of civil society in the last decade. For instance, in the late 1990s, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) supported an initiative by local NGOs to create a Parliamentary Center Program. The Parliamentary Center Program (1997-1999) was intended to facilitate communication between civil society and MPs, both as a forum for civil society networking, and as a coordination mechanism between Lebanon's NGO community and parliamentary entities. The goals of the center failed to materialize both because of the unwillingness of Lebanese deputies to allow for outside insight in their activities, and because of divisions within the NGO community itself, where individuals with private access to power holders were unwilling to risk their personal ties for the sake of collective civil society access to the political

⁵²¹ Interview CLOE volunteer, Beirut, May 2, 2009.

sphere.⁵²² In 2009, Na-am launched the Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor (LPM), which aimed to publicize the activities of each Member of Parliament on a website. The LPM, while modest in its goals compared to the Parliamentary Center, indirectly promoted interaction between the political sphere and civil society through putting public pressure on MPs to disclose their daily activities: “There are MPs who have contacted us, volunteering their schedules because they don’t want to be left out from the records, it would look like they weren’t doing anything.”⁵²³ Thus, a project launched by a small grassroots organization succeeded in fulfilling at least some of the objectives of the failed Parliamentary Center project, launched by established and highly professionalized NGOs ten years earlier.

To be sure, there were significant differences in the scale and scope of the two projects; perhaps most importantly, unlike the Parliamentary Center, the LPM did not depend on the active participation of elites, except their cooperation in sharing their agendas, the refusal of which would reflect poorly upon their performance in the eyes of the public. Nor did the activists behind the LPM have any personal ties to the “corridors of power,” and hence stood nothing to lose from publicly challenging MPs to become more transparent. The ability of a small civic organization to attract any attention from the political sphere at all suggests that the way the political sphere interacts with civil society has shifted, opening up for the possibility of new lines of communication between grassroots and politicians. This is significant in the context of a political arena where politicians normally do not act as public servants, but rather as patrons with a clientele. In

⁵²² Kingston 2007.

⁵²³ Interview Na-am/LPM volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009.

the words of Hilal Khashan: “[B]efore anything of real and lasting significance can be done to salvage Lebanon, the first moves must consider the transformation of the country’s elites from patrons to mass oriented.”⁵²⁴ Of course, not all members of the Lebanese elite benefit from preserving the current status quo. For civic organizations, it is crucial to identify and find “disgruntled elites” to cooperate with. The Civil Center for National Initiative (CCNI) was founded in 2008 by a large group of Lebanese professionals, academics, and political characters, including the former speaker of parliament, Hussein Hussein, ⁵²⁵ and his brother, Talal Hussein.

Similarly to how the NNRAI coordinates between political elites and grassroots, the CCNI campaign to remove the sectarian identity from the civil registry brings together grassroots volunteers with an organization populated by elites. The CCNI becomes a link for elites to cooperate with other civic grassroots organizations and become part of the broader movement. Most importantly, the CCNI illustrates alliances between civil society groups and individuals in the establishment who are stakeholders in the political sphere, but no longer part of the formal political structure. In other words, it illustrates how elite disunity can lead to opportunities for civil society organizations. However, as the next section will show, the consolidation of a civic movement community in Lebanon, and their increased interaction with the political sphere does not necessarily make them more effective as “agents of change.” In challenging the

⁵²⁴ Khashan 1992, 176.

⁵²⁵ Hussein Hussein was the Speaker of Parliament until he resigned from his post in the aftermath of the much-criticized parliamentary election of 1992 (see Chapter 3). According to Hussein, his Hezbollah opponents in the Ba’albek-Hermel district manipulated the elections. See el-Khazen 1994.

hegemonic understanding of identity in Lebanon, they risk falling prey to the very identity processes they are trying to counter.

The Lebanese “activism exchange” and a new civil society class

Lebanon is a small country with a small community of civic activists. Due to this limited activist pool, a system of reciprocity that can be described as an “activism exchange” has grown out of the various campaign coalitions that have emerged in recent years. A campaign coalition, then, in addition to being the organizational vehicle through which campaigns are executed, forms a kind of “market” which provides connections between activists of different core aims such as, for instance, environmentalists and disability advocates. For professionalized organizations, these markets offer access to the volunteer pools of grassroots level organizations, providing them with on the ground manpower. Through the activism exchange activists will engage in each other’s “pet projects,” even if it is not directly connected to their core objectives. An LPHU activist explained the involvement of the organization in projects that are not directly related to the issue of physical disability as a result of this system of reciprocity: “We help each other out, if we support a project that is another organization’s ‘pet project,’ we expect their support in one of ours.”⁵²⁶ The interaction in campaign coalitions also leads organizations to branch out and take leading roles in projects that are not necessarily of immediate interest to their core focus. For instance, in 2007 the LPHU and National

⁵²⁶ Interview LPHU activist, Washington, DC, March 7, 2010.

Democratic Institute (NDI)⁵²⁷ launched the Lebanon Alternative Budget Project (LABP), which “aims to create a dynamic dialogue between Lebanese civil society and the Lebanese government about issues related to the development of the national budget.”⁵²⁸

The initiative was the result of NDI-sponsored workshops held in 2003 (hosted by LPHU and LTA) and 2006 (hosted by LPHU), aiming at creating a national network of CSOs focused on raising awareness about national budget issues. Not surprisingly, the informal system of activism exchanges has as a consequence a certain level of “recycling” of actors in different campaigns. This is not only the case for the volunteers – time and again, the same key actors are found in leadership roles in various campaigns.

In fact, in some respects the civic activists appear to form a new kind of elite, the circles of which are quite as narrow as those of traditional elites: “It’s always the same people, it’s [names of four prominent activists]. They do great things, and I’m not saying they do it for their own enrichment or anything like that, but I feel we have become too confined to the same circles and really only repeat what we critique among the politicians – enable each other and shut others out.”⁵²⁹ A related challenge for civic grassroots organizations in Lebanon, especially in terms of their sustainability, is the question of personalized leadership. For instance, it is clear that Na-am has been strongly influenced by the attitudes and charisma of certain key individuals, without whom several of their volunteer activists may not have been as enthusiastic. This reliance on a limited number

⁵²⁷ The US-based NDI has had a Beirut office since 2001 and is a major donor for civic-oriented projects, such as Citizen Lebanon, CCER, LPM, LABP, Vote Match, and Nahar al-Shabab’s Youth Shadow Government (YSG). See www.ndi.org/lebanon.

⁵²⁸ LABP 2007.

⁵²⁹ Interview LPHU activist, Washington, DC, March 7, 2010.

of “social movement entrepreneurs” leaves civic organizations highly vulnerable to the personal choices of these key individuals – should they decide to leave the organization and pursue other tracks, there is not necessarily someone able to take their place.⁵³⁰ Long-term sustainability of civic activism is also hampered by one of the factors that allows for their short-term success – the lack of a coherent national civic movement structure. While this has made civic organizations less susceptible for co-optation and has facilitated the creation of dynamic campaigns, the limited scope of campaign coalitions presents them with the same dilemma Paul Kingston found in Lebanon’s environmental movement – the risk of only achieving “tactical successes,” which on the whole “do not add up to any fundamental forward progress.”⁵³¹

Furthermore, the presence of government and state entities in some of them, while, as I argue, this allows for a new kind of interaction between civil and political actors, it also opens up for the risk of elite control over civil society agendas. In trying to find a new role for civil society, activists run the risk of becoming so entrenched in the establishment structures, that they no longer function as a reformist force. Some observers claim that civic activists are well on their way towards becoming a part of the establishment: “During this five year period [2000-2005], some prominent civil society activists have opted to stake out a place in the ‘system,’ equipped with the legacy of their experience in these movements and other suitable tools for their new careers – these

⁵³⁰ M. N. Zald and R. Ash, “Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (March 1966): 327-341.; McCarthy and Zald 1977; M. N. Zald and J. D. McCarthy, “Social Movement Industries: Competition and Cooperation among Movement Organizations.” In Louis Kriesberg (ed.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 1-20, Vol. 3 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1980).

⁵³¹ Kingston 2001.

include MPs, ambassadors, experts and advisors, and others.”⁵³² The entrenchment of civil society actors in the political sphere may lead to a certain level of disconnect between formerly “socially rooted” actors and their original constituency; they risk becoming “dislodged” from their social setting. In the words of one longtime activist: “Civil society actors are too removed from their local bases, we have become elites ourselves, just another actor playing the same old game over and over again.”⁵³³ Self-critical comments such as these were quite frequent during my interviews with activists, especially among “veterans” in leadership positions.

This was likely a reflection of the disillusionment many of them felt in the aftermath of the political turmoil 2006-2008, during which their voices became severely marginalized (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, it was the institutionalization and entrenchment in the system of older NGOs, such as the YMCA, that made attempts of creating dynamic NGO networks so difficult in the 1990s. In fact, some of the same activists, who in my interviews were so self-critical of their increasing disconnect from society, were in the 1990s successful where the more professionalized NGOs failed, precisely because they had deep social roots in society:

[I]n Lebanon, it was clear that the kind of socially rooted civil society networks willing to push for greater social and political accountability were emerging in more informal ways elsewhere in the country – part of a new generation of activists working on more particular issues such as the environment, disability, and a remarkably successful campaign for the holding of municipal elections in the country in 1998.⁵³⁴

⁵³² UNDP HDR 2008-2009: 112.

⁵³³ Interview LPHU activist, Washington, DC, March 7, 2010.

⁵³⁴ Kingston 2007: 128.

The problem of grassroots activists becoming “professionalized” and thus increasingly distanced from their community is not exclusive to Lebanon. Development NGOs followed the same path in Palestine during the 1990s: “little by little, NGOs became distanced from the wider community of which they had once formed an organic part. They came to see themselves as development professionals, rather than as catalysts of community political organization and mobilization.”⁵³⁵ The following section will argue that civic activists in Lebanon are in effect attempting to renegotiate the civil society – political sphere formula, and in the process struggle with the difficult balance act of maintaining their social roots and legitimacy in the eyes of the broader populace.

