

Contents

Introduction	1
The Lebanese Polity 1943-1975	2
The Ta'if Accord: Ambiguous Identity Politics.....	6
Ta'if's Reforms: National Institutions?.....	7
Ta'if's Reforms: A National Identity?	10
Conclusion: Results of the Ta'if Accord Remain True to its Name	12
Bibliography.....	14

The Ta'if Accord 25 Years On: A Tool for National Unity or Business as Usual in Lebanon?

Introduction

Almost 90 years after its first Constitution, the Lebanese democracy – once hailed as an example of political enlightenment in the Arab World – has yet to consolidate. Just now, talks between the two largest groups in Lebanese politics, the coalitions led by the Future Movement and Hezbollah, are being held to ensure the election of a new President. The position has been vacant since May 2014, even though the National Assembly has voted on the matter six times to date. Meantime, a 25-year-old deadlock on the electoral law has led the same assembly to extend its own term twice.¹ Lawmakers reckon that the unstable security situation that has resulted from the war in Syria does not allow for an election to be held before 2017. Christians in towns bordering Syria bear the brunt of the situation: They fear that Islamic militants could have infiltrated the country disguised as refugees.² "He who doesn't have a gun is buying a gun", said a school teacher in a vivid description of events in his village.³ With memories of the 1975 Civil War in mind, and against the backdrop of growing animosity between pro-Saudi and pro-Iranian groups within Lebanon (motivated by the Saudi-led military campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels) rearming to protect one's family and property seems to be the most natural course of action.

Twenty-five years after militias were disbanded in Lebanon as a result of the 1989 Ta'if Accord, history is threatening to repeat itself. The Accord was negotiated to put an end to civil strife and political stalemate, to inject new momentum into the long abandoned call for abolishing sectarianism, and to re-establish the government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In short, it was document that was supposed to bring the Lebanese together as a sovereign nation. The current retreat into polarization, stalemate and rearmament shows that this goal is far from being met. And opinion leaders in Lebanon are asking why it is that a country like Israel, for instance, just about one hundred kilometres south of Beirut, is a stable

¹ (Holmes 2014)

² (Shaheen 2014)

³ (Salhani 2014)

country in spite of the staggering ethnic divisions in the country, whilst Lebanon explodes every time its parochial identities are reactivated.⁴ This chapter will show that Lebanon has suffered from chronic instability since independence because the crucial issue of national identity was left unresolved in 1943. Instead of incorporating this experience into the new constitutional document, the Ta'if Accord serves as a tool to maintain the status quo, perpetuating the country's vulnerability to identity-based regional upheavals.

This chapter will analyse the contents of the Accord and why it has failed to bring greater unity to Lebanon. The first section will provide the historical background to the accord, briefly discussing why Lebanon slid into civil war, briefly in 1958, and more dramatically in 1975. A second section elucidates how identity was managed in the first paragraphs of the Ta'if Accord, followed by a section on the institutional changes that it introduced. A final section speaks to the social base that the Ta'if Accord is set to operate in, and the difficulties stemming from a mismatch between its text and the country's social realities.

The Lebanese Polity 1943-1975

An economic report of the Lebanon of the early 1970s would likely read like this (Al-Attar 2015; Avakov 2015): The per capita GDP is only rivalled by the oil states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya; Lebanese citizens enjoy an extraordinarily high level of education; its liberal economy, ski resorts and long stretches of sandy beaches attract people and investment from all over the world; economic growth is solid, the tertiary sector is expanding steadily, the Lebanese Pound is strong and the country has a surplus in its balance of payment . It was called the Switzerland of the Middle East. Yet, exactly forty years ago, on April 13th, 1975, the Lebanese Civil War broke out, inaugurating 15 years of bloodshed and interrupting Lebanon's democratic success indefinitely. But how could this happen in a country so prosperous and successful? How could it happen in "Switzerland"?

