

INTRODUCTION

Shams C. Inati

IN THE LAST FORTY YEARS, LEBANON has been the battleground for two civil wars, the latter (1975-90) one of the bloodiest and most destructive civil conflicts in modern history. Understandably, Lebanon emerged from this latest conflict disintegrated, scarred, and confused. But it quickly began to try to pick up the pieces and engage in reconstruction and transformation of various systems and resources. Still, it is afflicted with serious political, socioeconomic, environmental, educational, and other serious problems.

Despite the necessity for continued efforts to deal with the serious issues relating to postwar Lebanon, Lebanon stands today as a subject almost forgotten by many scholars, political analysts, economists, and social scientists concerned with the Middle East. With its international concerns, global vision, and sense of intellectual and academic responsibility, the center for Arab and Islamic Studies at Villanova University recognized the necessity for reassessing the impact of the recent civil war and the pressing need for exploring the various possibilities for the future direction of Lebanon and making constructive recommendations that could help reawaken the Lebanese heritage and revitalize Lebanon. For this purpose the Center presented In April 1997 a symposium on postwar Lebanon which it hoped would be a step forward, if a small one, toward understanding better the present Lebanese conditions and the ways these conditions may be improved so that Lebanon may secure its future well-being.

The speakers delivered papers that covered local, regional, and international politics as well as education, economy, sectarianism, and environment. The present volume is a revised version of these papers.

Kail Ellis, Associate Professor of Political Science and Dean of Arts and Sciences at Villanova University, attributes to Lebanon's location its entanglements in regional conflicts, hence its two recent civil wars and the interruption in its development of a national identity of the social, religious, and ethnic communities. While not denying that the weakness of the Lebanese political system gave external forces the opportunity to interfere in its internal affairs, he asserts that Lebanon's political conflicts have been unavoidable, considering the highly turbulent world in which it exists. He points out that Syria, Israel, and the Palestinians not only have influenced Lebanese politics but continue to do so. This is not to say, according to him, that Lebanon's

involvement in regional conflicts was the original cause of its civil wars, but that such involvement was an essential element of “sparking the problems Lebanon has endured since its independence.” Because of the complicated relations with its neighbors, Syria and Israel, and the Palestinians residing in Lebanon, he sees no way out of Lebanon’s political predicament so long as the Arab-Israeli conflict remains unresolved and the peace process unfinished.

Michael Hudson, Professor of Political Science at Georgetown University, argues that, while the Ta’if Accord, signed in 1989, ended the Lebanese civil war and gave the Lebanese a sense of peace, it did not change the nature of the rules of the First Republic, but simply modified them. Thus it left Lebanon in the grips of sectarian representation, though the number of Muslim and Christian legislators and officials has been adjusted. Only in form, he adds, is postwar Lebanon a “consociational democracy.” But regardless of the form and nature of the Accord it was not adhered to in practice and the democratic reform it advocates is only a matter of lip-service. He concludes that Lebanon’s postwar recovery has been incomplete; the political and economic scenes remain gloomy. Not only is the system of confessional representation still in place, the presence of external powers in it is also still a reality. But Hudson hastens to say that “Ta’if was, after all, not just a return to consociationalism, with all its negative side-effects, but also a call for deeper structural reforms in the Western liberal mode, which might (if enacted in phases) move Lebanon beyond political confessionalism toward a more legitimate and effective system of governance.” He seems pessimistic, however, that such reforms will be implemented, since there has been no effort made in the last ten years to do so. He closes with a list of recommendations for Lebanon’s complete recovery.

Richard Norton, Professor of Political Science at Boston University, advances a thesis similar to that of Ellis, namely, that Lebanon’s recent problems are the outcome of the Arab/Israeli conflict for which Lebanon has served as a battleground. Though the recent civil war in Lebanon ended after the Ta’if Accord was signed over nine years ago, Lebanon, he says, continues to suffer from serious problems caused primarily by the fact that it is still captive to the unconcluded peace process. He gives examples to illustrate the hegemony of Syria over Lebanon, the devastating impact of the Israeli presence in south Lebanon, and the United States acceptance of Syria’s hegemony and Israel’s violations of UN Security Council Resolution 425. Norton confirms that there are positive sides to the physical reconstruction efforts that have been taking place in Lebanon. But he also recognizes that such reconstruction is not sufficient to keep the Lebanese happy at home and prevent a large number of them, especially the educated Christians, from emigrating, in part to escape the political subordination of Lebanon to Syria and the resulting restriction on freedom, “including heavy government tampering with elections and a growing intolerance for dissent.” He attributes the refusal of Israel and the United States to challenge Syrian hegemony over Lebanon to the fact that they failed in the 1980s to determine the Lebanese events. Though Norton considers the