Renegotiating the civil society – political sphere formula

In the context of a Western liberal democracy, it would not be considered particularly remarkable for CSOs to come together in networks, permanent or temporary, with other associations and political elites to achieve specific aims. In Lebanon, however, the interaction between civil society and the political sphere has historically been a highly unequal relationship, where CSOs, frequently confessional in character, were either relegated to the social realm or co-opted by political interests. Traditionally, CSOs in Lebanon have either taken on the role of service providers in lieu of a functioning state, or existed as a “civil front” for specific political aims, rather than as a counterweight to the political ambitions of individual patrons or parties.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ R. Hammami, “NGOs: The Professionalization of Politics,” *Race and Class*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1995: 58.

⁵³⁶ Kingston 2001.

Only in the latter half of the 1990s did networks linking grassroots groups, professional NGOs, and political elites, emerge as significant factors in Lebanon's political life (Chapter 3); a development that became more pronounced following the end of *Pax Syriana* in 2005 (Chapter 4). Whether or not they are perceived as having any "significant" impact on the political developments, it is clear that in the last decade and a half something has changed in the way civil society and the political sphere interact in Lebanon. Indeed, in recent years civil society actors have demanded and, to a much greater extent than previously, received attention from lawmakers and government officials.

Whether this is due to the intent of political elites to defuse a potential threat from a new segment of civil society by embedding their activities within an institutional framework elites can monitor and control⁵³⁷ or the gradual success of civil society activists to stake a claim as actors in the political process, the developments of recent years represent a new dynamic in Lebanese political life. While the relationship between civil society and the political sphere in Lebanon has historically been unequal, unlike many other Middle Eastern polities, Lebanon does not have a history of a strong state suppressing civil society. But while the state has been weak, individual political patrons have seen the benefits of having a civil society arm, effectively confusing the roles of the patron's political project and his foundation's actions as a non-partisan organization. Thus, for instance, the Kamal Joumblat Foundation is directly linked to the Progressive

⁵³⁷ Q. Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control: State Power in Jordan." *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (October 2000): 43-61; L. Alhamad, "Formal and Informal Venues of Engagement." In E. Lust-Okar and S. Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008): 33-47; D. Maghraoui, "The Dynamics of Civil Society in Morocco." In E. Lust-Okar and S. Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008): 193-215.

Socialist Party (PSP), under the permanent leadership of Walid Joumblat, the Rafiq Hariri Foundation to the Future Movement and its leader Sa'ad Hariri, and the René Moawad Foundation is chaired by Nayla Moawad, who served as MP until the 2009 election and as Minister of Social Affairs 2005-2008.⁵³⁸ These links to the establishment do not automatically render these associations incapable of pursuing “non-political” activities – the Hariri Foundation has, for instance, provided funding to Lebanese students from across the communal spectrum for years without taking into account student’s political leanings or backgrounds – but it nevertheless illustrates the dependency of civil society to local patrons and the pervasiveness of patron-client network structures in Lebanese society. Moreover, close ties to the political structure make such associations unlikely challengers of the status quo in a conceptualization of civil society as an alternate venue for opposition.

Having an impact: civic organizations and the public sphere

In terms of partnership-based cooperation, state-civil society coordination has historically been severely limited in Lebanon. According to a 1993 UN study of 26 NGOs, “cooperation between the government of Lebanon and NGOs is only partially developed. Work is conducted almost in isolation from each other.”⁵³⁹ Since the departure of the Syrians in 2005, this state of affairs has changed, at least on the surface, and a number of campaign coalitions meant to facilitate coordination between civil society groups and state entities have materialized. As this section will show, the

⁵³⁸ Bennett 1995; Cavatorta and Evanza 2010.

⁵³⁹ M. Mardelli-Assaf, “On the Way to the Right to Development,” UNDP Report, Beirut, 1993.

limitations in time and scope and the *ad hoc* nature of campaign coalitions make them more useful vehicles for specific reform projects than a permanent NGO network. I argue that there are two key reasons for why the campaign coalition mode of operation has emerged as predominant in Lebanon. First, decentralized *ad hoc* organizational structures limit the ability of political elites to co-opt the network for their own purposes, or for a particular organization to hijack the agenda: “Less easily infiltrated by the police than formal associations and less subject to factionalization, informal networks had advantages during a time when governments were becoming increasingly wary of combination.”⁵⁴⁰ Temporary *ad hoc* campaign coalitions have the advantage of not existing long enough to develop hierarchical structures and thus avoid some of the problems permanent NGO networks have experienced.

Second, forming coalitions around time- and scope-limited campaigns allows activists to minimize opposition to their cause and attract smaller organizations with limited resources because there is no long-term commitment involved and realistic goals make it easier to motivate participation. Such limitations, I argue, represent an adaptation to the fragmented and identity politics-prone Lebanese political landscape. In addition to the high-profile campaign coalitions in operation in post-2005 Lebanon, such as the CCER and NNRAI, some civic organizations are also running parallel individual projects sponsored by international organizations, such as LPHU’s Lebanon Alternative Budget Project (LABP), and Na-am’s Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor (LPM) and al-Hiwar. The decentralized structure of these campaign coalitions facilitates optimal utilization of resources and skills, and allows for flexibility in execution as the campaign evolves. The

⁵⁴⁰ Tarrow 1998: 50.

details of the organizational structure of campaign coalitions differ from one campaign to another, but they all have in common that they are, at least in theory, highly decentralized and based on a clear division of labor. Usually, a “steering committee,” consisting of a handful of organizations, normally those who took the initiative for the campaign, will be responsible for the broad strategy of the campaign. However, despite the existence of a steering committee, the hierarchy is less pronounced than that of a permanent NGO network. Rather, the division of labor is determined based on the specific skill sets each organization brings to the network.

Professional NGOs, having more developed organizational structures and established links to actors within the political system, tend to assume leadership functions, while younger grassroots organizations function as links to pools of grassroots volunteers and therefore manage lobbying and public manifestation activities. Focused on the broader strategy, the steering committee generally does not micro manage each task; responsibility for both executing and reporting on activities within the appointed task befalls each individual organization. A Na-am activist working within the NNRAI said on the division of labor: “Within the network we work in...tasks are pretty clear, and we try as much as possible to be transparent with each other.”⁵⁴¹ A grassroots organization like Nahwa al-Muwatiniya is frequently relied upon to attract volunteers and carry out the volunteering aspects of the campaign, such as making phone calls, getting signatures on a petition, distributing flyers in the streets etc. Individuals may also engage directly with the campaign coalition, never actually becoming involved in a specific organization (see chapter 5). This lends weight to the argument that “the meso-level of a movement is

⁵⁴¹ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 13, 2009.

much more complex than a collection of SMOs and [we] must consider the internal dynamics and functions of all mobilizing structures.”⁵⁴² Indeed, the organizational form has a significant impact on how a movement engages with the environment in which it operates. By awarding smaller organizations, which often have a local presence in villages, a dynamic role, a campaign coalition has a better chance of socially rooting the cause than that of an institutionalized permanent network.

To be sure, the campaign coalition format in itself is not a novelty exclusively found in the Lebanese case; similar decentralized structures are common especially in transnational activism, but also in social movements on a national level. This is not to say that there are not disagreements on strategy within campaign coalitions; as Karam has shown, there were clearly clashes within the steering group of the RME on which path to take at different junctions of the campaign.⁵⁴³ Similarly, frustrations may arise among the grassroots, who may be more inclined to more proactive tactics than those who are working a tack of political/lobbying negotiation with political elites. Nevertheless, as the following section argues, the decentralized format alleviates some of the tensions that inevitably will arise when groups of different character come together.

Leverage for smaller organizations

The campaign coalition format is especially beneficial for Lebanon’s community of small grassroots organizations, which tend to become marginalized in permanent NGO networks. By lowering the cost of participation and awarding them a more active role in

⁵⁴² S. Staggenborg, “The ‘Meso’ in Social Movement Research,” in Meyer, David S. et al. *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 126.

⁵⁴³ Karam 2005; 2006.

the day-to-day operations of a campaign, the campaign coalition format essentially provides smaller grassroots organizations with leverage vis-à-vis more established professional NGOs; in campaign coalitions, grassroots organizations have an crucial part to play through their access to a volunteer pool and act as the larger NGOs’ link to the “street.” Furthermore, it allows for organizations to “hedge their bets” – they can choose non-participation without risking the organization’s demise. For instance, Na-am could choose not to participate in any one particular campaign coalition without losing all funding sources or their legitimacy as an organization.

Figure 6.1: Na-am’s campaign coalition and NGO network membership in 2009

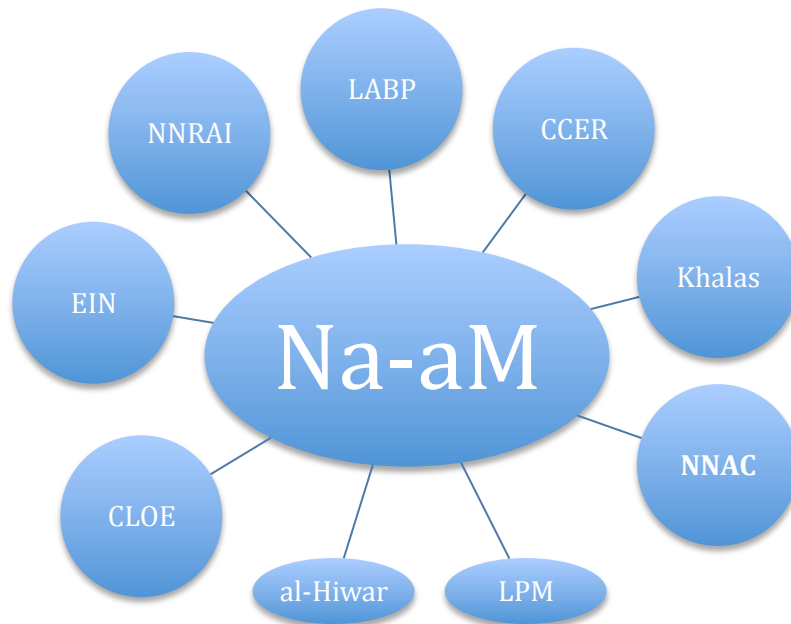


Figure 6.1 illustrates the major campaigns and networks Na-am has been involved with in recent years. In the spring of 2009, Na-am was officially part of the following campaign coalitions, in addition to the NNRAI: CLOE, Khalas, CCER, End Impunity

Now (EIN), and LABP. Moreover, they also maintain membership in the NGO network Non-violence Network in Arab Countries (NNAC). In addition to its membership in external campaign coalitions, Na-am directs and operates the Hiwar and the Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor (LPM) projects. Participating in five external campaigns networks and one NGO network, while simultaneously running two projects of their own, Na-am is not dependent on the NNRAI and could withdraw participation, should they feel their core principles were being compromised. By allowing for a broad spread of network membership, the low-cost commitment of campaign coalitions effectively reduces smaller CSO's dependency on participating professional NGOs and elites.

