Contested Identity of 'Self' and 'Others': A Study of Lebanese Nationalism

Jawaid Iqbal
Professor,
Department of west Asian and North African Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP, India

Received: April 11, 2019 Accepted: May 21, 2019

ABSTRACT: *Social fragmentation on the basis of primordial loyalties was instrumental in sharpening the sectarian identities of the Lebanese citizens. As religious sects were the major focus of loyalty, self-definition and self-identification for Lebanese citizens, a broad national consensus could not emerge even on fundamental issues like a constitution, political order for the country and above all the national identity of Lebanon. While social fragmentation helped in sharpening the sectarian identities, the economy gave a class colour to them. While a majority of the Lebanese Muslims belonged to the poor and exploited strata of society, a majority of the Lebanese Christians belonged to the prosperous upper strata. Class tensions in the long run can prove destructive to a polity. Class tensions when given a religious colour can prove all the more explosive as the happenings in Lebanon demonstrate.*

Key Words: *Sectarian, Fragmented, Ecclesiastical, Endogamous, Migration, Urbanization, Political Socialization, Primordial Loyalties, Class Divisions.*

Though Lebanon is a small country with a population of three million, it is characterized by extreme social fragmentation. Lebanon consists of a multiplicity of religious sects organized in a hierarchical manner accommodating their own conflicts and interests within the confines of system that tends to promote sectarian identities and acts as a barrier to social integration.[1] Evidence regarding the fragmented social structure is sought in the following dominant characteristic features of the Lebanese society.

Non-separation of Religion from the State and Legitimation of Sectarian Differences

The Lebanese republic has given official recognition to seventeen difference sects. These are the Maronites, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Eastern Nestorians, Chaldeans, Evangelicals, Latins, Sunni Shiites, Druze, Alawis, Ismailisand Jew.[2] The acknowledgement of separate religious sects as politico-legal units has not only helped to perpetuate the fragmented nature of social structure of Lebanon but over the years, the divisions have become more crystallized as the sects become the major focus of loyalty, self-definition and self-identification for the Lebanese. Each of the officially recognized sects is legally permitted to have its own legislative courts and councils. In case of some Christian sects this has meant that the final seat of authority in ecclesiastical matters lies outside Lebanon. For instance, the Maronite and Greek Catholics, being Uniate Churches recognize the Pope in Rome as the ultimate authority. Likewise the Greek Orthodox Church has its headquarters in Damascus and not in Lebanon.[3] The Muslim sects have their own ecclesiastical organizations despite the fact that Islam has never had an ecclesiastical hierarchy comparable to Christian churches. To the extent that a distinction now exists between clergyman and layman among Muslims in Lebanon,it has in large part been forced on them by the necessity of having leaders to serve as defenders of the group in a society where Christian clergymen fulfil this function.[4]

As a result of these ecclesiastical organizations, the spiritual head of each sect has come to acquire a political role and his efficacy as a spokesman of his sect varies according to the degree of centralization and authority that he wields in his respective community. The Maronite Patriarch who presides over the most centralized church hierarchy in Lebanon is the most effective of thesespokesmen. When religious leaders become

[1] Halim Barakat, "The Social Context", in P.Edward Hailey and Lewis W. Snider eds. Lebanon in Crisis: Participantsand Issues(New York, 1979), pp.5-6.
[2] Halim Barakat, "Social and Political Integration in Lebanon: A Case of Social Mosaic", Middle East Journal (Washington, D.C.), vol.27, Summer 1973, p.302.
[3]David C. Gordon, The Republic of Lebanon: Nation in Jeopardy (London,1983),p.84.
[4] David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, The Politics of Pluralism: A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana(New York,1975),p.79.

spokesman of their communities, they tend to promote sectarian interests even at the cost of national interest. Consequently, there is little if any consensus even on vital issues in Lebanese society. Secondly the international connections of the same of the religious bodies are an important factor in a country where politics and social life are so deeply influenced by events and persons outside Lebanon.[5]

