Lebanon: In the Middle of Violence

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Abstract

Socio-political theorists and historians have pored over Lebanon’s record of internecine strife and foreign incursion, and posited sundry causal factors, including extraneous meddling by Western powers, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, regional instability, Lebanese culpability in instigating internal conflict, intercommunal confrontation, ethnicity, and religion. This article will examine four wars: (i) the 1860 civil war; (ii) the 1958 civil war; (iii) the 1975-1990 civil war; and (iv) the 2006 war with Israel. Although there have been intervening skirmishes, these conflicts represent significant conflagrations within ‘recent’ historical reach. The article will summarise each war and seek to calibrate main causes according to a categorical scale; but the overarching question will be: how culpable is religion? With the rise of the so-called Islamic State, the plight of Middle Eastern Christians, and the escalating tensions within the Sunni-Shi’a dynamic, religion is perceived in some quarters as a primary causal factor of regional conflict. At the same time, Lebanon presents something of an historical paradigm of interreligious pluralism. There are a number of analyses of conflict in Lebanon. This article will provide an overview for those who are less familiar with the subject area and with Lebanon’s internal machinations.

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1. Lebanon: A Sociological Snapshot
There is something slightly underhand about lifting an epigraph from someone else’s work, but the one that appears in the opening pages of David Hirst’s book (Hirst: 5) is sufficiently apposite not to be ignored. It is from Freya Stark’s *Letters from Syria* and encapsulates the region and its people.

“The people are all charming to me. They are not really Eastern, or anything: just a poor fringe of a people between Islam and the sea, doomed to be pawns in whatever politics are played here…I haven’t yet come across one spark of national feeling: it is all sects and hatreds and religion. I read the Maronite mass book the other day, and felt the prayer ‘to be saved from bloodshed’ take on a particular meaning in this country of massacres. And it is a grand country, too.” (Freya Stark, 1942)

Lebanon is a state, which evokes differing reactions and gives form to a range of impressions. Some Westerners will recall a time when it was known as ‘the Switzerland of the Middle East’ or ‘the Paris of the Middle East’, denoting a kind of European liberality, where Westerners could enjoy a sophisticated and recreational lifestyle. For others, the very mention of Lebanon or Beirut conjures images from the 1970s and 1980s of mindless atrocities, searing intercommunal hatred, and effective anarchy; a time when sybaritic lifestyles had all but vanished, and the lives of Westerners were seriously endangered. Like all generalisations, these polarised impressions may have some degree of veracity, but they may be too heavily adulterated with misplaced emphases, misunderstanding, and plain hyperbole.

Lebanon has an East-West face, which is carved out of the Arab East, although the subsequent ‘facial characteristics’ are tempered by historical links with Europe. Partly, this is due to its geographical position on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean, which allows it to act as a gateway for Westerners to access the Arab Middle East and the Holy Land. As the birthplace of Christianity, there is an enduring fascination with the Middle East amongst a predominantly Christian West, which may go some way to explaining why there appears to be an umbilical cord linking West and East, aptly illustrated by the Maronites’ long association with Europe. As a major Christian denomination in Lebanon, the Maronites have long recognised papal authority,¹ becoming part of the global Catholic community, which in turn, afforded them membership of a ‘European club’. France, historically the Maronites’ protector, took over Lebanon and Syria as mandated countries following the end of the First World War and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, thereby cementing this European link.

There are, however, other Christian denominations within Lebanon who have not such developed bonds. The Greek Orthodox Church, for example, and the Melkites, along with

¹ Twelfth century. That said, respect was not, it seems, reciprocated, at least not at first. Salibi claims they were seen as “an outlandish communion of Eastern Christian heresiarchs who had entered into union with Rome while under Crusader rule, probably because they had found it politically expedient at the time” (Salibi, 1988: 72-3).
the Syriac Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox. Indeed, some of the Greek Orthodox feel their identity is more ‘Arab’, while other Christian denominations may resist any attempt to classify them as Arab, but who are equally keen not to be identified with the Maronite Church or with Maronite thinking.