Hence, the presence of elites or politically aligned groups in campaign coalitions alongside civic organizations does not automatically mean the latter have been co-opted, but rather that they have found a mode of elite cooperation that allows for a certain amount of autonomy. A permanent network offers a clear target for political elites who, as they did in the case of the Lebanese Environmental Forum (LEF), can utilize it to “own” the issues in a specific field.⁵⁴⁴ Co-opting a temporary campaign coalition, on the other hand, offers only limited ownership and since the cost of secession is low compared to that in a permanent NGO network – removing your organization from a campaign coalition will not isolate you from the whole NGO community – organizations can more easily opt out if they feel the network has become tainted by political motives: “We won't participate if we feel the actions are no longer aimed at achieving the specific goal we set out to do. But the networks are usually very decentralized and we have a say in what happens, it's not like with bigger networks that are more institutionalized, it's more

⁵⁴⁴ Kingston 2001.

difficult to do anything about it there.”⁵⁴⁵ Civic activists also employ media tactics in order to put pressure on political elites. In addition to petitions and raising awareness among the populace, they use media tactics to “corner” political elites, who normally publicly claim to support their cause. As in most other polities, politicians in Lebanon nearly always claim to be in favor of reforms; publicly the contention among politicians is rarely, if ever, whether or not reforms are necessary, but rather what kind of reforms are necessary and how quickly they should be carried out. Activists try to use this state of affairs to their advantage by publicizing their efforts as much as possible: “We know we can use the media to limit the opposition of politicians to our project – they are always less likely to oppose our initiatives publicly. Unfortunately, in Lebanon politicians are used to saying one thing in public and doing another under the table, but we do what we can to make it difficult for them to motivate opposing our initiatives.”⁵⁴⁶

Indeed, few politicians in Lebanon would openly oppose, for instance, the efforts to make the Lebanese system of governance more transparent through passing legislation that would allow ordinary citizens to request official documents from the state, even though such a move would make it difficult for political actors to follow their common practice of saying one thing in public and another in private. Thus it is in the interest of civic activists to attract as much publicity as possible, forcing political actors to live up to their public statements. But publicity alone does not eliminate opposition to civic campaigns: “We don’t face much open opposition, politicians these days always claim to be on the side of civil society. If they feel threatened by us, they make pretty speeches in

⁵⁴⁵ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, April 29, 2009.

⁵⁴⁶ Interview Na-am/LPM volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009.

support of us and then work against us under the table. If they say anything publicly about our agenda, it is only by saying ‘the time is not right,’ not ‘we shouldn’t do this.’”⁵⁴⁷ This was a recurring theme among interviewees; another activist said regarding the CCER: “They [did face] opposition in reality, but not in appearance. To the media [politicians] would say they are for the reforms, but under the table they would try to work against it. For example, they don’t want the premade ballot. But Lebanese politicians, they praise civil society openly.”⁵⁴⁸

In order to place the spotlight on the activities of Lebanon’s public servants, Na-am launched the Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor (LPM). The LPM is an ambitious project that monitors the activities of individual Members of Parliament. Through publishing MPs’ schedules and accomplishments in a public online database, Na-am and their partners aim to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in Lebanese politics. At a well-attended press conference organized by Na-am on June 2, 2009, the LPM team presented their findings thus far. Simply by being created, the LPM has already had an impact on the behavior of Parliamentarians – some MPs even contacting the activists to volunteer their schedules.⁵⁴⁹ At times, local chapters of political parties also reacted to the activities of civic organizations and preferred to get involved rather than being perceived as disinterested in their constituency:

“[We] were working on a project in the north and it was about having local youth asking the people in the municipalities for the implementation of certain projects. And Tayyar al-Mustaqbal, the Future Movement, which is very present in the northern Sunni communities, stepped in and said ‘No, we want to be paying for

⁵⁴⁷ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 13, 2009.

⁵⁴⁸ Interview CCER volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009.

⁵⁴⁹ Interview Na-am/LPM volunteer, Beirut, June 2, 2009.

this.’ And this is interesting, because then the work of Nahwa al-Muwatiniya is pushing political parties to become more need-oriented, more focused on developmental issues and long-term projects, not just the pre-election money spending.⁵⁵⁰

In other words, despite the widespread perception of a system of political patronage and irrelevance of grassroots initiatives in Lebanese politics, there is clearly a feeling among at least some political actors that public perception matters. But to even reach the point where civil society actors can put public pressure on political actors, the former need to be able to function independently of political patrons. In this regard, the campaign coalition mode offers significant advantages over permanent networks in the Lebanese context.

Time and scope limitations

Key to the ability of campaign coalitions to operate in the Lebanese context with some level of success is their time and scope limitations. Whereas permanent NGO networks form for an indefinite period of time and with a broad, vaguely formulated objective, such as coordinating efforts and benefiting from information sharing, campaign coalitions form for a limited time period and for a specific limited objective. Such measures, I argue, are tactical adaptations to the Lebanese context, representing steps in a broader strategy of “boiling the frog.” While some campaigns do have a pre-determined end date, most are in operation until either the goal is achieved or funding runs out. Regardless, participating individuals and organizations do not envision the campaign, and thus campaign coalition, to last forever. Rather, unlike permanent NGO networks, there is at least a conceptual sense of time-limitation when a campaign coalition is formed.

⁵⁵⁰ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 20, 2009.

Limiting the time period of a campaign, explicitly or implicitly, facilitates the formation of a network by providing participating members with a sense of urgency and purpose; there are actual achievable goals at the end of a certain time period, it is not an everlasting struggle to achieve lasting peace or an end to government corruption. Thus, it sends a signal to potential participants, organizations and individuals, that it is a low-cost commitment. As one civic activist involved with a campaign coalition concerned with transparency issues expressed the issue: “I think it is easier to find volunteers when they know it is not something they have to give up their whole life for. I mean, personally I am happy to work on this for a long time, but people have lives to handle, families to feed.”⁵⁵¹

In other words, a time limitation reduces the cost of participation, both for organizations and individual volunteers. Limiting the *scope* of a campaign coalition’s objective may alleviate the some of the problems transnational NGO networks frequently face – that of tension being caused by a heterogeneous membership.⁵⁵² Simply put, the higher the heterogeneity of a network, the lower the trust among the members. Since a campaign coalition is formed specifically for one limited objective, the issues arising from the heterogeneity of the network are less significant than in permanent NGO networks, because membership in the network would suggest agreement on, at the very least, the particular objective of the campaign.

⁵⁵¹ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 17, 2009.

⁵⁵² G. Schönleitner, “World Social Forum: Making Another World Possible?” In John Clark (ed.) *Globalizing Civic Engagement: Civil Society and Transnational Action*, 127-149 (London: Earthscan, 2003).

While limiting the time period of a campaign reduces the perceived cost for potential participants, a limited scope may increase the perceived benefits in terms of realistically achievable goals. For instance, a broad goal, such as abolishing the sectarian political system, may be something many activists sympathize with in principle, but, as one civic activist expressed it, “I would also like to grow wings and fly, but simply wanting it won’t make it happen, Insh’Allah evolution will grant my wish in time.”⁵⁵³ In other words, there is a difference between what activists would want to achieve, and what they deem realistic on the ground. Recent opinion data suggests that this view of the sectarian system as something evil in principle, but inescapable in reality, is shared by a majority of Lebanese. In a 2006 survey, 79 percent of respondents agreed that one should not mix religion and politics.⁵⁵⁴

Moreover, 70 percent agreed there should be the option of a “secularized community” with the same rights as the other communities in the country, and 65 percent agreed that the best solution to Lebanon’s dilemma would be a completely secular state and society. But at the same time, 69 percent believed secularism can have no chance in Lebanon and that community membership is a reality that has to be accepted.⁵⁵⁵ A limited goal, such as reforming the electoral law, which according to many civic activists would be a first step in dismantling institutional sectarianism, is perceived as more realistic. In the words of one civic activist: “It’s all fine to want a big end goal of total reform, but in this kind of environment we really need to be realistic. No one will abolish sectarianism

⁵⁵³ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, June 10, 2009.