Attempting to answer this question as a foreign observer is an almost presumptuous exercise. After all, the Lebanese themselves so strongly disagree on the events surrounding the war's outbreak that history lessons at Lebanese schools simply do not cover the event at all.⁵ Nonetheless, there seem to be three clear currents of thought among Lebanese and foreign observers alike. Three editorial articles printed in Lebanon's chief francophone daily, L'Orient

⁴ (Saghayeh 2015)

⁵ (Abou Taha 2015)

Le Jour, on the occasion of the war's fortieth anniversary, represent the most prevalent causal narratives. On the one hand, there are those who view the 1975 Civil War as the result of a class struggle. According to this version of events, Lebanon grew quickly but unequally, and a corrupt political class – itself a beneficiary of these inequalities – did not respond, thus forcing people to take matters into their own hands.⁶ On the other hand, there are those who believe that primordial identities, a lack of loyalty to the state, and a sectarian political class that did nothing to change this state of affairs were to blame.⁷ In other words, the system was a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. A third current points at exogenous factors, exporting causation to foreign actors.⁸ The war was triggered by a fight between Palestinian forces based in Lebanon and a Lebanese Christian militia. Furthermore, Syria and Israel were quick to intervene, causing the prolongation of the war and deepening the rift in an already divided population. Lastly, the creation of Hezbollah with the support of Iran added another divisive international dimension to the conflict.

The following paragraphs will show that these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the country's ethnic make-up coupled with a lack of loyalty to the state of Lebanon (nationalism/patriotism) was a deep, structural and recurrent cause for instability, while economic inequality was a more immediate cause or trigger.⁹ International intervention, in turn, was only possible because the Lebanese identified with these foreign actors and failed to defend the country's sovereignty.¹⁰ This is not to say that the underlying ethno-sectarian divisions were a sufficient cause for the war; surely economic inequalities, a corrupt and rigid government and international intervention added to an already tense situation to produce such a dramatic outcome. However, these factors could only cause such great upheaval because they connected with the struggle over Lebanese identity.

To begin, it must be noted that the idyllic description of Lebanon in the fictitious economic report above belies the existence of myriad sources of instability that existed alongside this positive image. In fact, shortly after independence in 1943, the identity crisis that would cause the temporary breakdown of the Lebanese democracy in 1958 began to brew. The 1943 National Pact was the unwritten agreement between Maronite leader Bishara Khoury and Sunni leader Riyad Suhail that established the power-sharing formula according to which

⁶ (Al-Attar 2015)

⁷ (Noun 2015)

⁸ (Gemayel 2015)

⁹ (Barakat 1979)

¹⁰ (Makdisi and Elbadawi 2011, 116)

Greater Lebanon was to be governed.¹¹ Based on the last census carried out under French auspices in 1932, Christians made up a majority of Greater Lebanon. As a result, parliament and public office would be distributed on a 6:5 basis between Christians and Muslims. The national identity issue, the issue of who the Lebanese people were, was deliberately left unsolved. Lebanon was not an "Arab country", it was one with an "Arab face". This definition was sufficiently vague to fit the diverse self-conceptions and national visions of all groups that had been absorbed into Greater Lebanon in 1926. It was somehow assumed that over time, Christians and Muslims would acquire the taste of being Lebanese.¹² What really happened is quite different. As one analyst put it, the multitude of Lebanese communities accommodated "their conflicts and interests within the confines of a system that promoted sectarian identities and loyalties *and opposed the development of belief in a common national fate*".¹³ It was a system that had been devised in opposition to something (French rule), lacking a core programme for the new nation to converge around.¹⁴

With the identity issue unresolved, the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s became an unsurmountable challenge to the country's stability. For many Muslims, Greater Lebanon was a French imposition that tore the country's people away from their natural brethren: the Arabs. The economic inequalities that developed during the course of the 1950s coincided – in part – with these cleavages. Thus Gamal Abdul Nasser's call on the oppressed to rebel against the established order found exceptionally fertile ground among the Lebanese Muslims. President Camille Chamoun was quick to take action, making sure that the 1957 elections would result in no Nasserite representation.¹⁵ The ensuing Civil War was soon brought to an end, and the system re-established to its *status quo ante*. While the situation of economic inequality certainly helped Nasserism, it is unclear that it would have sufficed to create a Civil War. After all, had Nasserism not connected with the deep divisions in Lebanese society, it might only have triggered a much less dangerous *ideological* struggle between socialists and liberals. As

¹¹ Greater Lebanon is a combination of Mount Lebanon – an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire composed of Druze and Maronite groups, engaged in centuries of power sharing – and the surrounding, majority Muslim districts. By absorbing these large swathes of Muslim majority lands, the Christian majority of Lebanon was put into danger, something which both Christians and the French mandatory power sought to prevent.

