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To Samira, Roula, and Ranya, my brothers,
and to the memory of my parents

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Latif Abul-Husn

Contents

1

Introduction

This book deals with the conflict in Lebanon from the mid-1970s through the 1980s. More than 100,000 people died in that conflict, many times that number suffered, and the world looked on while the warring parties within Lebanon were joined by external forces to achieve this outcome. The origin of the war, however, did not lie with these external forces, who had their own goals, but with the conflict within and between Lebanon's communal groups. This study, then, is mainly involved with the genesis, growth, and resolution of the conflicts among those factions. It investigates conflict dynamics not only as they relate to structural characteristics and political motives, but also as they challenge public policy and social engineering in any country with major ethnic or communal divisions. An emphasis on social structure is necessary to an understanding of the root causes of social conflict, though this is not meant to direct attention away from the political process.[1] This study will thus examine structural failures that seem to be the spawning ground of communal group tension.

The conventional literature on the conflict in Lebanon has been dominated by three hypotheses. The first argues that the basic source of the conflict is the malfunctioning of the country's sociopolitical and economic structure. The second suggests that the conflict is a function of the interplay among Lebanon's domestic, regional, and international environments. The third contends that the conflict is caused and determined solely by the intervention of foreign powers. The proponents of these hypotheses differ in focus, methodology, and judgment. They do, however, have one theme in common: with different degrees of emphasis, they all view the sociopolitical and economic structure as a fundamental variable to be reckoned with in any meaningful analysis of the conflict.

The influence of foreign intervention no doubt played a conspicuous role in the Lebanese conflict, but the conflict process has been cradled in domestic social, political, and economic contradictions that exacerbated it and hardened it to possible resolutions. The conflict itself has changed in shape, form, and direction over the years but the social structure has

remained constant. Analysis will show that the structure and its inherent conflicting tendencies are mutually reinforcing. The outcome of such an interplay supports the argument that the social structure is the spawning ground of conflict, and that the conflict itself contributes to the potential (and eventual) weakening of the social structure.

The Basic Issues

The conflict in Lebanon broke into civil war following two apparently unconnected incidents in 1975.[2] The first occurred in March in the southern port city of Sidon, where the army clashed with an organized rally protesting the establishment of a fishing monopoly in Lebanon. The death of a former parliamentary deputy, marching at the head of the protesters, triggered a campaign against the army that degenerated into civil war.[3] The second incident, on April 13, was a massacre in Ain al-Rummani, a suburb in east Beirut: Christian Phalanges gunmen ambushed a bus and killed twenty-seven of its predominantly Palestinian passengers. This incident sparked heavy fighting between the Phalangists and the Palestinian resistance movement in Lebanon. The fighting developed into intercommunal clashes, spread like shock waves through Beirut, and gradually engulfed the whole country.

During the sixteen years of conflict, loss of human life (estimated at 150,000) and destruction of property were matched only by the damage incurred by the social structure in the areas of community relations and nation building. The conflict revolved around three main themes: reform of the political system, the national identity of Lebanon, and Lebanon's sovereignty. Other issues emerged as the conflict progressed and evolved in form and focus, but only these three endured.

Intercommunal tension has been a feature of the modern state of Lebanon since its creation. From the early 1960s, the two main confessional blocs—the Christians and the Muslims—began to drift apart. This change was associated with three phenomena: the rise to power of an organized Palestinian armed resistance in Lebanon that aligned itself with the Muslim bloc; a soaring Arab nationalist feeling in the wider region; and the rising expectations of the Shiites and their demands on the system for a greater share in the power structure.

The rising Arab nationalist feeling among the Muslim masses in Lebanon and the increasing Palestinian influence in domestic politics alarmed the Maronites and their allies. They sensed that such developments might shift the intercommunal balance of power in favor of the Muslims in the country. Their fears were reinforced by the simultaneous rise of the Shiite power under the leadership of Imam Mousa al-Sadr.

These developments were associated with the emergence of a configuration of two distinct conflict groups and blocs: the reformists, who sought a change in the power-sharing arrangements with a view to increasing their share in the power and authority structure; and the status-quo coalition, who feared losing their privileged status. What seemed to differentiate the two camps was neither their sectarian nor ideological orientations, for those two divisions had been satisfactorily accommodated through various conflict regulation mechanisms, including the 1943 National Pact. The bottom line was rather their profoundly divergent interests in changing the existing power-sharing formula.