⁵⁵⁴ Hanf 2007: 46.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.; UNDP 2009: 96.

tomorrow, it cannot happen overnight. So if we focus on partial goals, more realistic in the short-term, then maybe in the long-term we can achieve that big goal.”⁵⁵⁶ Thus, by limiting the scope of their objectives, activists not only limit the number of people feeling threatened by their activism, but also provide potential volunteers with a realistic, achievable goal:

A lot of people participate in demonstrations against ‘sectarianism,’ without really knowing how this is supposed to be achieved. How are you going to eradicate sectarianism? So many people agree it’s a bad thing, but tell me how do you plan to do it? And people mean so many different things when they are against ‘sectarianism.’ Some people mean the way the electoral system is designed, others mean the way politicians only think of their own sect or their local followers. These are very different things, spanning from the societal culture to the institutional structure, and even though they are connected, different measures need to be taken to fight against it. This is why lofty calls for abolishing sectarianism never really amount to anything real on the ground, it never becomes more than a demonstration or two – it is just too complex to deal with as a package, partial goals are much more realistic, but not as ‘sexy.’⁵⁵⁷

A scope limitation can also reduce some of the tension within the network when it comes to designing strategy and setting objectives. In permanent NGO networks, discord can easily arise when setting objectives for various campaigns because some actors are more ambitious than others in what they wish to achieve, as was the case in the RME campaign.⁵⁵⁸ In contrast, in a scope-limited network, the campaign is from the beginning packaged and sold as an incremental step towards a greater end, no more, no less. Furthermore, the only “wills to please” are those in the localized networks – whatever the political sensitivities would be for a nationwide movement framework, they have no bearing on each campaign.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 14, 2009.

⁵⁵⁷ Interview CLOE volunteer, Beirut, June 9, 2009.

⁵⁵⁸ Karam 2005.

Because the objective is significantly limited, campaign coalitions are predominantly national in character, although international actors may take part if the objective falls under a broader category of their interest. For example, the Women's Right to Nationality Campaign (WRN), which is headed by Collective for Research and Training on Development – Action (CRTD-A), is part of a broader regional campaign for Arab Women's rights. However, while regional coordination in terms of information sharing and support does occur, the campaign by necessity targets national legislation in the home country of each participating organization, and is as such a national campaign rather than regional. Limiting the scope of a specific campaign also has several benefits for the development and sustainability of a campaign coalition. For instance, seeking elite support for a limited objective, such as a specific piece of legislation, rather than for a broader objective leads to a very different dynamic.

Since limiting your goals also means limiting your ambitions, forming a campaign coalition for the purpose of a limited objective can significantly reduce the perceived threat of a particular reform: “You can't avoid stepping on some toes when you try to achieve reform, but if you proceed carefully you can at least limit the number of toes you trample; if you stomp your feet loudly and aggressively, many toes will get hurt and you might be in for all-round opposition.”⁵⁵⁹ In other words, incremental changes are less obviously perceived as threats to those in power and can thus be expected to face less opposition from the beneficiaries of the status quo. As civic activists learned in the 1990s, especially through the successful RME campaign, targeting limited objectives that cannot be perceived as sectarian or beneficial to specific political groups makes it more difficult

⁵⁵⁹ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, June 1, 2009.

for stakeholders to publicly denounce the efforts. By attacking sensitive issues from innovative angles, civic movements avoid appearing as a “real” threat to the establishment. Indeed, there are “red lines” in Lebanese politics, issues that cannot be broached without facing fierce opposition. Instead, civic activists re-frame issues in terms that will avoid openly crossing those red lines. Thus, the issue of the sectarian political system is approached through the issue of transparency and accountability:

I personally believe that sectarianism is something we should get rid of, but in the meantime, if we can't get rid of it, if it is ingrained in our political culture, just by simply having the communities questioning their sectarian leaders and holding them accountable and asking them to do their job, even within the sect itself, it can lead to a change in the political culture in the long run. You know, 'if you still want to elect MPs based on their sect, ok fine, do it, but hold them accountable.'⁵⁶⁰

According to several interviewees, this approach allows for initiating incremental steps toward dealing with the problem of political sectarianism, even though the campaign itself makes no claim to work towards the abolishing of the sectarian system. In simple terms, if you begin with demanding accountability, in the long run people will start asking for competence, regardless of sectarian denomination. Since it is difficult for politicians to find an argument against increased transparency, and CSOs are prepared to hold them to their public statements through their media strategy, such a move has a greater chance of success than a campaign that openly crosses the red line of upsetting the communal balance in the Lebanese political system. Similarly, the issue of civil marriage, which civic activists failed to institute in the 1990s despite the support of the President of the Republic, is now approached through promoting the right to remove sectarian identity from the civil registry, which was achieved in 2009.

⁵⁶⁰ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, May 20, 2009.

By running a campaign aiming to get 100,000 Lebanese citizens to remove their sectarian identity, the Civil Center for National Initiative (CCNI) and their allies mean to force lawmakers to legislate on civil matters for those who officially do not belong in any religious community.⁵⁶¹ Limiting the scope of the campaign, then, allows for a step-by-step approach to issues that would otherwise face overwhelming resistance. Several of the volunteers involved with Na-am were also involved in CCNI's project to remove sectarian identity from the civil registry. One activist commented on the difference in working with an "elite" organization as opposed to a grassroots organization: "They are much more keen on lobbying for legal changes, not so much on reaching out to villages and local communities. Sure, there is an awareness component to the campaign, but it is much more of a top-down approach."⁵⁶²

While Na-am places much emphasis on the importance of working on changing the social culture as well as the political culture and legal framework, CCNI's approach is geared towards structural changes in the political system. The differences between the two approaches become very obvious in the debate on how to dismantle Lebanon's sectarian system – should the system change first or must the mentality of the population first be changed? According to the proponents of the former approach, if the system of political sectarianism is first dismantled, sectarianism, as a mindset in the population, will follow suit. Thus a board member of the CCNI argued that the political system should be reformed first, rather than waiting for a change in the population's mindset.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Interview, CCNI representative, Washington, DC, January 26, 2010.

⁵⁶² Interview CCNI volunteer, Beirut, May 18, 2009.

⁵⁶³ Interview, CCNI representative Washington, DC, January 26, 2010.

Proponents of the second approach argue that changing the political system without making efforts to influence the population’s local practices and customs would lead to an identity threat spiral and lead to increased tension and fragmentation. Indeed, a Beirut-centric top-down approach may not have the intended impact in different local contexts around the country. For instance, in terms of the electoral system municipal elections in Lebanon, unlike parliamentary elections, are not carried out within a sectarian framework. In other words, according the municipal election law, anyone can run for any position in the municipalities. In practice, however, this is not necessarily the case, because different municipalities have different traditions, not necessarily written down on paper, for who can occupy which seat.⁵⁶⁴

In other words, though the electoral law does not cement a sectarian distribution of seats, only communally homogenous municipalities will distribute seats according to votes. Though not using the term “campaign coalitions,” one civic activist in a leadership position explained the approach civic organizations employ in Lebanon as an expression of strategic pragmatism, specifically adapted to the Lebanese context: “To have an impact in this environment, you really have to break down broad issues into smaller pieces, otherwise you will be facing a brick wall.”⁵⁶⁵ However, while acknowledging a certain level of long-term strategic thinking on the part of the instigators of a campaign, he also downplayed the long-term considerations of their actions: “But it is not that we sit around conspiring about the downfall of the status quo – today we deal with this issue,

⁵⁶⁴ Interview, FPM official, Washington, DC, January 23, 2010.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview LADE activist, Beirut, April 23, 2009.

tomorrow another, one thing at a time.”⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, while not necessarily conceived of as such by all participants at the time of action, when viewed in a long-term perspective specific campaigns can be understood as tactical steps towards a broader goal, and the networks forming around these campaigns are the organizational vehicles through which a grand strategy of “boiling the frog” is implemented. But the networking around campaigns also has an impact on the way different segments of civil society interact with each other. In other words, beyond the instrumental function of campaign coalitions, they also reflect and, importantly, help create a civic community.

To be sure, the development towards the inclusion of political elites in networks of action (e.g. the National Network for the Right of Access to Information, Civil Center for National Initiative), and the inclusion of former civic activists in the political system (e.g. Interior Minister Ziad Baroud) have led some observers to view the developments within the civic movement during and after the Independence Intifada of 2005 as heralding “the imminent demise of the civil society movement.”⁵⁶⁷ Critiquing what he perceives as the “overstated importance” of new associations in the context of African civil society, Nelson Kasfir writes:

Patronage-based political economies produce incentives for civil society actors to organize platforms for gaining power rather than creating reform. Habituated by many years of extensive interference, and little effective capacity to implement policies, state officials both threaten and infiltrate organizations in order to deflect initiatives for reform.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ Interview LADE activist, Beirut, April 23, 2009.

⁵⁶⁷ UNDP HDR 2008-2009.

⁵⁶⁸ Kasfir 1998b, 126.

While the situation for Lebanese associations differs in many significant ways from that of their African counterparts (especially in terms of institutional restraints), there are parallels in terms of the threat of infiltration and resistance to reform. Despite its relative vibrancy and strength, the historical role of civil society in Lebanon as either complementary to the state or an extension of a political patron's sphere of influence, has made it an unlikely space for challengers of the status quo to emerge: "Patrons...have sought to dilute and diffuse the threatening demands emanating from this less controlled environment, either through a process of co-optation and/or penetration of civil society groups below."⁵⁶⁹ However, as the next section will show, the influx of foreign funding, particularly since September 11, 2001, has altered this calculation, limiting CSOs' dependency on local patrons, but at the same time raising questions regarding their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Civil society and democratization – Lebanon in a regional perspective

Historically, Lebanese civil society has been largely dependent on local patronage. Their dependence on local power structures and, not least, resources made independence vis-à-vis patrons difficult, if not impossible. With the influx of foreign funding, however, the dependency on local patronage has diminished for a *specific segment* of civil society. Indeed, Western donors' efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in the MENA region since September 11, 2001, have been heavily geared towards "the kinds of activities and organizations that...tend to fit a Western model of

⁵⁶⁹ Kingston 2001: 70.

democracy and political participation.”⁵⁷⁰ But, as we shall see, independence from local patronage has come at the cost of near total dependence on foreign patronage. This section discusses the problems that arise as a result of such dependence.