Due to the internal autonomy enjoyed by the officially recognized sects. Legislation in the era of personal statutes has become as diversified as the number of sects. This has tended to strengthen the existing sectarian identities and rigidity key differences in both belief and life-style among the sects. One important result of the lack of uniform civil law in Lebanon is the near absence of intermarriage between Christian and Muslims and even among the difference sects within the same religious. The tendency to marry within one's own sect further perpetuates the sectarian divisions. Legal barriers more than anything else have discouraged members of two different sects from the marrying unless one of the partners has converted. Religious endogamy is not maintained because it is explicitly prescribed that a person must marry within the religious community but because there no other simple recourse.[6]

Geographical Concentration of Different Religious Sects

The geographical representation of different sects also reflects and reinforces the fragmented nature of the social structure. The various sects tend to be concentrated in specific regions and even where difference sects live in the same city or village, they tend to live in separate neighbourhoods. The district wise distribution of some important sects given by Barakat is as follows[7]: Zghorta, Batrun and Kasruwan are exclusively Maronite districts whereas Jezzin, Metn and Baadba are Maronite majority districts. The Sunni also constitute about one-third of the district of Chapter II 48 Beirut and nearly a quarter of each of the districts of Rashaya and Zahleh. The Shiites are in a majority in the districts of Tyre, Ballbek, Hermel, Saidaand Marjayun; the Greek Orthodox are in each of the districts of Zahleh and Ballbek. The Druze from about half the district of Aley, one third of Rashaya and about a quarter of Shuf and Metn.

In towns, mixed villages and cities where more than one religious group is present, each group tends to live in its own neighbourhood. The large-scale migration from rural to urban areas that has taken place in Lebanon has also not been able to bring about any change in the settlement patterns of the sects. When a person migrates to the urban areas, he tends to be drawn to a part of the city inhabited by his coreligionist. Most districts in Lebanon's two major cities-Beirut and Tripoli-are identified as predominately for members of a particular sects or more generally for Christians and Muslims. A study conducted in one of the central districts of Beirut has shown that urbanization has not been associated so far with a large measure of decline or weakening of traditional ties and communal attachments.[8] This geographical concentration of difference sects has been a formidable obstacle to developing a positive national consensus particularly since the outlying regions are predominantly Muslim.[9]

Absence of Unified Educational System

The educational system too reflects and reinforces the fragmented social structure of Lebanon. The Lebanese educational system is as diversified as the country's social situation. There have been as many systems and philosophies of education as there have been religious communities, for education being primarily an endeavour of the religious communities, each sects has come to have its own autonomous private schools without any government supervision. This plurality of educational systems has become more complicated as a result of the development of Catholic and Protestant missionary education.[10] The diverse nature of schools, of their curricular, (some emphasizing the Arab character of Lebanon, others its Christian character), of the language of instruction (as varied as French, Arabic, English) even at the elementary level and philosophy behind them are a hurdle on the part to the development the existing

[5]Ibid., p.81.
[6] Victor Ayoub, "Resolution of Conflict in a Lebanese Village", in Leonard Binder ed. Politics in Lebanon (New York, 1966), p.121.
[7]Barakat, n.2, p.312.
[8] Samir Khalaf and per Kongstadt, Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanisation(Leiden, 1973), p.134.
[9] M.C. Hudson, "Democracy and Social Mobilisation in Lebanese Politics", Comparative Politics, vol.1, no.2, January 1969, p.256.
[10]SamihK.Farsoun, "Family Structure and society in modern Lebanon", in Lousie E. Sweet ed. Peoples and Culturesof the Middle East; vol. 2 (New York,1970), p.205.

sectarian cleavages.[11] In contrast the national educational system at the primary and secondary levels has remained ideologically weak and uncertain and there has been no conscious attempt on the part of the government to brink about some sort of uniformity in the overall system of education so that a national perspective cutting across sectarian cleavage may emerge amongst the younger generations. In the absence of national educational policy, political socialization function of the education i.e. to work toward a national consensus has been a failure in the main.[12] The multiplicity of educational system has prevented the emergence of a united intelligentsia.[13]Inspite of the sincere desire of many intellectuals to free themselves from the vicious circle of sectarianism, they are automatically pigeon-holed according to the sects to which they belong: Sunni, Shiite, Maronite etc., within this mosaic of religious sects every person must fit. Consequently, there is hardly any intellectual in Lebanon who does not take into consideration the interests of this religious community in the work which he undertakes. Even should he choose to disregard such communal interest, in the eyes of the society, whatever he does will necessarily reflect on his community.[14]