However, although the conflict had a sectarian dimension, it was not fundamentally a conflict between Christians and Muslims over religious precepts, or between leftists and rightists over ideological issues, or between Arab and Lebanese nationalists over the identity of Lebanon, or between the rich and the poor, or the powerful and the powerless over positions of authority. While some smaller groups that made up each camp assumed these identities and used them as a springboard to achieve their particular aims, each larger camp developed a set of core issues that distinguished it from its opponents. At different stages of the conflict the antagonism was greatest between the Christian and Muslim divisions, while at other stages the dividing line was between left and right, and so on, depending on the ebb and flow of the issue in dispute.

The Conflicting Parties

Groups supporting the status quo included the Lebanese Front and the Christian establishment. Formed in mid-1976, the Lebanese Front was a coalition of several Christian parties, militias, personalities, and organizations. It consisted of the Phalanges and National Liberal Parties, whose leaders, Pierre Gemayel and former president Camille Chamoun, joined with former president Suleiman Frangie (founder of the Marada militia), Father Charbel Kassis (head of the Order of Maronite Monks), and a few other leading Christian intellectuals to form the front. There were a few other organizations and parties that remained outside the front but were in alliance with it. The front's political agenda was to preserve the status quo, but if that proved impossible, then the establishment of a federal system of government, resettlement of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon throughout the Arab world, and the removal of foreign forces from the country were considered minimally necessary.[4]

The second category of revisionists consisted of the Lebanese National Movement, the Muslim establishment, and the Palestinian resistance movement. The Lebanese National Movement consisted of six major

parties and ten organizations who shared several aims: reforming the political system, supporting the Palestinian resistance movement in Lebanon, and opposing the right-wing militias.[5] The main constituent groups of the movement were the Progressive Socialist Party, the Organization for Communist Action, the Lebanese Communist Party, the Movement of Independent Nasserists (al-Murabitun), the Syrian National Social Party, and the Baath Party (both pro-Syrian and pro-Iraqi branches). The Amal Movement did not join the Lebanese National Movement but coordinated its activities with it. The Muslim establishment included the Sunni, the Shiite, and the Druze religious organizations. This alliance called for extensive political reform to ensure a more equitable distribution of scarce resources and the secularization of the representative system. They also sought restructuring of the balance of power between the three branches of government, the reorientation of the institution of the army toward more distinctly national aims, and the alignment of the military with other Arab armies in defense of the Palestinian cause.[6]

The two main domestic camps were not the only actors in the protracted conflict. There were also a number of external participants, including Syria, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Libya, and Iraq. Syria played a major role at almost every stage of the conflict. Due to both its own security concerns and its historical ties to Lebanon, Syria acted as mediator, conciliator, patron, and balancer at different times during the conflict. The Palestinians in Lebanon, both as a community and as an independent armed resistance movement, were perceived by the status quo coalition, particularly the Maronites, as a threat to the sectarian balance and the sovereignty of the state.[7] Their support for the Lebanese National Movement and their increased raids into Israel from South Lebanon, which invited disproportionate and indiscriminate Israeli retaliation, strained the already tense intercommunal relations. Israel's persistent incursions and air raids on Palestinian bases in South Lebanon, compounded with its support of the status quo coalition militias, exacerbated the intercommunal tension and contributed to an escalation in the conflict.

Inter-Arab discord and rivalries were another factor contributing to the war. They increased the intensity and violence of the conflict, and it was only when there was some Arab unity on the matter that a peace initiative succeeded in Lebanon. This was accomplished late in 1989, through the Taif Accord, after which the conflict subsided to a tolerable level.

The preexisting power-sharing arrangement offered each community an opportunity to contribute to the political process in the country according to its numerical weight. In retrospect, this system lacked flexibility and an adequate adjustment mechanism for dealing with demographic changes, as well as the modernization process and other domestic and regional changes. The basic issues in dispute between the two conflict groups were

resolved at the Taif meeting. This meeting evolved from several earlier unsuccessful attempts over a period of fifteen years. Several methods of conflict resolution were attempted by foreign as well as domestic actors but failed.[8] Conciliation and mediation by a high-profile and authoritative Arab League committee consisting of Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Algeria were finally successful; the committee put forward viable proposals that provided a base for negotiation and were approved by members of the Lebanese parliament in October 1989. As a result, an accord was signed between them under the auspices of the tripartite mediating committee, bringing the hostilities to an end and setting the peace process in motion.

The Taif Accord allowed communal pluralism to maintain its legitimacy in the face of federalist desires, cantonization, and irredentist pan-Arab ideologies. It restored to the political system its structural options and provided the policymakers with a conceptual foundation in their search for a relevant process to end the conflict and restore stability and credibility to a multicommunal system. The accord established a framework for continuing and formalizing the resolution process that might, if properly implemented, lead to political integration and social harmony over a period of a generation or two.