Funding conundrums: shifting dependence from local to international “patrons”

In addressing the widely debated issue of whether civil society in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) can play a constructive role in the democratization process, Cavatorta and Elanza argue that civil society in the MENA region is strong, but divided.⁵⁷¹ This division, they argue, has been enhanced by foreign support for specific types of CSOs: “foreign funding...enhances the separation between Islamist and secular-liberal groups within civil society through the exclusion of the former from any engagement and the perceived inclusion of the latter in a supposedly imperialist camp.”⁵⁷² This line of criticism is often heard from the ranks of overtly confessional organizations, which feel overlooked in the “feeding frenzy” engaged in by development agencies during the post-civil war reconstruction era in Lebanon. As one young student affiliated with Hezbollah expressed it: “What exactly are we to think when USAID, NDI and other American or US-ally organizations inject money into these groups? Are we to think they have no ulterior motive in shaping this country according to their preferences? It’s my country too and I don’t believe these foreign donors are working in my interest.”⁵⁷³

⁵⁷⁰ Alhamad 2008: 36.

⁵⁷¹ Cavatorta and Elanza 2010.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 82.

⁵⁷³ Interview Hezbollah activist, Beirut, April 26, 2009.

While this particular interviewee did not go so far as to accuse Lebanese civic activists of consciously working on behalf of the “enemy,” he certainly felt that foreign attempts of boosting their standing in the Lebanese society was part of a broader Western neoliberal project for the Middle East, central to which is, of course, the unwavering American support for Israel. To be sure, there is a widespread suspicion of the West in the Arab Middle East, not only because of Western support for Israel, but rooted in the close relationships between many of the region’s authoritarian regimes and Western governments.

In this symbiotic relationship between supposedly democracy-promoting Western governments and democracy-fearing regional leaders, authoritarian regimes receive financial and moral support in exchange for the regimes’ support for Western policies and use of territory in the region.⁵⁷⁴ In Lebanon, the end of Syria’s domination in 2005 provided the United States with an opportunity to, as the Bush administration saw it, bolster “pro-Western” forces against “pro-Syrian” forces. Indeed, the US employs several forms of support to Lebanon, including aid to civil society and significant Security Sector Reform (SSR) programs. In the civil society realm, as of spring 2010 the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), aiming at fostering a new generation of civic-minded leadership in the region, was implementing 20 projects in Lebanon, with a value of approximately \$15 million.⁵⁷⁵ Since 2007, USAID-OTI’s Civic Initiative Program has spent approximately \$9.9 million in small grants to civic organizations.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ See, for instance, M. Ottaway, “The Missing Constituency for Democratic Reform,” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway (eds.), *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005); Alhamad 2008.

⁵⁷⁵ Press Release US Embassy, Beirut, March 15, 2010.

⁵⁷⁶ USAID-OTI Lebanon Annual Summary Report October 2008 – September 2009.

These numbers pale in comparison with the \$526 million in US assistance to the LAF since 2006,⁵⁷⁷ or the \$110 million law enforcement assistance program for the ISF administered by the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).⁵⁷⁸ According to a 2009 Congressional report, the purpose of the security support to the government of Lebanon is to increase "the capacity of its various security forces to combat terrorism and secure Lebanon's borders against weapons smuggling to Hezbollah and other armed groups."⁵⁷⁹

In the eyes of the public, US funding becomes part and parcel of the same broader project, regardless of the fact that USAID or, for that matter, the NDI has little to do (and indeed much smaller resources) with SSR and attempts to boost particular political actors at the expense of others. Thus, civic groups' dependency on foreign (Western) support becomes an issue of questionable legitimacy among quite broad segments of the Lebanese population, further enhancing the risk of them becoming "uprooted" from their social context and rendering them ineffective outside of their narrow circles of support. For this reason, some NGOs refuse Western funding, at least in times of heightened tension. For instance, the League of Lebanese Women's Rights refused USAID funding

⁵⁷⁷ Press Release US Embassy, Beirut, January 26, 2010. This figure is approximately equal to MEPI's entire budget since its establishment in 2002, spread over 600 projects in 17 countries and territories. See <http://mepi.state.gov/>.

⁵⁷⁸ Figures based on FY 2006-2010 (\$24.7 million through Section 1207 of the National Defense Authorization Act, \$86 million from International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds). Fact Sheet Counternarcotics and Law Enforcement Country Program: Lebanon, US Department of State Website, www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/fs/141704.htm. Accessed June 6, 2010.

⁵⁷⁹ Casey L. Addis, "U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon," CRS Report prepared for Congress, Congressional Research Service, May 20, 2009.

during the summer war of 2006, citing American support for Israel.⁵⁸⁰ In Egypt, secular-liberal NGOs were targeted by a government-led campaign to discredit them, based on the argument that they were living lavishly on foreign funding – the irony apparently lost on the Egyptian regime.⁵⁸¹ In the Lebanese context, the perception of secular-liberal CSOs as being aligned with a Western agenda also risks placing them in a specific political camp on the national arena, since a main fault line in Lebanese politics often is the issue of Lebanon’s relationship to the West and the rest of the region (more to the point, Syria and Iran). In other words, civic organizations, whether they wish to or not, become drawn into the polarizing East-West narrative often utilized by Lebanese political leaders as they trade accusations of treason. In that struggle, those who oppose Hezbollah and its allies employ their own version of the “foreign funding argument.”

Hezbollah makes no secret of their close relationship with Iran and Syria, and opponents trying to delegitimize Hezbollah frequently frame their actions as part of a “Persian project,” or, alternatively, as part of Syria’s attempt to reassert itself in Lebanon. This narrative resonates with some segments of Lebanese society; as one Western educated Lebanese male expressed it when he walked through the tent camp set up by the Hezbollah-led opposition in downtown Beirut in 2006: “They don’t look Lebanese – the clothing, the atmosphere, nothing here feels *Lebanese*.” Thus, the issue of legitimacy, which, in theory, could be an exclusive matter for civil society (i.e. it could be deemed on performance, level of activity, regional spread, etc.) is directly linked to the issue of Lebanon’s national identity, which is a political battle that has been fought in the political

⁵⁸⁰ Cavatorta and Elanza 2010.

⁵⁸¹ Langohr 2005.

sphere since the inception of the Lebanese Republic (see Chapter 2). Indeed, identity politics, which is after all what the East-West narrative is about, is a realm shared by civil society and the political sphere, making dependency on foreign funding a significant source of weakness for civic organizations. In my interviews, activists agreed that the dependency on foreign aid was a problem in terms of the public's perception of their activities, but at the same time, they argued, it allowed for independence from local patrons, and any "steering" of their agenda was emphatically denied. In the words of one activist: "We didn't adapt our projects to what donors wanted, we drew up a project we wanted to do and then went out and looked for donors that would be interested in our project. We didn't adjust the proposals to their needs."⁵⁸² While this is probably true on the micro level, it is clear, and not very surprising, that Western donor agencies funnel their resources towards organizations and projects they perceive as aligned with their fundamental values and norms. According to one activist, this bias is not against confessional organizations across the board, but specifically slanted against Islamic organizations:

I think people in the West forget that there are Islamic organizations that have a democratic platform – they may be confessional in character, but they work towards citizen empowerment. There is such a fear to be perceived to support 'terrorists' that they go the safe route and only support secular or Christian groups.⁵⁸³

The issue of donor bias in favor of a certain segment of civil society in Lebanon highlights the diversity of the organizations that populate any country's civil society. Because of the potentially divisive influence in the form of competition over resources

⁵⁸² Phone interview PPM activist, November 4, 2010.

⁵⁸³ Interview Na-am activist, Beirut, April 21, 2009.

and the vulnerability of these organizations to ‘de-legitimization’ campaigns by supposedly ‘organic’ locals, this issue brings to the forefront the issue of what role civil society can play in a democratization process or, as is the case in Lebanon, which is already a democracy, the consolidation of democratic structures and the development towards a citizen-centric state.

The role of civil society

In terms of the role of civil society in state building, the aspect usually explored is the potential of civil society promoting the development of a (liberal) democratic political system.⁵⁸⁴ As such, civil society is usually either cast in the role of an important counterbalance to the state and stumbling block for tyranny by functioning as an intermediate realm between the state/political, economic/business, and private/family spheres.⁵⁸⁵ A “strong” civil society, the argument goes, protects the individual from state abuse, builds social capital and trust, thus facilitating the development of “good” democratic institutions. Others caution that civil society can also be a realm where anti-democratic forces flourish.⁵⁸⁶ This concern is often raised in relation to the Middle East,

⁵⁸⁴ See, for instance, Augustus Richard Norton’s (ed.) two volumes on civil society in the Middle East (1995; 1996). Also see Sarah Ben Néfissa et al. 2005.

⁵⁸⁵ See, for instance, F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993); E. Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (New York, NY: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1994); R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵⁸⁶ Sheri Berman offers an interesting study of a European case of the anti-democratic role of civil society; the vibrant German civil society was crucial in aiding the NSDAP in ending the Weimar Republic: “Had German civil society been weaker, the Nazis would never have been able to capture so many citizens for their cause or eviscerate their opponents so swiftly.” S. Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic.” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1997): 402. See also M. W. Foley and B. Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1996): 38-52.

where Islamic movements critical of the Western conception of democracy find informal pathways to mobilization outside of state control.⁵⁸⁷ Islamic movements have also found fit to enter the formal political system, as was the case with Hamas in the Palestinian territories and Hezbollah in Lebanon, which works on the multiple levels of political party, NGO, and militant guerilla organization (see Chapter 5). The Party has a wide range of NGOs in its orbit, including the construction NGO Jihad al-Bina', the think tank Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation (CCSD), and an advertising agency called the Lebanese Association for Arts. These three NGOs, in particular, were instrumental in the reconstruction efforts of *al-Dahiye* after the summer war of 2006, showcasing the Party's efficiency and agility, especially in comparison to the sluggish response of the Lebanese state.⁵⁸⁸

The issues that have been raised thus far in this chapter prompt the question of whether fruitful parallels can be drawn to the regional status of civil society, especially from the perspective of civil society's role in facilitating political participation and democratization. After all, Lebanon is a parliamentary democracy, not an authoritarian regime like the majority of polities in the MENA region. Yet, there are clearly common denominators in the challenges the secular-liberal segment of civil society faces in Lebanon and other countries in the region – the pervasiveness of a patrimonial logic

⁵⁸⁷ Wiktorovicz 2004; C. Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); M. M Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

⁵⁸⁸ M. Harb, "Faith-Based Organizations as Effective Development Partners? Hezbollah and Post-War Reconstruction in Lebanon," in Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (eds.), *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); M. Harb and M. Fawaz, "Influencing the Politics of Reconstruction in Haret Hreik," in Howayda Al-Harithy (ed.), *Lessons in Post-War Reconstruction: Case Studies from Lebanon in the Aftermath of the 2006 War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

within sectarian boundaries; the legitimacy issue due to popular suspicion regarding Western funding; and the resulting divide between secular-liberal and confessional (Islamic) movements. The following section examines the potential of Lebanon's civil society as a space where challenges to the status quo can emerge and situates the Lebanese case in a broader context.