¹² (Khalidi 1983, 36)

¹³ (Barakat 1979, 6)

¹⁴ Maya Tudor has identified this negatively defined nationalism as one of the main reasons why Pakistan established an unstable autocracy. She contrasts this with India, where a positive, "programmatic" nationalism arose during the years immediately preceding independence. Having this core to converge around, Indians were able to resolve political conflicts post-independence more effectively, thus retaining democratic stability. (Tudor 2013)

¹⁵ (Khalidi 1983)

it was, President Chamoun, as a representative of the Western-leaning Maronite sect, viewed pan-Arabism as a threat to his sect's conception of Lebanon as an independent, sovereign country with a unique, Phoenician cultural heritage. It follows that the deeper roots of the crisis lay in the identity politics reflected in the 1943 Pact.

Even the rising inequalities that added to the strength of Nasserism cannot be viewed in isolation from the sectarian system inaugurated by the Pact. It was accompanied by a tacit agreement to avoid a review of the *status quo*. This meant not reviewing the quotas based on the 1932 census; it also meant not upsetting the parochial interest of the groups sharing power. As a result, the political system did not have the ability (or even the task) of distributing economic resources equitably, or of taking any other far reaching decisions that might have ameliorated the situation.¹⁶ This is exactly the situation in which democratization experts Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan rule out democratic consolidation, for a modern polity cannot function democratically when "identities and loyalties of the *demos* are so intense that no state exists".¹⁷ With no bond tying members of the polity to each other, arguments for redistribution are hard to come by.¹⁸ Why should the wealthier Christian community accept downward distribution of resources to less privileged members of the Shia community, when they have nothing in common? The Pact limited the political system to protecting the interests of individual communities, without providing the means to adapt the system to changing communal balances and interests.¹⁹

By 1975, when the latest Lebanese Civil War broke out, the political system had become woefully ill-fitted to the social realities. While the Christian population had fallen due to emigration and low fertility, the Muslim population had grown substantially. Especially the Shia population, a community which barely found representation in the 1943 system. Viewing Muslim political dominance as a threat, Christians preferred partition of the country over losing their privileges.²⁰ Under these circumstances, a political solution became ever more unlikely and the political climate ever more tense. On April 13th, 1975 armed clashes between the Christian Phalangist militia and Palestinian fighters broke out, sparking the 15-year long war that ensued. Palestinian demands of sovereignty from Israeli occupation were at the heart of

¹⁶ (Shils 1966)

¹⁷ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, 'Toward Consolidated Democracies', *Journal of Democracy*, 1996, 14–33 (p. 14).

¹⁸ (Miller 1995, 72)

¹⁹ (Barakat 1979)

²⁰ (Gordon 1980, 8)

pan-Arab ideology, and many Lebanese identified with this all-Arab cause more than they did with Lebanese Maronites, for instance. The latter demoted the country's Arab character, looking toward a West which had for so long deprived Arabs of their political independence. Each of Lebanon's sects – and even sub-groups thereof – looked to another foreign power for ideological and material support. Some advocated union with Syria, others fought alongside the Israeli Defense Forces or the Palestinians, and yet others allied with Iran. Once again, a lack of loyalty towards the state of Lebanon and the prioritization of sectarian over national interests conspired with socio-economic grievances and a volatile regional environment to bring down the country's democracy.

From 1975 to 1989, Lebanon became the textbook example of civil strife.²¹ Forty years later, the Lebanese know one thing: It should not happen ever again. But the political means of ensuring the democratic stability needed to prevent a repetition of history has not been put in place. The Ta'if Accord, which was to be the first step into the right direction, has not been able to eradicate the deep divisions that have led to repeated breakdowns of the Lebanese democracy.

The Ta'if Accord: Ambiguous Identity Politics

After over a decade of civil war, the warring Lebanese parties came together to sign the Ta'if Accord, with the help of their respective regional sponsors. The document's paternal rhetoric belied what many view as the real intent behind it. Whilst it speaks of Lebanon as the "homeland of all its sons, one land and one people"²², analysts have charged that Ta'if served nothing but the parochial interests of warring militiamen.²³ On paper, it emphasizes the necessity to abolish political confessionalism, to instil national sentiment through educational reform, and to disarm non-state actors and achieve full sovereignty. In this sense, it could be interpreted as a return to the rhetoric of the 1943 National Pact, which also expressed the need

²¹ The term "Lebanonization" has since widely been applied to situations of extreme communal conflict in Iraq, Syria and Palestine.