The fragmented character of Lebanese society is also reflected in a whole array of organizations and associations that are secular in other societies, but in Lebanon reinforce a particularistic orientation. Thus, hospitals, orphanages, old-age homes, dispensaries and clubs are organized on sectarian lines. Even such a humanitarian organization like Red Cross is not free from religious considerations. In Lebanon we have the Red Cross and the Red Crescent existing side by side.[15] This burgeoning of sectarian institutional life enables an individual, if he wishes, to pass his entire life in schools, youth organization and voluntary associations with only members of his own faith.[16]

As a result of the fragmentation of Lebanese society on the basis of dominant traditional loyalties religion has come to play the most important role in the life of an individual. The Lebanese citizens participate in public life only through their respective communities and under these conditions any feeling of nationalsolidarity manifests itself only through these intermediate and unavoidable elements. Since interaction between citizen is effected exclusively through the religious communal web this influences their social consciousness and political behaviour. They tend to look at the world from the point of view of their community.[17] Thus sectarian considerations far outweigh national considerations since each sect has its own world view and its own interest which more often than not stands in opposition to the interests and world-views of other sects. There is thus a lack of consensus on such fundamentals as a constitution, a popular national pact, a political order for the country and above all the national identity of Lebanon. Whereas the Christians, particularly Maronites consider Lebanon to be an independent, separate, sovereign, complete and eternal entity, the Muslims have developed no such attitude toward it. Their strong pro-Arab sympathies have always stood in the way of giving total allegiance to Lebanon. This disagreement over the national identity has been extended to other related fields also. Thus, whereas Christians want Lebanon to be pro-West, capitalist and a liberal democracy, the Muslims want Lebanon to identify more closely with the Arab world, the Palestinian cause, the socialist countries and socialism. In the best of times social fragmentation on the basis of dominant traditional loyalties rends Lebanese society and dims the prospects for harmony between the major sects. Yet, social fragmentation by itself would not have been sufficient to bring about a civil war. Other developments have coexisted and contributed in turn to the violent encounter.

Class Divisions on Sectarian Lines

Economic development in Lebanon after 1944 instead of integrating the various sects more firmly into the national economic life has had differing impacts on the Christians and Muslims. As a result of this the class divisions which emerged broadly coincided with the religious divisions. Before independent the most significant aspect of the Lebanese economy was the predominance of service sector (banking, transport, managerial service, communication facilities, tourism and hostels), and the dominant role of the Christian sects in the sector. A rich class of wealthy traders mostly Christian, engaged in export and import had already established themselves in the port of the city of Beirut prior to the French Mandate. Under French mandatory authority in Lebanon rapidly become an entrepot and center of trans-shipment for Western goods and for the raw material exported to Europe, As a result of this a new class of agents, representatives

[11] Ralph E. Crow, "Religious Sectarianism in the Lebanese Polotical System", Journal of Politics (Florida), vol.24, no.3, August 1962, p.512.
[12] Gordon,n.3,p.50.
[13] Clovis Maksoud, "Lebanon and arab Nationalism", in Binder ed., n.6, p.246.
[14]HishamNashabi,"The Problems of Lebanese Intellectuals Today",in Binder ed., n.6, p.258.
[15] Crow.n.11, p.484.
[16]Smock and Smock, n.4, p.84.
[17] V. Alavov, "Origins of Lebanon Tragedy", International Affairs (Moscow),no.8,august 1979,p.41.