Parallel structures of power

Several scholars have in recent years taken an interest in the role of informal venues for political participation in the MENA region's authoritarian regimes.⁵⁸⁹ These contributions, in different ways, show the vibrancy and, indeed, strength of civil society as an arena for oppositional politics, even in strongly autocratic environments. Unlike the classical argument for civil society's role in democratization, the focus on informal venues for political participation does not serve to argue for a particular type of CSO, nor does it operate within the normative framework of liberal democracy. Rather, this focus highlights the benefits of a social movement framework in studies of political participation, disassociated from normative conceptualizations of civil society. On the surface, a comparison with Lebanon and other countries in the MENA region may appear less than fruitful, since Lebanon is unique in its particular form of democracy and, save for Israel, has a better record than any other country in the region when it comes to orderly transitions of power after elections. Indeed, especially since the demise of the

⁵⁸⁹ See, for instance, S. Joseph "Working-Class Women's Networks in a Sectarian state: A Political Paradox," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 1983): 1-22; D. Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); D. Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements." In Q. Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004): 143-163; Wiktorowicz and Farouki 2000; Wiktorowicz 2004; Posusney and Angrist 2005; Lust-Okar and Zerhouni 2008; Albrecht 2010.

Syria imposed security regime, Lebanon does not appear to have much in common with the authoritarian regimes found in the region. But a deeper engagement with the problems Lebanon's civic organizations face reveals commonalities in the challenges similar organizations face other MENA countries. For instance, Lebanon shares with the rest of the MENA region the pervasiveness of a patrimonial logic; the common use of ethnic/sectarian cleavages to defuse threats to the status quo; the existence of CSOs (both civil and "uncivil") rooted in embedded identities; the legitimacy issues that arise as a result of the "detachedness" of a secular-liberal collective identity. Eva Bellin argues that authoritarianism has been so robust in the MENA region because of the exceptional willingness and capability of the coercive apparatuses to "crush reforms and initiatives from below."⁵⁹⁰

Further, she argues, "the prevalence of patrimonial logic in many MENA regimes makes this a particularly pervasive problem in the Middle East and North Africa."⁵⁹¹ In the 1990s, while Lebanon was recovering from a civil war, Morocco was opening up an authoritarian system and instituting a parliamentary monarchy.⁵⁹² During this time period, civic oriented CSOs were becoming a factor in Moroccan politics, much like they were in Lebanon. In the preceding years, the constraints from an authoritarian state had led to a low level of political participation among the populace, much like the civil war and militia rule had created disillusionment with the weak state in Lebanon. In the Moroccan case, the state reacted to civil society pressures by incorporating NGOs in state

⁵⁹⁰ Bellin 2005: 26.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Maghraoui 2008.

structures, thereby co-opting them in an institutional framework that could be controlled and manipulated by the state.⁵⁹³ Maghraoui's argument about a "flexible and adaptable form of authoritarianism"⁵⁹⁴ is reminiscent of Kingston's argument on the "remarkable agility" with which Lebanon's political patrons have adapted to the "ebbing and flowing of opportunities created by the modernization process."⁵⁹⁵ In Lebanon, however, the "flexible and adaptable" actor is not an authoritarian state, but the many political patrons who make up the various loci of power and who, much like the authoritarian state, wish to preserve and protect their spheres of influence. In fact, the patrons of the region have been known to adapt to new sources of legitimacy in the past – this is what happened with the pan-Arab socialist movements that swept the region in the 1950s and onwards (see Chapter 2).

Lebanon, for all intents and purposes a parliamentary republic, albeit based on a custom-made consociational formula, displays many of the same "symptoms" as the region's authoritarian regimes. Indeed, the state in Lebanon cannot be understood as a unitary actor. Because of the peculiarities of Lebanon's consociational formula, the Lebanese government, in order to achieve some level of function, has to consist of representatives from both the parliamentary majority block and the "opposition," i.e. the parliamentary minority. Having a constant national unity government has the effect that the concept of opposition becomes somewhat fluid and, hence, interpreting a government presence in a campaign coalition as state co-optation becomes problematic. For instance,

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁹⁵ Kingston 2001: 57.

after the 2009 election, the ministry for administrative reform (OMSAR) was assigned to the opposition and the minister was a representative of Hezbollah. Hence, the presence of OMSAR in the NNRAI campaign cannot simply be dismissed as state co-optation of the network; a government representative in Lebanon is not necessarily a representative of the agenda of the Prime Minister. Instead, Lebanon's state bureaucracy is replete with bonds of loyalty along parallel structures of power. This, I suggest, is the reason that Lebanon's civic activists face many of the same obstacles as their equivalents in the MENA region; from the perspective of political participation, Lebanon's democracy is not designed around *citizen representation*, but around *Zu'ama management* (sing. *Za'im*).

That is, it is designed to manage relations between more or less autocratic political patrons, whose spheres of power are permeated by the same patrimonial logic as those of authoritarian regimes. Thus, civic activists are in effect trying to implement a Tocquevillean model of civil society as an intermediate sphere, negotiating the relationship between the private and public realms, in an environment where the state is weak and permeated by patron-client networks, which span across both the economic and private spheres.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, as Suad Joseph has pointed out, the Western construct of civil society may not be perfectly suited for a society in which social organization is on the level of family.⁵⁹⁷ State structures matter in as much as there is intra-elite competition for access to state resources, but the private-public dynamics, which the Western construct of civil society are conceptualized to negotiate, do not necessarily play out between the

⁵⁹⁶ For a critical engagement with the civil society and social capital debate, see B. Edwards, M. W. Foley, and M. Diani (eds.) *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in a Comparative Perspective* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001).

⁵⁹⁷ Joseph 2002.

individual and the *state*, but between the individual and the institutional structures of the community to which the individual is affiliated. For instance, personal status issues are resolved by family courts within each of Lebanon's eighteen sects – not by the state. Moreover, when an individual has an immediate complaint or concern, the state is not necessarily where the individual turns to resolve the issue, but the local notable to which his or her family is aligned. These parallel structures of power cause problems when individuals with no client base of their own are placed in prominent positions in the state hierarchy.

For instance, the importance of patron-client networks and impotence of formal power structures of the state became blatantly obvious in November 2009, when the General Director of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), Ashraf Rifi, with allegiances to the Hariri family, attempted to fire the Police Chief, Brigadier General Antoine Shakkour, who has the backing of the opposing political camp, without first clearing this action with Interior Minister Ziad Baroud. The incident was a public display of patrimonial politics involving patrons from opposing political camps, and illustrates clearly that Lebanon's formal structures of the state are not necessarily the most powerful ones – access to these structures does not guarantee corresponding influence. According to one activist with some insight in the minister's problems, the publicized incident was not the only time he had to struggle with a lack of a clientelist base himself: "This is only the tip of the iceberg, he has to deal with these kinds of things all the time, this was just the most public of them."⁵⁹⁸ These problems are a direct consequence of the patrimonial logic, which permeates Lebanon's institutions – the practice of patrons to insert loyal

⁵⁹⁸ Phone interview civic activist, March 5, 2010.

individuals in key positions of the state bureaucracy. Lebanon's political system is based on patron-client structures along sectarian lines and, as a result, the formal structures of the state do not necessarily constitute the de facto avenues of hierarchical power – when the formal structures are occupied by non-patrons, the informal patron-client structures are likely to trump state structures. In such a context, informal venues of political participation are not necessarily beneficial to the emergence of a challenge to the status quo – they *are* the status quo. While in an authoritarian environment such venues could lead to networks through which challenges to the state can emerge (although those challenges are not necessarily democratic in nature), in the Lebanese context the most salient informal networks are, as we have seen, structured along communal and sectarian lines. Indeed, the main obstacles to civic activists and their achieving the goal of creating a citizen-centric state emanate from these parallel structures of power – not from the state.

Conclusion

When understood as a reflection of a broader civic movement, the campaign coalitions can be seen as dissemination structures of a civic collective identity. Indeed, the campaign coalitions have become a site for socialization and interaction of organizations of widely different character and areas of focus. They collaborate on specific issues, creating a system of reciprocity and crossover between issue areas. Thus, the LPHU gets involved in issues not directly related to their main focus of physical disabilities in return for support from other civic organizations in campaigns more directly pertaining to their main cause. There is a pragmatic reason for this system;

Lebanon is a small country with a small community of civic activists, and there is a great need to cooperate. As such, campaign coalitions essentially function as “activism exchanges” and provide connections between, for instance, environmentalists and disability advocates. In Lebanon, CSO coordination has a history of politicization and co-option, as one or a few strong organizations have come to dominate the agenda of permanent NGO networks. In contrast, the decentralized organizational form of campaign coalitions and their nature as being limited in time and scope help alleviate the risk for co-option of the reform agenda. The time and scope limitations allow activists to minimize opposition and attract smaller organizations with limited resources, because the cost of commitment is low and the objectives are within the realm of possibility.