2. Lebanon: An Historical Snapshot
Originally occupied in antiquity by the Phoenicians, the ports and towns they established were founded on maritime trade. This flourishing community lost its independence in the sixth century BCE to the Persians, who, two hundred years later, were defeated by Alexander the Great. On Alexander’s death, the empire he had built was divided amongst his generals and the area that we know today as Lebanon became part of the Hellenistic Seleucid kingdom. It was this region that fell under Roman rule until the Arab conquest in the seventh century CE by a nascent Islamic empire (Salibi, 1988: 5).

The Arab armies swept westward and up into Europe, occupying Palestinian holy sites and provoking armed response from European mercenaries, who, during the Middle Ages, ventured to recapture sacred sites and reabsorb them into a Christian ‘empire’. But these Crusaders were not without some indigenous support; the Maronites were among those who were not only hospitable, but acted as positive facilitators for the invading forces.

Prior to this influx of European interlopers, the Islamic empire had experienced rapid growth, first under the Umayyads in Damascus and then under the Abbasids in Baghdad. In the early eleventh century, around the time of the first Crusade, Seljuk Turks advanced from the east to usurp the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad and reduce the caliph to a “puppet” (Hitti: 476). By the fourteenth century, the Seljuks were in decline and the arrival of Mongols on the eastern frontiers led to the dissolution of their empire and its fragmentation into independent states. The ruler of one such state in the north west of Anatolia was Osman, a dynastic forebear of the Ottomans, whose military ambitions led to the fall of Byzantium in 1453 and the eventual consolidation of an Ottoman Empire. It was this empire that was to grow in power from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, by which time it started to experience substantial decline. Having allied themselves with the Germans during the First World War, the Ottomans were finally vanquished and the empire dismantled.

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2 There are eighteen officially recognised sects in Lebanon.
3 The Lebanese branch of Orthodoxy, which comes under the patriarchy of The Church of Antioch, has taken pride in its Arabism. See, for example, references to their Arab roots in Ignatius IV, 2008. Owing to its dualistic Janus-like profile – looking both West and East – other Christian denominations would bridle at any insinuation of Arab heritage.
4 See Salibi, who makes the comment that, in the eleventh century, when the Crusaders appeared, “…the main body of the Maronites in northern Mount Lebanon rallied around them...” (Salibi 1988: 13). See also Hitti, who refers to how the Maronites provided “…guides and a limited number of recruits.” (Hitti: 639).
During their long reign, the Ottomans occupied a broad stretch of territory, including the whole of Anatolia, southern Europe, parts of eastern Europe, North Africa, and swathes of the Middle East, including Lebanon. The Ottomans ruled this substantial territory from a central bureaucracy in Istanbul, but in far flung pockets of the empire like Lebanon, this proved impractical if not impossible. Instead, the Ottomans adopted a more pragmatic policy; they recognised local families and their chiefs, in effect granting them impunity and a certain level of self-rule so long as they continued to submit revenue and did not threaten trade or military routes. Another example of the Ottomans’ governmental strategy was to set families and clans, even family members, against each other to maintain a balance between “imperial and local interests” (Hourani: 226). This divide and rule policy is arguably a causal factor in the first of our conflicts.

3. 1860: Christian-Druze Confrontation

Perhaps it is too easy, even fatuous, to trace the intersectarian disaster of 1975-1990\(^5\) to events that occurred a little over a century before, but the parallels are striking. Not so much with regard to direct causes – clearly, specific eruptions are founded on unique historical circumstances – but it is the generic similarities within patterns of violence that create common denominators – for example, tradition and memory. A descriptive analysis of events leading up to 1860 may single out identity, power, majority-minority paradigms, but these elements are responsible for many bloody confrontations throughout the world and throughout history. Within the Lebanese theatre of confrontation, there is, perhaps, an additional element – religion.