²² The Taif Accord, Art. 1:1

²³ Elisabeth Picard, for instance, explains how confessionalism became a self-evident organizational principle in post-war Lebanon, with Ta'if simply reflecting this fact. Militia members were co-opted with governmental posts, creating a new political elite that was more interested in securing gains for their own sect than in reaching consensus among the Lebanese. (Picard 1994, 3) Joseph Maila has lamented that Taif makes abolition of the confessional system a voluntary confessional task, thus making it improbable. (Maila 1992, 50) Daoud Khairallah puts it even more sharply: "The full extent of the accord's commitment to deconfessionalization boils down to this: It gives the confessional establishment an unguided, nonbinding, open-ended mandate to abolish itself". (Khairallah 1994, 263)

to strengthen national identity and to abolish confessionalism. Alas, in practice, the Ta'if Accord further entrenched the communal system that the Pact created. As political sociologist Joseph Maila put it, the 1926 Constitution put in place institutions that were then adapted to reflect the existing confessional make-up through the Pact. At Taif, it was the other way around: The confessional make-up dictated institutional design.²⁴ Indeed, it was a carefully negotiated agreement that gave each powerful player a piece of the pie without offering any practical guidance on how these parochial interests were supposed to be diluted in the future. Once again, it was assumed that the people would gradually acquire a taste for being Lebanese.

The following sections will show how neither the institutional reforms nor the socio-cultural dispositions in the Accord provide the tools to achieve its proclaimed goal of greater national unity. For the purposes of this analysis, the stipulations of the Ta'if Accord will be divided into two categories: 1) Institutional reforms (including electoral reform and recovery of state's monopoly on force); 2) Socio-cultural reforms (including references to identity and education).

Ta'if's Reforms: National Institutions?

The institutional imbalances enshrined in the National Pact of 1943, which strongly overrepresented the Christians of Lebanon, are often blamed for the outbreak of Civil War in 1975. As a result, Ta'if's preoccupation with institutional design comes as no surprise. What surprises is that Christian overrepresentation was only slightly attenuated in spite of the demographic changes that had taken place over the previous decades. There has not been an official census in the country since 1932, but it is estimated that Christians currently make up about 40% of the population.²⁵ Yet, Ta'if stipulates a 1:1 representation for Christians and Muslims on all levels of government. To account for a rise in relative Muslim numeric significance, the Accord reduced the powers of the Maronite President, whilst increasing those of the Sunni Prime Minister and the Shiite Speaker of Parliament. In reflecting what American University of Beirut professor Hilal Khashan has dubbed "the Lebanese confessional mind"²⁶, analysts of different confessional groups disagree on how fair this redistribution of power really was. Muslim authors would say that the President still has unjustifiable powers, such as the prerogative to ask the cabinet to reconsider resolutions before issuing them. Maronites would

²⁴ (Donohue n.d., 2524)

²⁵ (Harris 2009, 86; *The Lebanese Demographic Reality* 2013, 13)

²⁶ (Khashan 1992)

counter that the President has been placed under the tutelage of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, even losing the position of commander of the armed forces.²⁷ Proportional rather than egalitarian representation was chosen for the distribution of the remaining positions of the executive among individual sects. This was to ensure that Druze, Armenian, Christian Orthodox and other minorities were adequately represented.

The unicameral Chamber of Deputies is likewise elected on a 1:1 basis between Christians and Muslims, with proportional representation for denominations. To attenuate the divisive potential of sectarian political representation, an apparently lucid compromise was reached regarding future elections: With Ta'if, the province (*mohafazah*) became the electoral district. This was larger than the pre-war electoral district (*caza*), but much smaller than taking the country as a single district.²⁸ It was a formula of compromise between Christians – who called for the establishment of homogeneous, autonomous regions within Lebanon – and Muslims, who sought proportional representation on a national level to ensure their political dominance. It was also a way of creating cross-cutting cleavages. In theory, campaigning in provinces would force candidates to present broad electoral programmes, geared at all communities within their districts.

In practice, as of the latest elections in 2009, only 50% of provinces elected representatives of different sects. In many multi-member districts, all seats were assigned to the same sect.²⁹ A district with three Christian representatives and a majority Christian population cannot contribute to national unity. Especially if this pattern is repeated in half of the country's districts. This amounts to returning to the pre-war *caza* system, which Ta'if was supposed to overhaul. At the same time, results in multi-confessional districts give no more reason for optimism: After the 2000 elections, Christians complained that most of their MPs were elected by Muslim votes.³⁰ It is true that such election results show the ability of Christian candidates to speak to Muslims as well as Muslim voters' willingness to be represented by Christians. Thus, these are valuable examples of cooperation among the Lebanese. However, it also renders Christian votes ineffective, thus risking their alienation from the system. After all, where elections follow this pattern, it amounts to the alternative of proportional representation with Muslim dominance that was likewise rejected at Ta'if.