Indeed, a broad goal, such as abolishing the sectarian political system, may be a goal that activists sympathize with, but as data shows, most Lebanese simply do not believe it is a realistic prospect in the near future. Instead, a limited goal, such as reforming the electoral law, is perceived as more realistic. Furthermore, the *ad hoc* campaign coalitions avoid meeting the same fate as permanent NGO networks by employing tactics adapted to the Lebanese environment, avoiding direct challenges to powerful stakeholders and framing issues within the “red lines” of Lebanese political life. By framing issues such as transparency, nationality laws, access to information, and removal of sectarian identity from the civil registries, within the “red line” of challenging the perception of communal balance, civic activists approach their ultimate goal of a civic state through incremental goals, thereby attacking the issue from a backdoor. For “professional” organizations, the campaign coalitions offer a link to the volunteer pool of grassroots level organizations. But the formulation of common strategies also necessitates

a common identification of threats and obstacles, i.e. a common understanding of the environment in which they operate. With regards to the internal dynamics of civil society, then, this chapter argues that when CSOs of different kinds coalesce around certain limited goals in campaign coalitions, the structures of these networks disseminate a shared movement identity negotiated through the employment of common strategies and tactics. In the Lebanese context, the development of the last decade and a half has represented a significant shift in how different CSOs interact with each other. However, because the activist circles are so limited, there is a clear recycling of actors in the various campaigns and as bonds are formed among civic activists through campaigns and other activities, there is a risk of a gap emerging between an activist community and the society from whence they came – an uprooting of the grassroots.

As they become more professionalized and interact with political elites, there is a risk creating a gap between “professional” activists and political elites on the one hand, and the broader populace on the other. Indeed, the post-civil war developments in Lebanon not only suggest a transformation of civil society itself, but also a shift in how civil society engages with political society. While foreign funding allows for a certain level of independence from local patrons, it also opens up for their legitimacy to be questioned. In a context where Islamic movements have been very successful in consolidating a constituency, firmly rooted in local culture and an “authentic” historical narrative that connects with already “embedded” identities, secular-liberal organizations, espousing a “detached” identity rather than an “authentic” embedded identity, find it difficult to maintain a constituency. Instead, constant instability causes otherwise sympathetic individuals to revert to the “safety” of their “embedded” identity, thus

rendering the civic movement impotent in times of crisis. Ultimately, this is about the complex interaction of civil society, state institutions, informal power dynamics, and micro- and macro-level identity processes. Because Lebanon's democracy is based on *Zu'ama* management, rather than citizen representation, the patrimonial logic that permeates authoritarian states in the MENA region is every bit as present in the Lebanese context. Hence, we find similarities in their obstacles, despite the differences in their institutional constraints. In such an environment, activists are essentially trying to implement a role for civil society based on a Tocquevillean understanding of civil society as an intermediate sphere between the state and society. However, such models tend to mistake the empirical state for Weber's ideal-typical state. Indeed, Weber's state does not exist in any country, but even less so in a context of strong parallel power structures around patron-client relationships. Thus, not only are the civic activists hampered by social constraints in the form of activated embedded identities, which are conflated with political identities, but also they face challenges from hidden power structures. To broaden the space for political participation in such a context is not a simple matter of opening channels from 'ordinary' citizens to the state, but of breaking structures of loyalty between patrons and their clients, and transforming the political culture from one of elite centric bargaining, to citizen-centric public service.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE EVOLUTIONARIES

Introduction

Efforts from below to broaden the space for political participation rarely gain much attention unless they are successful. Thus, many social movement scholars study the reasons for successful revolutions and focus on the outcome of grassroots mobilizations. The premise for this dissertation was slightly different, however; the focus was not so much on the outcome, but of the *processes* involved in grassroots attempts to gain access to political participation in a context where society suffers from fragmentation and political elites are seen as the actors of any ‘real’ relevance. Of central interest were the long-term processes that play out through informal networks before, during, and after dramatic ‘contentious episodes.’

This dissertation posed the question: *How can grassroots activists broaden the space for political participation in a factionalized and elite-centric, as opposed to citizen-centric, polity?* Broadly speaking, this dissertation engaged with grassroots-level activism in a context where the space for political participation for non-elites is narrow. It did so through a case study of civic activists in Lebanon, who employ an incremental change approach towards transforming their elite-centric ‘republic’ into a citizen-centric *republic*. In this exploration, themes that go far beyond the obvious trappings of democratization and political participation, such as democratic institutions, free elections, and peaceful shifts of power, have emerged. Indeed, the topic leads into the ideational realm of culture and collective identity.

This chapter revisits the research questions posed at the outset of this study and discusses the empirical and theoretical significance of its findings. First, it is useful to recall the historical development of the Lebanese Republic. As I argued in Chapter 2, the specific trajectories of the nation- and state-building projects in Lebanon were of direct significance for today's grassroots efforts to create a citizen-centric, civic, state. The structuring of Lebanese society in patron-client networks within the boundaries of sectarian communities produced a 'culture of sectarianism' that effectively conflated political and communal identities. Indeed, like all collective identities, Lebanon's communal identities are continually defined and redefined, and these processes happen in part through drawing on real and imagined pasts. In a fragmented society however, those pasts are not always in accordance with each other, resulting in differing understandings and perceptions of the environment, which they share.

The political system that was devised at the birth of the Lebanese polity was meant to facilitate coexistence among the various communities that inhabited its territory. In effect, however, the system first and foremost served to manage elite relations; it did not provide citizens with access to a public space free of a patrimonial logic. This patrimonial logic is recurrent in this study as a significant obstacle to attempts from below to broaden the space for political participation, as are the identity processes that political elites utilize to bolster their positions vis-à-vis other elites within and outside their communities. But as this dissertation has argued, there is a significant segment of Lebanese society that tries to challenge institutional and structural obstacles in order to transform the country into a citizen-centric democracy. I have labeled that segment of Lebanese society 'the civic movement.'

The emergence of Lebanon's civic movement

The road to the formation of a Lebanese civic movement came by way of a war-weary population, thirsty for a capable civic state as an alternative to the militia-run fiefdoms of the civil war. Chapter 3 explored the question: How can we explain the emergence and proliferation of independent civic organizations in Lebanon in the mid-1990s? Civic organizations emerged and proliferated at a time when Lebanon's political climate was becoming increasingly securitized by Syria's hegemonic rule – when political constraints placed on Lebanon's civil society were at a historical high. During this time, labor unions were promptly co-opted by political parties allied with Syria and attempts were made to reinterpret the associational law in more strict terms.

The emergence of Lebanon's civic movement depended on a collusion of several factors. First, political opportunities arose as a consequence of the end of the civil war. Paradoxically, while the ending of militia rule and the tightening of state control facilitated by Syria's involvement in Lebanon posed a new kind of political constraints, it also presented civic organizations with political opportunities. While trade unions and political movements that were perceived as a direct threat to the stability of the post-civil war regime were widely co-opted and marginalized, civic associations found ways to maneuver the political constraints and laid the foundation for loosely coordinated 'campaign coalitions' on a national level. Second, "militia fatigue," a weariness of war and distrust in the traditional politicians who had failed to prevent the devastating fifteen years of warfare, provided activist with a potential constituency. The new associations were civic organizations concerning themselves with issues of good governance and citizen influence, offering Lebanese citizens disenchanted with political parties an

alternative avenue to make a difference. Third, Lebanon's history of a thriving associational life provided the new organizations with preexisting mobilizing structures in the various regions of the country, giving them access to grassroots networks and facilitating nationwide campaigns. Furthermore, unlike most other countries in the Middle East region, the legal framework that regulates associational life allows for minimum state control, thus providing the new associations with a certain level of legal protection. While frequently dismissed by political parties as irrelevant, developments would suggest that throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century these organizations slowly began carving a space for themselves, both institutionally and in terms of human capital, in the Lebanese polity. This was a significant achievement, given that traditionally civil society to a large degree had been relegated to social services, often within the confines of specific religious communities.

However, civic activists experienced failures during this period as well. Indeed, the failure to push the authorities to institute civil marriage clearly demonstrated to the civic activists where the 'red lines' were drawn. In effect, the issue of civil marriage was a matter of re-drawing the public-private boundaries, effectively strengthening the state at the cost of religious institutions. Thus, Christian and Muslim religious leaders were united in their opposition to the prospect of such a weakening of their authority. Civil marriage would have opened the door to civil legislation in other issues concerning the private realm – family law was a realm in which religious institutions reigned supreme. The lessons civic activists learned from this failure would, as we shall see, inform their overall strategy and specific tactics in approaching Lebanon's 'red line' issues.

Organizing collective action

Beyond emerging and surviving, a viable movement needs to find ways to organize for the effective articulation of claims toward the authorities. In order to understand how this can happen in a factionalized and elite-centric context, Chapter 4 asked: How do civic activists organize to effectively make their claims? In this context, it is important to note the fluidity of boundaries between social movement activism outside of the structures of the state and political party activism within state structures. This fluidity is clearly illustrated in the various forms of coalitions that form between civil society actors and political party actors both in times of heightened tensions, when there is potential for ‘revolutionary’ coalitions to form, and in times of ‘normal’ politics, when civil society and political party actors sometimes engage in ‘evolutionary’ coalitions.