In the conquered territories, the Ottomans ruled by way of a millet system. This was a means of governing their subjects according to their religion (Cleveland & Bunton: 44-5). Pragmatic as well as systematic, it was something of a solution in a pluralistic empire. While Islam remained the dominant religion of the state, people were permitted to practise their faith; the matrix of Ottoman society, however, was a hierarchical one and in Lebanon this resulted in a top layer of Muslims and a lower, albeit protected, layer that included Christians and Jews. The freedom accorded to these protected groups (dhimmis) carried with it a form of social ‘apartheid’, such as exemption from military service and exclusion from administrative roles. It could additionally mean the aggrandisement of Muslims, an example of which evolved on Mount Lebanon where ‘aristocratic’ Druze overlords held sway over the Christian community (Traboulsi: 3-4). Yet, this was not, at this point, an interreligious confrontation.\(^6\)

\(^5\) The third conflict under discussion here.
\(^6\) Not only Christians suffered under Druze landlords; Druze, subject to the same landlords, fared no better. On the other hand, Christian feelings of injustice extended to Christian overlords in Kisrawān, an area north of Beirut, where Maronites were smarting under the yoke of Maronite overlords (Salibi, 1999: 80. See also Traboulsi: 29).
The situation is made more Machiavellian by the Ottomans. It might be supposed that they would have favoured the Druze, and there were examples of their doing so in the past – for instance, during the civil war of 1845, an ‘alliance’ was made with the Druze against the Maronites, although this has been described as a “marriage of convenience” (Abraham: 63). Yet the Ottomans in a policy of divide and rule, ultimately favoured no one, purposely avoiding any possibility of creating a ‘top dog’, who might then have threatened Ottoman hegemony (Abraham: 63.).

At the root of Christian disquiet was their feudalistic, socio-economic conditions. But it was the rebellion against the Maronite Khāzin sheikhs in Kisrawān that encouraged peasantry throughout the country, notably in the Chouf, the enclave of the Druze. Galvanised into action by priests (Salibi, 1988: 114), the Maronites began to prepare for action. Citing a report by Malcolm Kerr, Salibi highlights a putatively deliberate attempt to incite interreligious enmity. Kerr writes of “a collision between two pack-animals one of which was driven by a Christian and the other by a Druse [sic]” (Salibi 1999: 88; Kerr: 55-7).

Elsewhere, protest was sporadic and the violence that ensued had a slow build, but it reached an unstoppable momentum. Christians in towns and villages began to organise themselves into what amounts to militia groups, complete with bespoke uniform; the Druze, on the other hand, although they too were preparing for conflict, did so less openly (Salibi, 1999: 88-9). They were clearly anticipating a coordinated assault, and before the Christians got into their stride, they pre-emptively and ruthlessly cut down all protest and closed down all opposition.

Once instigated, the attacks and massacres were mindless and merciless in their savagery. Salibi argues that the Druze, knowing they were outnumbered by Christians and, fearing reinforcements arriving from the north, embarked on a series of pre-emptive strikes, attacking villages and towns (Salibi, 1999: 93). Incidents of terrible violence followed in various parts of the country. After an assurance “from Sa‘īd Janbalāt, the supreme Druze leader…[the Christians] had all gone about their daily work and were busy attending to their silk crop” when the Druze attacked (Salibi, 1999: 95). Indiscriminate burning, looting and killing were rampant, and, those that could, fled south towards Sidon. Here, they were not permitted to enter and were left outside the town limits, prey to Sunni and Shi’ite robbers (Salibi, 1999: 95). Inside the town, the Muslim inhabitants, hearing of the success of the Druze “began to taunt the defenceless Christians…and threaten them with massacre”, their fate taking a turn for the better when “a British warship outside Sidon…and imposed order on the town.” (Salibi, 1999: 96)

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7 See Samir Khalaf, who believes that social unrest at this time was caused by overbearing policies of landlords. “On at least three occasions – 1820, 1840 and 1857 – peasants and commoners were incited to rebel against some of the repressive abuses of feudal society.” (Khalaf, 2012: 45).
With a massacre at Dayr al-Qamar, the violence was brought to an end. It took just four weeks to produce a toll of eleven thousand Christians killed and in excess of a hundred thousand displaced (Salibi, 1999: 106). However, persecution continued for many fugitive Christians, some of whom had fled to Beirut where they were taunted or threatened (Salibi, 1999: 106). This latter action, coming at the end of so much bloodshed and, what amounted to, ethnic cleansing, persuaded many to leave for the safe havens of the Maronite north, while others, who were able, migrated to Greece and Egypt (Salibi, 1999: 106). Meanwhile, news of the massacres had reached Europe and it was the French public who demanded intervention; but before the French government, in collusion with Britain, could hatch a plan, a peace deal was struck (Salibi, 1999: 107), recognising Druze supremacy.