²⁷ (Maila 1992)

²⁸ (Maila 1992, 68)

²⁹ (IFES Lebanon Briefing 2009, 3)

³⁰ (Arsenian Ekmekji 2012, 7)

With the executive and the legislative divided along sectarian lines, it would seem absurd to expect these bodies to foster unity among the armed forces. Militaries, especially the infantry, are a central element of nationalist discourses worldwide. They embody patriotism and a love of country that cuts across communal differences. The common understanding is that the Lebanese military completely disintegrated during the Civil War, turning into an instrument of the Maronite government.³¹ While acknowledging the army's fragility, other experts provide a more differentiated analysis of the army's role during the war. According to military expert Oren Barak, the army continued to call for national unity throughout the war, instilling a sense of loyalty in its members, and even continuing to pay the salaries of those who had defected and joined sectarian militias. Contrary to conventional wisdom, then, the Lebanese army was the only institution that managed to retain a measure of unity that could then be re-established after the war.³²

If this view is correct, the credit for turning the Lebanese army into the trusted and effective guarantor of internal (if not external) security that it is today may not entirely go to the fathers of the Ta'if Accord. Nevertheless, even the most optimistic accounts report that the army was divided into homogenous Muslim and Christian brigades by the end of the war, and that it had lost its legitimacy, owing to its excessive support of the Presidency.³³ As a result, massive reforms were needed to improve the institution's efficacy and legitimacy. The Ta'if Accord provided for the unification, preparation and training of the armed forces, for the explicit purpose of countering the Israeli threat.³⁴ By 2004, the rebuilt Lebanese army had become much more representative: 47% of recruits were now Christian and 53% Muslim,³⁵ roughly mirroring population numbers.

This has clearly paid off. The latest wave of the Arab Barometer Survey (2013) shows that 81% of Lebanese trust the army to a great or a medium extent. This level of trust is impressive if compared with the 69% who absolutely do *not* trust the cabinet and the 61% who absolutely do *not* trust the parliament. Trust in the army is identical for all groups except Sunnis, who feel more neutral about the institution.³⁶ When it comes to civilian government, by contrast, public opinion is split along sectarian lines: Christians are more likely to trust the

³¹ (Nerguizian 2009, 4)

³² An extensive review of the army's development throughout the Civil War can be found in: (Barak 2010)

³³ (Barak 2010, 99)

³⁴ *The Taif Accord III.C.3*

³⁵ (Nerguizian 2009, 9)

³⁶ ("Arab Barometer Survey, Wave III" 2013)

President; Sunnis are more supportive of the Cabinet.³⁷ It follows that the army is an institution that unites Lebanon's divided public opinion. Furthermore, the army has been able to remain neutral throughout the political crises of the past years. Thus, overall, Ta'if has inaugurated a period of renewed unity among the armed forces. This could be related to the fact that the army is no longer under the leadership of the Maronite President but rather under that of the multi-confessional Cabinet. It is one of the great achievements of the Accord and may well turn into an indispensable pillar of stability.

Ta'if's Reforms: A National Identity?

Both the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Accord of 1989 make it sound as if institutions operated in a vacuum. The texts place great emphasis on institutional engineering, and at the same time on the need to eliminate these very institutions later on, in order to achieve political deconfessionalization. As the outbreak of the Civil War showed, elite pacts only hold up when they are built on compliant social bases. Consequently, even if an elite pact for institutional deconfessionalization was implemented, its success would depend on the transformation of political values among the people. Reflecting upon the lessons learned from the War, columnist Fady Noun wrote that what is required "is not the change of the political system that some advocate; it is a change of history".³⁸ It would require creating a Lebanese identity that members of all sects can identify with, rendering proportional representation or majoritarian electoral systems more acceptable in the future. Only in this way can a national democratic government consolidate. The Ta'if Accord includes only two references in this direction: The identity of the Lebanese state is more clearly delineated, and the need of an educational reform geared towards greater national unity is expressed.