This study identified such time- and scope-limited coalitions as the main vehicle of collective action in post-*Pax Syriana* Lebanon – an era ushered in by a revolutionary coalition’s successful ousting of the Syrians in 2005. More common than such broad-based revolutionary coalitions, however, were low-intensity evolutionary coalitions, which involved far less contentious interactions between claim makers and their adversaries. Furthermore, this study argued that such coalitions are an important arena for social networking and socialization and make possible the formation of broader, revolutionary coalitions. Thus, the dramatic episodes of contention, frequently the focus in social movement literature, are preceded and succeeded by low-intensity processes of social networking. Coalitions, especially civil society-state actor coalitions, also offered an opportunity for elite interaction with non-elites in a way rarely seen in Lebanon’s history. As was mentioned above, Lebanon’s political system is constructed with a

communal balance in mind and is theoretically designed to encourage cross-communal interaction. In reality, however, it is characterized by elite maneuvering and the forging of alliances between various political patrons. Thus, there are significant limits to the Lebanese citizens' political participation, not because of an authoritarian political system, but because of a political culture of familism and clientelism. Civil society-state actor coalitions, then, beyond the immediate objective for which they are formed, are in and of themselves a significant shift in the way politics happen in Lebanon. Furthermore, this study argues that the interactions of various actors in campaign coalitions render them the organizational structures of a broader movement community, the members of which employ a common vision of the future and share fundamental understandings of the environment in which they operate. This line of thought inevitably leads to the issue of the social interactions by which collective identities are forged.

Collective identity and movement formation

In order to attract members and mobilize for collective action, civic organizations need to cement a sense of community amongst its ranks. Thus, Chapter 5 posed the question: How do civic organizations construct a crosscutting movement identity in a context of societal fragmentation? In answering this question, it became necessary to explore understandings of individual identities as well as collective identities. The reason for this is that the way individuals start thinking of themselves as part of a collective depends on how well symbols and understandings employed by a group resonates with the symbols and understandings of the individual. Moreover, every individual harbors multiple identities and different identities take precedence in different contexts. For

instance, in a context of high insecurity, individuals tend to revert into the collective that offers the highest sense of security. At the same time, regional political pressures and the sectarian organization of Lebanon's political system lead political patrons in Lebanon to utilize identity politics for political ends. Consequently, political instability and a deterioration of the general sense of security leads to a retreat into the "security" of the various communities. This is not to say that a majority of Lebanese citizens necessarily disagree with the agenda of the civic movement, but rather that a lack of crosscutting social interaction reinforces the perception that nothing can change in Lebanon and that the local patron or political party is a more reliable vehicle towards security and service provision. Indeed, due to Lebanon's historical development of a 'culture of sectarianism,' the core social unit is the family and clientelist connections within a communal framework.

For a sense of belonging to emerge among individuals, there needs to be social interaction and development of common cognitive frameworks. Thus, in a context of highly activated 'embedded' identities, the ability of 'detached' identities to resonate with the perceptions of individuals is limited. For this reason, this study argues that opportunities and constraints must be understood as emanating from society as well as from the state – I call these 'social opportunities and constraints' – as the fragmentation of the societal fabric will affect a movement's ability to develop a collective identity through social interaction. Furthermore, political opportunities must be interpreted and recognized as such if they are to have any impact on a movement's formation. Thus, if we accept that a sense of common grievances, a sense of collective identity among a movement's members, is a necessary condition for a political opportunity to be

recognized and seized, cultural factors that prevent or encourage social interaction must be understood as constituting a structure permissive or restrictive to movement formation. In light of this, individuals' cognitive frameworks, that is the cultural filters they employ in order to make sense of their environment, become important not only as mobilizing factors once a movement seizes a political opportunity, but as the building blocks from which movement identities are forged *prior* to the identification of political opportunities. Moreover, social opportunities and constraints not only vary temporally, but also geographically. Indeed, urban centers allow for crosscutting social interaction and the development of joint cognitive frameworks. In other words, the ties of the family are less important in an urban environment with crosscutting solidarities. Thus, the civic movement finds the vast majority of its constituency in the urban centers. In other words, while civic organizations can boast of crosscutting membership in terms of communal identities, there is instead a tendency towards an urban-rural divide. This raises the issue of civil society as a space where challenges to the status quo can emerge. To be sure, in an environment as politically polarized as Lebanon's, the ability of CSOs to act as agents of change can, and frequently does, come in to question.

The civic movement community and the political sphere

Arguably, to be able to act as agents of change in a political system, organizations need to retain a certain level of independence vis-à-vis stakeholder in that system, and navigate carefully in order to avoid co-optation or termination. Moreover, broadening the space for political participation requires a renegotiation of the formula on which the civil society-political sphere relationship is based. In other words, the way in which the

political sphere interacts with civil society must shift from, for instance, dictation and dominance to consultation and partnership. Accordingly, Chapter 6 asked: To what extent do civic organizations reflect a broader social movement community and what is their relationship to the political sphere? This dissertation argued that the various campaign coalitions could also be understood as dissemination structures of a civic movement identity. The reason for this, beyond the facilitation of sustained social interaction, is the coordination of strategies and tactics that take place within campaign coalitions. By framing issues such as transparency, nationality laws, access to information, and removal of sectarian identity from the civil registries, within the “red line” of challenging the perception of communal balance, civic activists approach their ultimate goal of a civic state through incremental goals, thereby attacking the issue from a backdoor.

But the formulation of common strategies also necessitates a common identification of threats and obstacles, i.e. a common understanding of the environment in which they operate. However, as the boundaries between social movement activism outside of the structures of the state and political party activism within the institutions of the state become more fluid, the civic activists risk becoming ‘dislodged’ from the society from whence they came. Indeed, as they become more professionalized and interact with political elites, there is a risk of creating a gap between “professional” activists and political elites on the one hand, and the broader populace on the other. Indeed, the post-civil war developments in Lebanon not only suggest a transformation of civil society itself, but also a shift in how civil society engages with political society. Moreover, while foreign funding allows for a certain level of independence from local patrons, it also opens up for their legitimacy to be questioned, as there are many actors in

Lebanon willing to discredit civic activists as Western implants. Indeed, in this way, the civic movement often becomes an unwilling party in the broader debate on Lebanon's identity and, in the extension, the conflict between Syria and Iran on the one hand, and Israel and the United States on the other. The civic movement community in Lebanon does not have clearly defined boundaries. While its core constituency comprises of educated middle class youths, it also harbors political and economic elites, as well as individuals from the lower classes. Thus, the relationship between the civic movement community and the political sphere cannot be represented by a static model of compartmentalized categories, but can best be understood as fluctuating and evolving processes of interaction. Nevertheless, as this dissertation argues, in a long-term perspective, Lebanon's civic movement community has established itself as a factor that must be included in political considerations. And that, in light of the elite-centric tendencies of Lebanon's political life, can be regarded a significant shift in the civil society-political sphere formula.

Conclusion: the Evolutionaries

This study has been an exploration of efforts to broaden the arena of political participation to include previously marginalized actors. The findings discussed above underscore the importance of recognizing that participatory democracy is not only about elections and democratic institutions, but also about political culture and identity politics. However, rather than forwarding a culturalist argument that serves to essentialize sectarian identities and exceptionalize Lebanon as a case, this dissertation has sought to 'demystify' sectarianism by arguing that it is nothing other than an infrastructure for

mobilization, utilized by political elites in order to garner support for their ends. However, that does not mean that culture and collective identities do not matter – quite the contrary. This is where Charles Tilly’s concepts of “embedded” identity versus “detached” identity and Ibn Khaldun’s concept of *‘asabiyyah* become important. Indeed, civic activists try to disseminate a civic identity among the population – the vast majority of which, as opinion data from various sources suggests, actually expresses support for their key values – but political instability translates to a game of identity politics in Lebanon. Hence, people revert into their “embedded” identity, which for the past two centuries have been inextricably linked to political leadership. Thus, I have made an argument for understanding culture as a *structure of opportunities and constraints*.

In this complex environment, civic organizations navigate the Lebanese political scene carefully to avoid co-optation or termination, approaching issues of political sensitivity not through head-on confrontation, but through a two-level strategy of advocacy and elite cooperation on the one hand, and community dialogue and awareness campaigns on the other. Thus, the challenges to Lebanese civic activists do not only emanate from the political system or the many patrons that populate it, but from a complex web of factors that transcend the national boundaries of Lebanon. This is the case for border-transcending linkages among local collective identities, as with an Arab identity (creating affinity with the Arab world), Islamic identity (belonging to the Islamic umma), or a Maronite Christian identity (Mediterranean/Western identification). It is also the case in the realm of the region’s political dynamic – the confrontation between Syria and Iran on the one hand, and Israel and the United States on the other. Indeed, Lebanon’s political fortunes are inextricably linked to regional dynamics, in the identity

realm (as when the supposed “Sunni-Shia” divide causes rifts in Lebanon’s Muslim community, or when Western funded organizations are dismissed as illegitimate because of their lack of “authenticity”) and in the realm of geopolitics, where Syria and Iran are determined not to lose the strategic advantage of Israel’s northern neighbor. In the theoretical realm, this study shows that an approach that combines analysis of micro-processes of movement identity production with analysis of macro-processes of collective identity production is necessary in order to understand the complex dynamics of movement formation in an environment where not only institutions are “hostile,” but where challenges also emanate from the society from whence the movement once came. Thus, people may share grievances (when broken down in specific issues) and be active in an environment with political opportunities, but still fail to construct viable movement frames on which to build a sustainable movement identity, when there are embedded identities competing for the same constituency.

To navigate such an environment, grassroots can devise long-term strategies of incremental change, target specific ‘key’ legislation or reforms, and minimize opposition to their causes by finding innovative ways to ‘frame’ sensitive issues. Second, they can seek elite allies in individual issues; avoid financial dependency on local actors (innovative fundraising, external funding). Third, to overcome societal fragmentation, they must construct movement frames around themes that resonate with broader layers of the population. In this context, they can also work on creating their own ‘social opportunities,’ by not only targeting the level of political institutions, but also reach out in society and create crosscutting networks that will, in time, function as an infrastructure for a civic identity. In that effort, the spread of Internet connections on the countryside

may begin to break the urban-rural divide among civic activists. Transforming political culture is a slow process and Lebanon's civic activists have understood this in full. Hence, the most significant achievements in broadening the space for political participation are in the long run not likely to be achieved by revolutionaries in dramatic contentious episodes, but in comparatively low-key projects and coalitions by them – Lebanon's Evolutionaries.

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