3.1 Roots of Conflict

Does this war qualify as a clash of ethnicities in the sense that Christians were, to some extent, under an umbrella of Western protection, whereas Muslim interests were prioritised by the Ottoman government?\(^8\) Christians, although in a subsidiary position within Ottoman society, had nonetheless prospered, thanks to Ottoman decrees of 1839 and 1856, which were designed to create greater equality in the subject lands of the empire (Cleveland & Bunton: 84).\(^9\) On the back of this attempt at egalitarianism, Christians had forged profitable alliances with Europeans, even establishing educational establishments and, in the eyes of the Druze and Sunnis, rising above their permitted status (Cleveland & Bunton: 84). As a result, it was not only the envy of wealthy, internationally connected Christians, but their social equality that appeared to enrage Muslims. The Druze saw themselves as “champions of Islam”, which gained them widespread support amongst the population and some political sympathy from the Turks \textit{in situ} (Salibi, 1999: 94).

On this evidence alone, it is hard to ignore a religious element in these divisions; on the other hand, it could be argued that, in this context, religion merely designated identity, and was devoid of theological underpinning. Nonetheless, Salibi cites an account of a Druze family that had been watching and waiting fifteen years, since the civil war of 1845, to avenge the murder of one of their family members (Salibi, 1999: 92). Although this may not be convincing evidence of religious prejudice and perhaps was more tribalistic, Salibi highlights another episode (Salibi 1999: 98). The Druze had managed to intercept a letter, which had been written by the Orthodox Bishop of Tyre, giving wholehearted support to a united Christian front to eradicate the Druze, declaring that by doing so, the land of their Christian forefathers would be returned to them. The reaction of the Druze was scarcely

\(^8\) It may be regarded as somewhat bold to introduce ethnicity in a work that includes communality and religion, but see Khalaf, who, citing Horowitz, is prepared to use the term with more flexibility. “Of course, technically speaking, communal and confessional attachments are not ‘ethnic’ in character, if by that is meant that the assignment of special or distinct status within a culture or social system is arrived at on the basis of purely racial or physical characteristics. But if ‘ethnicity’ is broadened to incorporate variable traits associated with religion, communal, ancestral affiliations, dialect and other behavioral and subcultural distinctions, then confessional and sectarian identities may well assume some ethnic attributes.” (Khalaf, 2012: 66; Horowitz, 1985).

\(^9\) Ottoman attempts at some degree of egalitarianism were brought about by European pressure.
surprising. Other than outrage, it exposed their (the Druze's) conviction that this conflict was rooted in religion. As reported by Churchill, their apparent response was: “This then is a war of religion... so let it be... The country is ours or theirs.” (Salibi, 1999: 98; Churchill: 159)

European interference could be construed as positive – the British navy’s quelling of hostility off the coast of Sidon; and France and Britain's preparation for intervention, admittedly on the Christian side. But subtle and not so subtle pressure had been put on the Ottomans by European Powers. Weakened by debt to European banks, subject to internal stagnation, and slow to modernise, the Ottomans could only acquiesce to European demands to facilitate trade and grant more equitable treatment of Christians within the subject lands of the empire; and eleven years after the 1821 Greek rebellion, Christian Greece became an internationally recognised independent state under the protection of Britain, France, and Russia. French troops had also been stationed in the Chouf, while Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia formed an international commission under the presidency of Fu‘ād Pasha in Beirut to discuss the future of Lebanon. British proposals to divide Lebanon into three Kaymakamates or provincial governorships – one Maronite, one Druze, one Greek Orthodox – were unsuccessful; instead, in 1861 the Règlement Organique was signed, making Lebanon – not including Beirut, the Biqâ, and the regions of Tripoli and Sidon – “an autonomous Ottoman province under the guarantee of the six signatory Powers.” (Salibi, 1999: 110)