Whether Lebanon is Phoenician, Arab or quite simply Lebanese seems to be an unsolvable debate. These various interpretations of the country's identity have been used as a bargaining chip by competing sects. In this way, Christians have conceded the Arab character of Lebanon (demanded by Sunnis) whilst Muslims conceded Lebanese independence (demanded by Christians).³⁹ While Ta'if is a continuation of this compromise, it also proves growing Muslim participation in the Lebanese constitutional design. On the one hand, the Accord clearly states that "Lebanon is Arab in Identity and Belonging". The wording here is

³⁷ ("Arab Barometer Survey, Wave III" 2013)

³⁸ (Noun 2015)

³⁹ (Maila 1992, 13)

much stronger than the 1943 wording of a country "with an Arab face". On the other hand, the Ta'if Accord emphasizes strong brotherly relations between Lebanon and Syria, whilst dedicating a whole chapter to strengthening Lebanon against Israel (the Maronites' ally). Right after the Civil War, a survey showed that only an average of 5.5% of all Muslims identified themselves as Lebanese, whilst almost 50% of all Christians did so (close to 85% of Maronites). Only 5.6% of all Christians said their identity was Arab, compared with over 80% of all Muslims.⁴⁰

It seems obvious then, that the Accord settled the issue of identity – at least on the constitutional level – in favour of the Muslim majority. Nevertheless, governmental policy has not been coherent with this constitutional definition. A case in point is the reconstruction project for post-1989 Beirut, led by former (Sunni) Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's construction company, Solidere. Its main objective was attracting international investment to the capital by emphasizing Lebanon's free market, Western, commercial – indeed, Phoenician – tradition.⁴¹ In doing so, the project created and recreated Lebanese history, and a discourse of identity, that stands in complete opposition to the wording of Ta'if. Rather, it emphasizes those elements that the Maronites have long viewed as characteristic of Lebanon. While reproducing the destabilizing contradictions in Lebanese identity, these projects also foreshadowed an easing of tensions between the Christian and Muslim perceptions of Lebanon. In fact, since the Cedar Revolution of 2005, following Rafik Hariri's assassination, the main identity divide is no longer Arab *versus* Lebanese. Rather, Sunni Lebanese have been pitted against Shia Lebanese on the matter of Syrian-Lebanese relations. The war that has raged in Syria in the past few years, as well as the worldwide deepening of Sunni-Shia animosity, have strengthened this rift and shown how sensitive Lebanese identity remains to regional politics.

If what British-Lebanese scholar Rosemary Sayigh has called Lebanon's "split personality"⁴² is ever to be remedied, the state has to begin – after producing a unifying national discourse – with the primary mechanisms of socialization. In order to change the history, not

⁴⁰ (Khashan 1992, 108) Another interesting finding are the responses about Lebanese heritage. 51% of Muslims and 10% of Christians thought that Lebanon's roots were Arab. 45% of Muslims and 1.8% of Christians thought that Lebanon's roots were Islamic. 1.7% of Muslims and 45% of Christians felt that its roots were Greco-Roman, and 2.4% of Muslims and 43% of Christians thought they were Phoenician.

⁴¹ Tarek Saad Ragab, 'The Crisis of Cultural Identity in Rehabilitating Historic Beirut-Downtown', *Cities*, 28 (2011), 107–14 (pp. 107–114); C Nagel, 'Ethnic Conflict and Urban Redevelopment in Downtown Beirut', *Growth and Change*, 31 (2000), 211–34 (pp. 211–234).

⁴² Quoted in Yasir Suleiman, 'Charting the Nation: Arabic and the Politics of Identity', *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 2006, p. 129

just the institutions, as Fady Noun (cited above) said, greater control over school curricula is indispensable. In an attempt to do so, a new civics textbook was introduced by the Ministry of Education as part of a major educational reform in 1997. Its use is compulsory across all schools and levels of education in Lebanon. Field research carried out at schools in 2007 showed the emergence of a national identity among year 11 students, albeit in a very small, non-representative sample.⁴³

What could otherwise have been a step into the right direction, however, is encountering formidable obstacles. The vast majority of educational institutions are still confessional either formally, by name, or informally, by composition.⁴⁴ Ta'if confirmed and protected this *status quo*: Freedom of private and religious education was retained. Interactions between members of different confessional groups are still very limited, with groups geographically divided, attending confessional schools and marrying mostly within their own sect. In a study from the year 2000, more than 50% of Maronites said they would not want to live in the same neighbourhood as Muslims.⁴⁵ The 2013 World Value Survey found that 33.8% of respondents would not want to have someone of a different religion as their neighbour.⁴⁶ Of course, there are arenas in which members of different religious communities interact with each other peacefully and cooperatively. A recent poll even showed that support for optional civil marriage – another good indicator to measure inter-communal relations – is at an all-time high, with 51% of respondents supporting it.⁴⁷ But as an army officer said: At the end of the day, everyone will return to their own town, village or city, where they cannot avoid Lebanon's sectarian logic.⁴⁸