unfinished peace process a cause of Lebanon's present lack of independence and hence of its present problems, he does not assert that the completion of the peace process will unavoidably reassert Lebanon's independence, thus eliminating these problems. Instead, he expresses uncertainty about the future of Lebanon, as he concludes by saying: "Whether the hostage will be released at the end of the peace process remains a central question."

Shams Inati, Associate Professor of Islamic Philosophy at Villanova University, addresses the recent changes introduced into the Lebanese educational system. Her essay opens with the assertion that education is the making of a country because it molds the country's new generations. Therefore it should never be ignored in any important discussion of Lebanon, as is usually done. She goes on to define the two main terms of her thesis, "education" and "integration." On the basis of these definitions, she declares that the recent transformation of the Lebanese educational system will not create desirable individual and social integration because it focuses heavily on vocations and practicalities to the exclusion of stressing linguistic, religious, and intellectual studies. Thus, the new system is aimed at preparing the Lebanese for the expected future of local and regional labor markets. She closes her discussion with the statement, "One cannot but wonder whether there is a political effort to deintellectualize the Lebanese, stripping them of the intellectual and linguistic superiority for which they have always been known in the region and turning them into laborers with strong bodies that can do the job and weak minds that can obey."

Atif Kubursi, Professor of Economics at McMaster University, begins his article by examining the causes of the past Lebanese economic success and of the civil war. He sees nothing miraculous about past economic success in Lebanon. Rather, he attributes it to traditional economic factors. He argues that Lebanon's current economic difficulties have been caused by (1) "the unmanaged mercurial successes" of the 1950s to the mid-1970s; (2) "the traumatic consequences of the civil war and the massive reconstruction effort that followed it," and (3) "the confessional structure of the economy." He believes that understanding past economic successes and the grounds on which they were based will help in understanding the economic causes and results of the war and the difficulties of reconstructing the economy thereafter, and in rebuilding the economy and society. The essay concludes with a recommendation for a new economic framework different from that employed by Hariri and one that could rebuild the Lebanese economy and society.

Sami Ofeish, Assistant Professor at Drexel University, takes up the issue of sectarianism. He states that the 1989 Ta'if Accord constituted a major turning point in the modern history of Lebanon. It signaled a successful attempt to end the civil war and constituted the basis for the emergence of Lebanon's "Second Republic." Although the 1990 constitutional amendments, drawing

mainly on the Accord, included statements that addressed and promised to resolve major causes for Lebanon's instability, they presented mixed signals regarding abolishing the sectarian system. Sectarianism and the sectarian system, in Ofeish's view, have been among the major tools for Lebanon's instability since the system's initiation in the mid-nineteenth century. He points out that they were used frequently by the elite as a mechanism for dividing the popular classes and diffusing their demands for reform. He adds that, although the Second Republic was founded on the premise that sectarianism and its system are destructive and should be abolished, they were used heavily by the ruling elite in the 1990-98 period. That elite has not taken any serious steps so far to eradicate sectarianism and its system, along with narrowing the socioeconomic gap, advancing equitable development among Lebanon's regions, and solidifying common grounds for initiating a unified national identity.

The volume concludes with a paper by Rania Masri, a Ph.D. candidate in Forestry at North Carolina State University. In her essay, Masri reviews and critiques the previous Lebanese authorities' management of the environment, and the effect of that government's environmental policies regarding land management and infrastructural development. She argues that Lebanese authorities have failed to create a holistic approach to environmental management. She states that land use planning is practically non-existent, resulting in the loss of fertile land and an increased burden on a weak infrastructure. In their hasty attempt to develop the infrastructure, she adds, the authorities have failed to treat waste adequately (both toxic and non-toxic wastes), failed to provide—or even attempt to provide—clean water for Lebanon's population, and used a carcinogen (asbestos) in infrastructural development. Masri concludes that the approach taken by the previous Lebanese authorities “may be a route to rebuilding Lebanon, but it is not a path toward Lebanon's rebirth.”

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