and functionaries of Western capitalist interests, which has once again predominantly Christian, emerged in Lebanon. This class allied itself with the successful importexport merchants and the semi feudal landlords who were slowly turning to commercial, export-oriented agriculture. Along with French mandatory authorities who protected French capitalist interests, these three segments became the ruling class of Lebanon.[18]

Thus, at the time of independence, Christians were the most powerful economic group in Lebanon and by virtue of their economic strength, members of the ruling class by and large came from the Christian community. A white collar urban middle class also existed at the time of independence. The class had arisen with the growth of Western, especially French, investments in Lebanon. In part because they were favoured and because they spoke the language of the foreigner, this middle class was also principally Christian.[19]

After independence the economically dominant position of the Christians has been further enhanced primarily because of two reasons. First, the Lebanese economic system based on private enterprise conforming to one of the most extreme laissez-faire outlook of the contemporary world. Second, the fortuitous operation of a number external factors which increased the dominance of the service sector in the economy still further.

The most important of these external factors was the creation of Israel in 1948. As a result of the creation of Israel, Lebanon inherited all of Palestine's regional economic functions due to the Arab boycott of Israel. The Arab boycott gave a boost to Beirut port and the Beirut International Airport as well as an added appeal to the Lebanese schools and hospitals for Palestinian and TransJordanian student and patients.

Besides, the Iraq Petroleum Company, which until May 1948 had used Haifa in Palestine as an outlet for part of its petroleum exports, now chose Tripoli in Lebanon as its new outlet, upon the stoppage of the flow of oil through Israel. Similarly ARAMCO used South Lebanon as an outlet for part of its Saudi oil export, by building a pipeline in 1957 from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon via Jordan and Syria.[20] Banking and other services were also shifted to Beirut from Jerusalem and the tourist business of the Holy Land began to be routed through Lebanon and Jordan. The creation of Israel had another effect on the Lebanese economy as well. Around 1,50,000 Palestinian refugees were forced to take refuge in Lebanon. Not all of them were unskilled camp dwellers. Many possessed highly specialize skills which in later year helped to attract a large number of foreign-based companies to Lebanon. Besides, the Palestinian camps provided an inexhaustible supply of cheap labour not covered by state labour legislation and social security.[21]

The second external factor which gave a boost to the service-sector was the post-war oil-boom that took place in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf. This huge inflow of foreign currencies, which grew in volume since the early fifties, poured in at a time when the region had neither the financial institutions, nor the immediate investment opportunities, nor the skills necessary for and capable of absorbing or otherwise handling the large sums involved. Lebanon in contrast, was well-known in the region for its more advanced financial structure and its shrewd enterprising financiers. This resulted in the direction of vast sums into Beirut's money market. This process was epitomized in the rise of bank deposits from £L 215 million at the end of 1950 to £L 9106 million at the end of 1974.[22] This process acquires significance in view of the fact that the vast majority of the banks were in the hands of the Christian. The fact that funds were concentrated in the hand of one religious community assured their investment in that community's industrial, agricultural, commercial and construction enterprises. In West Asia as well as in the other newly independent countries of the Third World, investment tends to follow primary social ties—community, sects, ethnicity, family, etc.[23]

A third external factor which also served to increase the role of service sector and consequently strengthen further the Christian dominance in the economy was the flight of capital from Egypt, Syria and Iraq into Lebanon as a result of coup d'etats and the subsequent socialization of the economy of these three countries. This inflow though smaller in volume has supplemented the one coming from the Gulf region.[24]

[18]SamihFarsoun and Walter Carrol, "The Civil War in Lebanon: Sect, Class and Imperialism", Monthly Review (New York), vol.28, no.2, June 1976, p.18.
[19]Ibid., p.19.
[20] Yusuf A. Sayigh, The Economies of the Arab World, (London,1978), p.258.
[21]Alanov, n.17,p.39.
[22] Sayigh,n.20,p.289.
[23]Fuad I. Khuri, "The Social Dynamics of the 1975-77 War in Lebanon", Armed Forces and Society, vol.7, no.3, Spring 1981, p.390.
[24]Sayigh, no.20, p.289.