Conclusion: Results of the Ta'if Accord Remain True to its Name

Ironically, the name Ta'if (city in Saudi Arabia where the Accord was signed) is etymologically related to the Arabic word for sect (Ta'ifah). The root of both words means going around something in circles, versing around a core. People in Ta'if are Muslims who, in their pilgrimage to Mecca, move around the Ka'bah in circles. Members of a community or sect all congregate around core features that they share. The word can thus be taken to unify a

⁴³ (Akar 2007, 2–8)

⁴⁴ UNICEF, *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding. Case Study : Lebanon*, 2011, p. 36.

⁴⁵ (Haddad 2001, 473)

⁴⁶ ("The World Value Survey, Wave 6" 2014)

⁴⁷ ("Istitla'a Al-Dauliyeh Lil Mu'alumat: Al-Zawag Al-Madani" 2014)

⁴⁸ Quoted in (Nerguzian 2009, 10)

people, but it can also be taken to split people into disparate groups, each with its own core. Which meaning of the term does the Ta'if Accord best reflect? This chapter has shown that the identity politics prescribed by the Accord as well as the institutional mechanisms that it introduced have served to perpetuate the divisive tendencies in Lebanese society. The Accord introduced reforms to ensure greater representativeness for the country's institutions. Nonetheless, even according to the most conservative of estimates, Christians remain overrepresented. This has continued to polarize the Lebanese, between Muslims who still feel underrepresented, and Christians who jealously guard their prerogatives. Moreover, the Shi'ite political identity that awoke during the War has become ever more salient. This has caused further rifts among the Lebanese population and has opened avenues for a renewed encroachment upon Lebanese sovereignty by competing regional powers.

If Ta'if's institutional mechanisms favoured the Christians relative to their demographic might, then the Accord's definition of Lebanese identity was a clear victory for the Muslims. Lebanon is decisively Arab now, an affront to the Christians who continue holding on to a distinctive Lebanese identity. Belying its rhetoric about the planned creation of a national discourse, the Ta'if Accord failed to introduce the necessary mechanisms for its implementation: Private education has been retained and the media remains free to work in support of parochial interests. Though the 1997 educational reform has had some success in implementing a unified civics curriculum, much remains to be done in the field of socialization. Not the least is the very creation of a national discourse that is acceptable to Lebanese of all sects, and that can then be spread through education and the media. The army's standing, Solidere's Beirut, and national sentiments aroused by conflict with Israel and the influx of Syrian refugees are a beginning. But these opportunities have to be seized, lest they fade without a trace.⁴⁹ A discussion about Lebanon's history is required to develop a shared discourse, and such a discussion no longer seems impossibly controversial. In fact, it seems as if only the elites were adamant on silencing debates on the matter, whilst lively discussions surrounding the war are commonplace among the people.

The overall balance for the Ta'if Accord is negative: It has created a fragile peace based on a coexistence of disparate groups that is set to break apart if deeper reforms fail to follow. As a result, it has created no more than the National Pact did and is in no better condition to

⁴⁹ (Noun 2015) For Noun, the 14th of March 2005 was an occasion at which many Lebanese desired to act as one nation. Instead of seizing the moment, politicians took control of the situation and managed it following the habitual, sectarian logic.

Zaha Kheir. "The Ta'if Accord 25 Years On". DPhil Candidate in Politics. University of Oxford.
Transfer of Status. Chapter. 2015

ensure democratic stability in the country. Even though legally the identity question seems to have been resolved in favour of the majority – which could potentially increase stability – this has not changed the underlying social divisions that have time and again led to democratic crises and even breakdown. Putting all eggs into the institutional basket as politicians have done since independence will not lead to greater stability. The Lebanese problem is one of national identity, one of the definition of the democratic *demos*, not one of institutional engineering. And as long as the development of a national identity remains a taboo, democratic stability in Lebanon will remain elusive.

Bibliography

- Abou Taha, Souha. 2015. "Ce Qui S'Est Passe Le 13 Avril 1975? Je N'en Ai Aucune Idee." *L'Orient Le Jour*.
- Akar, Bassel. 2007. "Citizenship Education in Lebanon: An Introduction into Students' Concepts and Learning Experiences." *Educate* 7(2): 2–18.
- Al-Attar, Sahar. 2015. "Que Reste-T-Il de La <<Suisse Du Moyen-Orient>>?" *L'Orient Le Jour*.