Two factors were responsible for the success of the mediation in resolving the conflict. First, the conflict itself reached the end of its life cycle. Second, through their extensive involvement in the peace process, the mediators gained insight into the nature of the conflict, the issues key to it, and, above all, its structural base and sociopolitical bearings.

Multicommunal Lebanon

The Lebanese conflict took different forms and directions and passed through several stages during its long life. It involved a whole range of conflict groups, factions, and parties and caused devastating damage to the society and state. The Lebanon of today, with its name and present borders, was created on September 1, 1920, by expanding the area of the previously semi-autonomous Mount Lebanon (whose main inhabitants were the Maronites and the Druzes). The newly incorporated areas were mostly urban communities, inhabited predominantly by Muslims and an Orthodox Christian minority. By virtue of their urbanization, they differed in outlook from the inhabitants of rural Mount Lebanon, who saw themselves as an independent republic of villages. By annexing the coastal cities and the interior areas, Lebanon became a city-state, a concept foreign to the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. Their contradictory interests, and their different conception of what the new Lebanon was and what it ought to be, were almost irreconcilable.[9]

The interaction between the various component communities was strongest through economic and commercial exchanges, rather than through social life. This interaction was not strong enough to integrate the various communities into one social system. Each community developed an independent social system, with its own beliefs and values, communal consciousness, specific interests, and stratification system. Moreover, each community was virtually self-contained geographically: the Druzes and Maronites live in their enclosure in Mount Lebanon, the Shiites in southern Lebanon and the Beq'a Valley, the Sunnis in the coastal cities and towns, and the Orthodox Christians in parts of North Lebanon and the city of Beirut. This trend has only been intensified with the coming of civil war.

Perhaps the most relevant portrayal of Lebanese society is to underline its multicommunal character. It consists of several social systems that exist side by side, often in harmony, but void of a basic central value system and widespread acculturation. Their exposure to a common lifestyle, urban or rural, has brought these communities closer to each other, but not close enough to create an integrated social system. Western values permeate the Christian society and influence the lifestyle of those sects but have failed to penetrate Muslim society enough to create a similar transformation.

Lebanese society has preserved its multicommunal characteristics over the centuries.[10] Even present-day Lebanon is seen by some as no more than a grouping of sectarian communities.[11] It is a system of multiple social units hierarchically structured; conflicting tendencies are embedded and generated in this system.[12] No doubt such a system experienced intermittent periods of stability, but behind that apparently smooth functioning remained divergent communal interests that penetrated the social order and created separate value systems. Between 1864 and 1920, intercommunal relations in Lebanon were stable: seventy years of stability and cooperation followed the mid-nineteenth-century cycle of violence between the Druzes and Maronites, the two main communities of Mount Lebanon. Yet the antagonistic tendencies in each community persisted beneath the surface and were instrumental in defining and sharpening the communal boundaries, interests, and goals.

An analysis of the Lebanese conflict and its resolution requires a thorough investigation of the social structures and processes of conflict and their outcomes. The genesis of that conflict is the social structure: the war was born of the communal contradictions inherent in this structure and exacerbated by external contingent factors. The conflict process is itself a cause as well as an outcome of change.

There are a number of theoretical approaches in understanding conflict. Karl Marx explains it in terms of economic determinism and property relations. Talcott Parsons lends more weight to cultural factors but rejects the notion of conflict as a natural phenomenon in life. Rather, he sees it

as an aberration in an otherwise orderly world. Ralf Dahrendorf and Ibn Khaldun both share with Marx the assumption that the social system is the spawning ground of conflictive tendencies. Contrary to Marx, however, Dahrendorf postulates that positions of authority, rather than differential distribution of property, are the major sources of conflict. Ibn Khaldun ascribes the cause of conflict to the *asabiya* factor in societal relations.

Both factors, authority and asabiya, aid analysis by identifying and understanding the root causes of the Lebanese conflict. Dahrendorf's concept rests on the assumption that social conflict is ubiquitous and pervasive, even though every society incorporates measures of restraint and control.[13] Ibn Khaldun's concept of asabiya explains the rise and fall of the state and the formation and dissolution of conflict groups. Asabiya is a concept that refers to group cohesion. It is a fourteenth-century notion that refers to the vitality, cohesion, and stamina of the group. Its main attributes are obedience and loyalty to the chieftain and the unrestrained support of the group members. While Dahrendorf argues that the group's solidarity may be achieved by coercion, Ibn Khaldun maintains that such a solidarity could be obtained through the asabiya attribute of obedience. The following chapter will discuss the relevance of the concept of asabiya to the Lebanese civil war of 1975, as well as its role in the rise and fall of state institutions and the groups in conflict.