European power politics was a backdrop to the affairs of the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean, where competing Western countries were jockeying for the best position. It is not fanciful to suppose that these Christian countries, which may have been viewed as puppet-masters, caused resentment in Muslim Ottoman lands, and that Christians within the empire were identified with Western Christian powers. Europe was synonymous with Christianity and it was Christianity that held the real power. Christianity represented a foreign ethnicity that was at odds with both Ottoman Muslim subjects and the Ottoman Empire. As such, Muslim sensibilities, and the integrity of Muslim identity may have been perceived as under threat.

4. 1958: A Prelude to Conflagration

Between 1860 and 1958, Lebanon had experienced a measure of stability and undergone change. Following the end of the First World War and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, Syria and Lebanon had become mandated to France and had fallen under the influence of French culture. In 1943, in the midst of another world war, Lebanon was granted its independence. The French defied the wishes of the Maronites, who had wanted Leba-

10 The French were keen to establish a little piece of France in the Middle East, but they were aided and abetted by indigenous politicians. Raymond Eddé (1913-2000), a Christian lawyer trained in Paris and a leading Lebanese politician, has been described as someone of “French taste and culture.” (Cleveland & Bunton: 210).
non as their homeland, and instead engineered a political arrangement whereby a Greek Orthodox held the presidency. The Maronites, on the other hand were strategic winners, securing all other major positions within the government (Atiya: 35). This was to change eventually, with Maronites being allotted the presidency, Sunnis retaining the speaker’s chair, and other sects claiming a range of posts. This basic structure has remained to the present day.

Camille Chamoun (1900-1987) may be seen as a primal instigator of civil strife, but this would be to overlook his presidency, which was not wholly without achievement. Under him, there had been economic growth, but, while this brought prosperity, it also heightened “social and regional disparities” (Traboulsi: 128). Chamoun himself was an internationalist, but for many Lebanese he was looking in the wrong direction. It was the time of Nasser’s rise to prominence, both within Egypt and across parts of the Arab world, Lebanon not excluded. It was Nasser’s appeal to the masses that worried the United States and persuaded them that Lebanon should be a bulwark against Arab nationalism, which they perceived as a threat to their interests – Lebanon was a safe oil terminal and a base for their military forces – and a vehicle for Soviet expansionism (Traboulsi: 130). In 1953, they encouraged Chamoun’s support with a $6 million aid package; in return, he allowed them use of Lebanese air space. He was also sympathetic to the Baghdad Pact of 1955, in diametric opposition to many in Lebanon, who demonstrated against it in the streets.

It was clear that Chamoun and the United States were closely cooperating. Such was the depth of this cooperation, it has been alleged that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) bought Chamoun the 1957 election (Traboulsi: 132). The aftermath of this supposedly rigged election was that leading Muslims lost their seats, but it also split Christian ranks, particularly when Chamoun was so vague about his intentions to retain the presidency (Traboulsi: 132-3). Meanwhile, widespread corruption increased. Although Chamoun may have been retaining office for personal ambition, he may also have feared for Lebanon’s future, either because of Nasserism or militant Islam (Harris, 2006: 142); and it has been said that he had not had the opportunity to make his mark since 1952 (Harris, 2006: 142). But there was also another element to consider.

There were, according to Hirst, two strands to the Maronite party: the Arabist and the pro-Zionists; and it was these groups that personified Lebanon’s Janus face – one side looking East, the other side looking West (Hirst: 69). The Arabists had dominated Maronite politics for some time; now the latter were in the ascendant. However, with Chamoun, this had to be put into perspective. Hirst comments that, although Chamoun was opposed to Nasser and to Nasserism, it did not make him ipso facto pro-Zionist; but nonetheless, “it placed him firmly in company to which, in the eyes of the nationalists, Israel certainly belonged.”

11 The Baghdad Pact was an alliance between Turkey, Iraq, Britain, Pakistan, and Iran, and was created as part of a “shield of alliances against Soviet expansionism” (Cleveland & Bunton: 257).
In the end, it was a fear of Arabism that drove him not towards Israel, but towards France (Hirst: 69).