As a result of this massive inflow of capital, Beirut turned into the most important financial center in the region. A phenomenal boom and an international cosmopolitanism ensured in Beirut and the nearby mountain districts mostly inhabited by Maronites. The inflow of capital into Lebanon created a strong dynamism in the banking sector, which in turn helped in promoting real estate, hotel, tourist, and construction industry. While the service-sector thus boomed, the agricultural sector of the economy on which the majority of the Lebanese Muslims depend continued to stagnate. In 1968, 67 percent of the national income came from services whereas this sector employed only 32 percent of the total labour force. Industry came second, its contribution to the national income being 22 percent and agriculture third, its contribution being only 11 percent. At the same time, 50 percent of the population derived their income from agriculture.[25]

Thus, it is clear that agriculture was the most neglected. This resulted in an uneven economic development of Lebanon as a whole. A study conducted by the *Institute deRecherches et de Formation en Vue de Development* (IRFED) in 1960 had highlighted the nature of uneven development that was taking place. It had classified 70 percent of the localities in the central zone corresponding to predominantly Christian Beirut and Mount Lebanon as being in the developed category and only 5 percent as under developed. On the other **hand 46 percent of the localities** in the North, 35 percent in Bekka and 30 percent in the South were underdeveloped.[26] In Bekka and South Lebanon (inhabited predominantly by Shiites) 70 percent of the populace lives in the countryside whereas in the North (which is Sunni), it is slightly lower at 55 percent.[27] Being the least urbanized these regions have the highest proportion of people depending on agriculture as their source of income and therefore have the lowest income. As a result rural per capita income was $ 166 per year while that of the urban elite was $ 2680 in the 1960's.[28] Thus the sectarian implications of the lopsided economic development become clear. Whereas the most prosperous sector of the Lebanese economy remained by and large a Christian preserve, the most unproductive sector (agriculture) was overwhelmingly dominated by Muslims. In case of industry the position of Muslims was slightly better but here too it was the Christian community which dominated. Yusuf Sayigh in his study of entrepreneurs of Lebanon says that there are indications that Muslim business leaders now have, by industrial enterprise, an outlet for their frustration at finding much of the opportunity in foreign trade, finance, and service seized by their Christian counterparts. But Christians, according to Sayigh's sample nevertheless dominate by a factor of five to one in industry as well.[29]

As a result of the uneven economic development there has been a steady flow of the Muslim migrants from the rural to the urban areas. In the cities, there is a concentration of industries, educational facilities, commercial activities, state institutions, bureaucracy, etc. They thus become powerful attractions for the rural poor Muslims who flocked in ever-increasing numbers to the cities in search of jobs. The population of Beirut, for instance, rose from 250,000 in the early 1950's to 1.4 million in 1975 when the Lebanese war started.[30] Rural to urban migration continued to increase until the rural population was pared down from 65 percent at which it had stood after World War II to no more than 17 percent of the total population at the time of civil war stared. Rural to urban migration of Muslims was partly the result of the development in agriculture of export oriented fruit and vegetable farming. Fruit and vegetable farming is different from the old type of agriculture producing capital. As a result, urban capitalists come to have a dominant say in agriculture either by means of ownership of fruit and vegetable orchards or by control of the marketing of the produce of such farms.[31] This development led to a majority of Shia and Sunni peasantry being displaced from their small land holdings who consequently flocked to the cities in search of livelihood. From 1970 onwards these migrants were joined by another kind of migrants-Shiite Muslims fleeing their homes to escape the death and destruction caused by devastating Israeli raids into South Lebanon.

The incoming Muslim migrants tended to settle in sectarian clusters which underscored the link between religious and class affiliation. In course of time two poverty belts inhabited predominantly by Muslims sprang up in Lebanon. One surrounding the country itself and one surrounding Beirut. The poverty belt surrounding the country included the Southern region, the Akkar region of the North and Bekka. These impoverished areas surrounded the prosperous Christian Mount Lebanon. Muslim migrants coming to

[25] Smock and Smock, no.4, p.98.
[26] Ibid., p.97.
[27] Michael W. Suleiman, Political Parties in Lebanon: The Challenge of a Fragmented Political Culture (New York), p.34
[28] Farsoun and Caroll, n.18, p.20.
[29] Yusuf a. Sayigh, Entrepreneurs of Lebanon (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp.69-80.
[30] Jamal Toubi, "Social Dynamics in War-torn Lebanon", The Jerusalem Quarterly (Jerusalem), no.17, Fall 1980, p.95.
[31] Georges Hakim, The Economic Basis of Lebanese Polity", in Binder ed., n.6, pp.59-60.