Notes

1. Joseph Himes, *Conflict and Conflict Management* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 51.

2. The term "civil war" has been subject to dispute. Khuri suggests that those who fought on the side of the established regime, that is, the Maronites and their allies, referred to the conflict as "war," whereas the ideologues who attacked both the regime and the Maronites called it a "revolution." The Palestinians in Lebanon who fought side by side with the Reformist Camp referred to it as "civil war," implying a Lebanese-Lebanese rather than Lebanese-Palestinian conflict, as did Kamal Salibi. A fourth group called it "internal war." See Reuven Avi-Ran, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon Since 1975* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 1–2; Fuad I. Khuri, "The Social Dynamics of the 1975–1977 War in Lebanon," *Armed Forces and Society* 7, no. 3 (spring 1981), pp. 383–408; Kamal Salibi, interview, *An-Nahar Supplement* 19 (July 18, 1992), p. 6.

3. Abbas Kelidar and Michael Burrell, *Lebanon: The Collapse of a State: Regional Dimensions of the Struggle,* Conflict Studies No. 74 (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, August 1976), p. 12.

4. George Delury, ed., *World Encyclopaedia of Political Systems* (London: Longman, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 615–616.

5. Ibid., p. 618. See also Marius Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), p. 139.

6. Delury, ed., *World Encyclopaedia*, p. 617.

7. Theodore Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies in Association with I.B. Tauris and Co., Ltd., 1993), chapter 6.

8. For a thorough insight into the mediation efforts of foreign powers to resolve the conflict, see Elie A. Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon: The Troubled Years 1982–1988* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., Ltd., 1995).

9. Albert Hourani, "Visions of Lebanon," in Halim Barakat, ed., *Toward a Viable Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 3–11.

10. Samih Farsoun, "E Pluribus Plura or E Pluribus Unum? Cultural Pluralism and Social Class in Lebanon," in Halim Barakat, ed., *Toward a Viable Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 100–115; Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1985), pp. 10, 11.

11. Augustus R. Norton, "Sectarian Estrangement and Social Fragmentation in Lebanon," in Altaf Gauhar, ed., *Third World Affairs 1988* (London: Third World Foundation for Social and Economic Studies, 1988), pp. 63–76; Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle over Lebanon* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), p. 16.

12. Halim Barakat, "The Social Context," in P. Edward Haley and Lewis Snider, eds., *Lebanon in Crisis: Participants and Issues* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979), pp. 5–6.

13. Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 64, no. 2 (September 1958), p. 126.

2

Asabiya and Authority in the Lebanese Polity

The major factors underlying the Lebanese conflict are the struggle for political power and economic disparities. This chapter looks at the political power struggle in terms of asabiya (group consciousness) and authority. Both concepts have implications for the emergence of conflicting parties, the distribution of power between them, and the success of patterns of domination among them. Authority is a central issue in the birth of conflict, and asabiya is a fundamental factor in the rise, growth, and demise of the conflict groups. The effects of sociopolitical and economic disparity will be discussed in later chapters.

Three assumptions underlie the theme of this chapter. The first is that positions of authority in the Lebanese power structure are a source of tension that can, under specific circumstances, throw the existing institutional arrangements seriously out of kilter. Second, shifts in the balance of power between the communities who occupy positions of authority in the Lebanese power hierarchy can also cause new forces to emerge; these new groups are fundamentally organized around the concept of asabiya. The third assumption of this chapter is that the notion of asabiya is a phenomenon that constitutes a quintessential source of power for the leadership of conflict groups and provides for social cohesion and performance.

The term *asabiya* is pre-Islamic and is now used to describe a strong bond between members of the same group. This bond would commit its adherents to support one another without question, without regard to the justice of the cause. Islam condemned asabiya, and the prophet Muhammad denounced it as contrary to the spirit of the religion: aiding one's people in unjust action is repugnant and antithetical to Islam. Ibn Khaldun was well aware of Islam's religious rejection of the concept, yet he uses it to explain the conflict in Muslim thought without damaging the orthodox view on the role of the prophet's successors, the Caliphs.