All this contributed to a serious division within Lebanese society and encouraged the marginalised Muslims and Druze to take up arms, which Syria, under the newly formed United Arab Republic (UAR), was happy to supply (Hirst: 70). There were protests in the streets and across the country, but one of the sparks that ignited wholesale fighting may be traced to the assassination in Tripoli of Nassib al-Matni, a Maronite and editor of *al-Tallaghraf*, a newspaper with a significant circulation. Al-Matni’s newspaper was a staunch opponent of President Chamoun, whose government was seen as corrupt and with a foreign policy skewed westward. When the funeral was held, people turned out in force and demonstrated against what was suspected to be, and even, in some quarters, firmly believed to be, a blatant political assassination (Traboulsi: 134). Although this one event has not been universally credited with the start of the war, the situation was clearly on an irrevocable slide towards conflict.

The assassination of Nassib al-Matni was one of a number of violent outbreaks. In the Chouf, Druze militants destroyed bridges and blockaded roads, bombs went off in Beirut (Salibi 1999: 201). As the violence escalated, with sectarian assassinations in Beirut (Fisk, 1990: 71), it was clear that the government was losing control of the situation, but the Americans were not keen to get involved. It was another regional event that changed their minds.

The 1958 military coup in Iraq, which overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and installed Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim as head of state, could be said to have not only terminated hostilities, but changed Lebanon’s future (Harris, 1997: 144). In its wake, came a dramatic cessation of the Baghdad Pact and elimination of “the West’s major ally in the Arab world” (Harris, 1997: 144). This time when Chamoun called for help, the United States was quick to respond, despatching Marines to preserve another “major ally” (Harris, 1997: 144). But their assistance was more pragmatic than perhaps Chamoun had anticipated, for they also thwarted his presidential plans, forcing him to step down in favour of Fuad Shihab, the head of the army. With the main obstacle to peace removed from power, order was restored.

There was a movement to restore Greater Syria, of which Lebanon was viewed as an integral part. See, for example, Cleveland & Bunton: 217. As a result, it could be argued that destabilising Lebanon may have served this objective. In addition, Egypt’s President Nasser, who took a leading role in the newly formed UAR, may not have been averse to ousting President Chamoun, someone who opposed Nasser’s Pan-Arabism. See also Traboulsi: 130-1.

See also Khalaf, who claims, “The motive for the assassination, rumored to have been entirely nonpolitical, was never discovered; neither were the suspects. Leaders of the UNF [United National Front] nevertheless charged that Chamoun’s henchmen were responsible” (Khalaf, 2002: 114).

See, for example, Kanaan, who is not convinced this was the actual start, instead believing “conflicts...were part of a long-established pattern of social dynamics, rather than relating predominantly to the events of the 1950s in the region.” (Kanaan: 23).
4.1 Roots of Conflict
As far as extraneous elements are concerned, there was, first, Nasserism. This mass movement, socialistic in style and in its policies, inspired people in the Arab world, who had suffered under colonialism, monarchical dynasties, or tyrannical republics. Nasser was not just confined to Egypt. His open opposition to the capitalist West and espousal of a united Arabism produced grassroots’ support across the Middle East and endeared him to millions.\(^{16}\) It was a form of external pressure, which placed Lebanon in the middle of what could be described as a geopolitical sandwich – on one side the West, in particular the Americans; on the other, Muslim support filtered through Nasserism and blended with Soviet influence. It could be argued that Nasser, to all intents and purposes abandoned by the West, was obliged to seek support elsewhere. He did not have to look far. Soviet Russia was keen to establish a foothold in the Middle East\(^ {17}\) and was only too willing to fill a strategic vacuum. As a consequence, America saw Nasserism, which had seeped into Lebanon, as a platform for Sovietism and a direct threat to their own interests.\(^ {18}\) Hence, their support of Chamoun as a way of blocking the Soviet factor; but it was this apparent cosiness that would have aggravated Chamoun’s already disgruntled or marginalised people, many of whom were Muslims.