Zaha Kheir. "The Ta'if Accord 25 Years On". DPhil Candidate in Politics. University of Oxford.
Transfer of Status. Chapter. 2015

"Arab Barometer Survey, Wave III." 2013.

Arsenian Ekmekji, Arda. 2012. *Confessionalism and Electoral Reform in Lebanon*.

Avakov, Alexander. 2015. *Two Thousand Years of Economic Statistics. Volume 2: By Country*. New York: Algora.

Barak, Oren. 2010. *The Lebanese Army: A National Institution in a Divided Society*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Barakat, Halim. 1979. "The Social Context." In *Lebanon in Crisis*, eds. Edward Haley and Lewis Snider. New York: Syracuse University Press, 3–20.

Donohue, John. "Changing the Lebanese Constitution: A Postmodern History." *Cardozo Law Review* 30(6): 2509–33.

Gemayel, Amine. 2015. "Qu'Avons-Nous Retenu." *L'Orient Le Jour*.

Gordon, David C. 1980. *Lebanon: The Fragmented Nation*. London: Hoover Institution Press.

Haddad, Simon. 2001. "A Survey of Maronite Christian Socio-Political Attitudes in Postwar Lebanon." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12(4): 465–79.

Harris, William. 2009. *The New Face of Lebanon. History's Revenge*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

Holmes, Oliver. 2014. "Lebanese Parliament Extends Own Term Till 2017 Amid Protests." *Reuters*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/05/us-lebanon-parliament-idUSKBN0IP18T20141105> (January 6, 2015).

IFES Lebanon Briefing. 2009. "Lebanon's 2009 Parliamentary Elections. The Lebanese Electoral System."

"Istitla'a Al-Dauliyeh Lil Mu'alimat: Al-Zawag Al-Madani." 2014. *The Monthly Magazine*.

Khairallah, Daoud. 1994. "Secular Democracy: A Viable Alternative to the Confessional System." In *Peace for Lebanon? From War to Reconstruction*, ed. Deidre Collings. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Khalidi, Walid. 1983. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Khashan, Hilal. 1992. *Inside the Lebanese Confessional Mind*. Maryland: University Press of America.

Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan. 1996. "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 7: 14–33.

Maila, Joseph. 1992. *The Document of National Understanding: A Commentary*. Oxford.

Zaha Kheir. "The Ta'if Accord 25 Years On". DPhil Candidate in Politics. University of Oxford.
Transfer of Status. Chapter. 2015

Makdisi, Samir, and Ibrahim Elbadawi, eds. 2011. *Democracy in the Arab World: Explaining the Deficit*. New York: Routledge.

Miller, David. 1995. *On Nationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Nagel, C. 2000. "Ethnic Conflict and Urban Redevelopment in Downtown Beirut." *Growth and Change* 31: 211–34.

Nerguizian, Aram. 2009. *The Lebanese Armed Forces: Challenges and Opportunities in Post-Syria Lebanon*. Washington, D.C.

Noun, Fady. 2015. "13 Avril: Le Liban Est Un Comptoir Dont Nous Sommes Les Changeurs." *L'Orient Le Jour*.

Picard, Elizabeth. 1994. "Les Habits Neufs Du Communautarisme Libanais." *Cultures et Conflits* 25(4): 49–70.

Ragab, Tarek Saad. 2011. "The Crisis of Cultural Identity in Rehabilitating Historic Beirut-Downtown." *Cities* 28(1): 107–14.

Saghayeh, Hazem. 2015. "2014-2015: Alwaqa' Akthar Khayalan." *Al-Hayat*.

Salhani, Justin. 2014. "Ras Baalbek's Christians Take up Arms." *The Daily Star*.

Shaheen, Kareem. 2014. "Near Batroun, Fear of Syrians Prompts Patrols." *The Daily Star*.

Shils, Edward. 1966. "The Prospects of Lebanese Civility." In *Politics in Lebanon*, ed. Leonard Binder. New York: Wiley, 1–13.

Suleiman, Yasir. 2006. "CHARTING THE NATION: ARABIC AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26.

The Lebanese Demographic Reality. 2013. Alexandira, Egypt.

The Taif Accord.

"The World Value Survey, Wave 6." 2014.

Tudor, Maya. 2013. *The Promise of Power. The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

UNICEF. 2011. *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding. Case Study:Lebanon*.