Most writers who follow Khaldun seem to have failed in reaching a consensus on the precise meaning of the term. This is due, primarily, to the

lack of a direct translation for asabiya. Writers interpret the term differently depending on their own orientation. Some have defined it in a purely sociological context, accentuating a causal relationship between asabiya and cultural context. Others have focused on its political framework—with special reference to its organizational impact on the rise of power groups and the formation and decline of the state. Ibn Khaldun himself gave no precise definition for the term. The way he used the term (around five hundred times in his *Muqaddimah*) conveyed many different shades of meaning. However, most of the renditions of the term point to one widely accepted interpretation: "solidarity." The further connotations are wide-ranging: social solidarity, group solidarity, group cohesion, common will, esprit de corps, group feeling, group instinct, fanatical solidarity, the corporate will of the group, party spirit, community ethos, socio-agnatic solidarity, fellow feeling, zeal and ardor, patriotism, tribal spirit, national spirit, national feelings, party strength, power, support, communal ethos, and the vitality of the state. Each of those connotations implies an equally divergent and discursive meaning of asabiya. Undeniably, there is both a sociocultural meaning and a political one.

An examination of asabiya and its role in the emergence and perpetration of conflict can greatly facilitate an understanding of the Lebanese polity. Asabiya is highlighted in an intensely conflictive situation, where it can play a defensive role. Ibn Khaldun argues that "group feeling produces the ability to defend oneself, to protect oneself and to press one's claim. Whoever loses his group feeling is too weak to do any one of these things."[1] The root of asabiya means kingship or rulership, and this implies an inherent notion of domination: presumably, a group with strong asabiya manifests a unity and dynamism that help it gain domination over other groups. It is only those groups with strong asabiya who can constitute a major political force in a larger polity, and who can use that force to propel their leader to national power.[2] Once a group attains authority by virtue of its stronger asabiya, it dominates other groups, though the dominance atrophies as the asabiya wanes. Before long, another group whose inferior position leads to a defensive growth of its own asabiya is in the position to overthrow the dominant group and replace it in the authority structure. This image of conflict closely resembles Dahrendorf's classification of conflict groups into those who possess authority and those who are denied positions of power. This becomes a relationship of domination and subjugation, and Dahrendorf asserts that this inequitable distribution of power is the determining factor in social conflict.

Asabiya is a normative concept that guides all actions in a prescribed way, but it is important to note that asabiya operates as a force for integration through consent, obedience, and loyalty within the group. On the other hand, Dahrendorf's concept of authority is more conflictive by

nature; authority depends more upon coercion than it does on consent. By depending upon coercion to maintain law and order rather than the precepts of asabiya, Dahrendorf's formulation seems to assume that authority can be used to create new group values and norms reflecting the will of the ruler.

Assuming the elite-mass relations defined by the conception of asabiya, a leader backed by strong asabiya might try to introduce changes to the social-value structure. He or she could impose these changes on the people by resorting to coercion, but it would inevitably lead to conflict. In such a situation, the masses' feeling of asabiya might well prompt them to deny their consent and obedience on the grounds that the changes violate the given communal normative value system. This sort of behavior would probably be read as deviant behavior, leading to the overthrow of this leader in favor of another with stronger asabiya, or recognizable communal identity (and traditional behavior). The notion of order employed by Talcott Parsons also has a coercive implication. He maintains that the normative value system can be functionally integrative, but if it fails to deliver internal peace, then coercive authority can be used to restore order and balance to the system.

The consent, obedience, and loyalty implicit in asabiya accomplish the same cohesion and integration of the group that the coercion inherent in authority structures can achieve. Asabiya is a function of lineage affiliation, but, more importantly, it reflects a feeling of solidarity that is itself a function of the cohesion of the group. The relation between this and authority is complex because "such coherence cannot be maintained without the presence of a dominant element with a mandate to coerce."[3] An authoritative leader (who can coerce if necessary) is needed to gain the respect necessary to make coercion a marginal partner of consensus and willing obedience in maintaining group coherence.

Ibn Khaldun treats asabiya as an abstraction that points to, rather than explains, a phenomenon: it is not reified as a substantive cause of conflict but is conceived of as a vitalizing characteristic of the group that influences intergroup relations. Most Khaldunian writers treat asabiya as a concept interlocked with tribal structure that is particularly associated with segmentation and clanship. Some treat it as a universal concept,[4] while others argue that it is best used in more specific, limited contexts.[5]

Lacoste, for example, rejects the use of asabiya in generalized sociological discourse and argues that it is associated only with tribal societies and should only be used to examine such structures. In fact, he argues that its applicability is limited to the North African society where Ibn Khaldun developed the concept.[6] However, despite Lacoste's rejection of the universality of the concept, Ibn Khaldun's original study of medieval North African society was later expanded. Asabiya was used to explain the