The allusion to pro-Zionist elements in the Maronite camp is a cogent reference, for it was sufficiently serious to upset a sizeable proportion of the Lebanese. For many of the Lebanese, Israel was, and remains, ‘the enemy’.\(^ {19}\) Its foundation in 1948 instigated enforced Palestinian migration, which had repercussions on regional economies, upset often delicate demographics in neighbouring states, and sowed the seeds of bitter resentment in the collective memory of the displaced and dispossessed. To be thought in sympathy, albeit politically, with Israel would have been anathema to many Lebanese, Christians and Muslims. There was an additional factor with regard to Israel and the Maronites. Even before the modern state of Lebanon had been conceived, and a long time prior to the setting up of the Jewish state, prominent Jewish leaders were wooing the Maronites, who themselves were comparatively well disposed towards the prospect of a Jewish state on Lebanon’s doorstep.\(^ {20}\) This disposition of the Maronites is an example of tradition and memory moulding a group psyche – both Zionists and Maronites shared a common fear, or at least a wariness, of Muslims – influencing attitudes, political affiliations, and collective decision-making. There was also the influence of Syria, which, under the aegis of the UAR, was

\(^{16}\) Long after his death and well after his legacy had passed into history, the author has seen pictures of Nasser pinned to the wall behind counters in Lebanese shops.

\(^{17}\) “The Soviet Union was seen as an aggressively expansionist power devoted to the single-minded passion of spreading communism throughout the world.” (Cleveland & Bunton: 256).

\(^{18}\) Cleveland & Bunton assert that the Soviet Union’s perceived position motivated the United States, which, “in order to protect its new global interests, had to commit its resources and those of its allies to the containment of the Soviet Union.” (Cleveland & Bunton: 256).

\(^{19}\) It could be said that a state of ‘dormant’ bellicosity permanently exists between the two countries and thus, in general, Israel is seen as ‘the enemy’.

\(^{20}\) See, for example, Hirst: 40.
supplying arms to the Druze and Muslims in their fight against the Chamoun government. Finally, there was the Christian-Muslim paradigm, an atavistic fear of the ‘Other’ as different. How much of this is religious, how much communal identity? Is there an interplay between all these elements?

While it may seem comparatively straightforward that, where Christians and Muslims ‘front up’ to each other, there is a clear religious dimension, it may be possible to argue that religion was a lynch-pin for the other causal contenders such as pro-Zionist elements amongst Maronites. However, this may not always be the case. The designations ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ may be free of religious association – that is, they may denote sociological denominations, and the Christian and Muslim may in fact be more inclined towards an agnostic or atheistic position. Indicators of a non-religious base appear in the run up to the 1860 war. The Druze family bent on vengeance could be more suggestive of a tribal action than a religious one. There is, in addition, the reaction of the Druze to the Orthodox Bishop’s provocative exhortation – “The country is ours or theirs” – as cited by Churchill. This might equally suggest that, at the seat of confrontation, lies the issue of ‘living space’, politics, and sociological supremacy. Whether this has anything to do with religion in its framework of spiritual devotion and theological assertion is a moot point.

5. The Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990
It could be argued that all the communal players and some of the elements which comprised the 1860 and 1958 wars are all present in this eruption of violence and hatred. There is Christian-Muslim confrontation, suspicion of the ‘Other’ as ethnically and religiously different, and world powers on the sidelines. The one additional factor that plays a major combustible role is the Palestinian issue.

The Palestinians in the form of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) had established itself in Jordan and, growing more settled with support from many of the people, had transmogrified into a ‘state within a state’. A certain latitude had been granted to the PLO, but their assumption of power now threatened the government and the king’s authority. King Hussein, owing to the PLO’s popularity, had to perform something of a balancing act, but in 1970, in an operation called Black September, he acted decisively, sending in the army against the PLO. Needing another base from which to operate and to launch attacks against Israel, the PLO operatives re-established themselves in Lebanon.