Beirut from these regions formed another poverty belt around Beirut, which surrounded the rich Christian neighborhoods in the center of the city.[32]

At the initiative for economic growth in Lebanon came chiefly from the private sector, the public sector remained relatively small and inefficient. As a result, social institutions and services of Lebanon fell far below those of other Arab countries having similar income level. This could be seen clearly in the fields of education, health and housing. Due to the predominant role of the private sector in these fields, education, health and housing services were available to only those who could effort it. The high cost at which these services were provided by the private sector made them prohibitively expensive for people of small means—a feature of social inequality of grave dimension in view of the fact that social inequality in Lebanon was beginning to coincide with religious inequality. Thus we find that the Muslims were lagging behind the Christians ineducation, health and housing facilities. For instance, the country's student enrollment in pre-university schools had been increasing at a yearly rate of 9.6 percent in elementary schools and 24 percent in secondary schools since the mid-fifties, but at different rates among districts. In case of the Christian Mount Lebanon in was 18 percent in elementary schools and 16 percent in secondary schools increased between 1958-1968 in Mount Lebanon from 58 percent to 78 percent while in the other district it remained static at about 4 percent.[33] This gap in educational opportunities was not only quantitative but also qualitative for it was only in the private schools that a better quality of education was provided. But education in private schools was costly and only the well-to-do could send their children to such schools. This imbalance in educational opportunities between Christians and Muslims has led to further economic disparities and concomitant grievances. As with education similarly in the case of health and housing one come across the discrepancy between what the private sector actually provides for those who have the means and the failure of the republic sector to provide adequate facilities at low cost to those who are at the lower range of income distribution.

This analysis of the developments in Lebanese economic and its impact on the religious sects clearly highlights the economically deteriorating position of the Muslim section of the population and the strengthening of the economic position of the Christian community. By the 1970's the Muslims in general were poorer than the Christian. Family income of Christian averaged about 50 percent higher than those of Muslims and some two-third higher than those of Shia Muslims who were the worst affected by the distorted economic development.[34] This is not to say that there were no prosperous Muslims or poor Christian in Lebanon. From the point of view of intersectarian relations, however, whereas the rich Muslims tended to identify themselves with their common economic interests, in case of the not-so-well-to-do Christian, this was not the case. While a large number of Christians may have envied the wealth and power of the business oligarchs most of them took pride in the fact that the oligarchs were their co-religionist and felt secure in the belief that the ascendency of these oligarchs bolstered up the Christian ascendency in the country.[35] Thus class consciousness cutting across sectarian lines failed to emerge in Lebanon. The class polarization that took place, coincided with the religious-divide between Christians and Muslims. Although similar class tensions are encountered in other societies at various levels of economic development these tensions took on a special significance in Lebanon primarily because of the fact that poorer classes were overwhelmingly Muslims and the richer classes had a larger proportion of Christians. What might have been simply a conflict of interests among social classes elsewhere, in Lebanon come to take on a sectarian and communal color. Class tensions as such in the long run can prove destructive to a polity. Class tensions when given religious color can prove all the more explosive as the happenings in Lebanon demonstrate.

[32] Barakat,n.1, p.10.
[33] Ibid., p.11.
[34] Riad B. Tabbarah, "Background to the Lebanese Conflict", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Toronto), vol.20, nos.1-2, March-June 1979, p.117.
[35] Kamal Salibi, "Lebanon under FuadShihab 1958-1964", *Middle Eastern Studies* (London), vol.2, no.3, April 1960, p.215.