There were already Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and as a result of Black September, the number of Palestinians in the country swelled to new proportions. But it was

21 A strong unifying element is a common enemy. Israel is seen as a usurper of Arab lands and an aggressive force irrevocably opposed to the Arab world in general. The PLO’s fight was thus viewed as legitimate activity by many Jordanians and worthy of their support.
22 See, for example, Cleveland & Bunton: 338. But for a thorough and more personal account, see Queen Noor, 2003.
the presence and actions of the PLO that created the first building blocks of the war. Once established, the PLO soon developed into the very same ‘state within a state’ and, as a result, aggravated relations with the local population.

In 1975, Ma’ruf Sa’d, a Sunni and high ranking Nasserist in Sidon, was shot dead. The lead up to this event was a demonstration against what was seen as a corrupt commercial deal. A fishing company, belonging to former president Camille Chamoun, had won a concession and it was feared this would jeopardise the livelihood of many thousands of fishermen in the town (Hirst: 102). Sa’d was leading the demonstration when the Lebanese army, which had been in charge of policing the demonstration, opened fire. Rumours suggested that it was not the Lebanese army that had killed Sa’d, but Syrian agents (Deeb: 8). It was also reported that Sa’d had said he was ‘impatient’ with “some armed Palestinian organizations in Sidon” (Deeb: 8). This was a step towards outright war, but in reality, there were sporadic outbursts of violence, which had yet to coalesce into full scale hostilities; and, indeed, it should be noted that there was a slow build over a number of years.

The PLO was not an organisation that prosecuted its cause along strictly peaceful, diplomatic lines; it was an active guerrilla group committed to an ongoing campaign of violence against Israel, which stimulated counter-reactions from the Israelis: for example, the assassination in 1973 of three Palestinian leaders in Beirut (Cleveland & Bunton: 380). The response of “Arab nationalists and radical reformers” was to accuse the Lebanese of not doing enough to prevent Israeli actions (Cleveland & Bunton: 380). The Lebanese government was effectively caught. It had to demonstrate to the Christians, the Israelis and Western powers, that Palestinians were under some measure of restraint; on the other hand, to appease ‘Arab nationalists’ and the Arab world in general, they could not be seen to be hampering PLO action against Israel.

Due to dissatisfaction with President Frangieh’s inability to tackle socio-economic issues and the way in which rampant corruption had re-entered the bureaucratic system of government (Cleveland & Bunton: 381), there was increasing polarisation between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. The country was being divided, and broadly along Christian-Muslim lines. Kamal Jumblatt (1917-1977), leader of the Druze, had formed the Lebanese National Movement, whose manifesto included governmental reform, a dissolution of a political system based on confessionalism, and carte blanche for the PLO’s actions against Israel (Cleveland & Bunton: 381). On the Christian side, the Maronites profited from the extant political system and were intent on preserving that advantage (Hirst: 91). They were also implacably opposed to the Palestinians. In order to protect and advance their

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23 This was actually reported in an-Nahar, the Lebanese newspaper, and it was their report that Deeb cites (Roger ‘Azzam, 14 June 2001:4).
25 Cleveland & Bunton refer to it as “a loose coalition of discontented Muslims” (Cleveland & Bunton: 381).
26 Hirst points out that there were “many poor Maronites who suffered under essentially the same socio-economic hardships and disabilities as their Muslim counterparts”, but were fearful of change (Hirst: 91).
interests, two powerful Maronite militias were thus formed: the Phalange of Pierre Gemayel and the Tigers of ex-president Chamoun (Cleveland & Bunton: 381).

On 13 April 1975, a bus was ambushed by Phalangists in Ein al-Rumaneh, a Beiruti suburb. Although the Maronites claimed it was retaliatory, it has been observed that the ambush seemed well planned, suggesting less spontaneity and more deliberate action (Fisk, 1990: 78). In August, Christian and Muslim militias engaged in a fire fight (Cleveland & Bunton: 382), and in December, four Christians were shot and killed in a car outside the headquarters of the electricity company in East Beirut, traditionally the Christian part of the city (Fisk, 1990: 79). Retaliation was swift, haphazard, and bloody, with road blocks set up to trap innocent victims (Fisk, 1990: 79). The style of war had shown how it would progress; and so the future unfolded interspersed with short respite of peace, only for the cessation of hostilities to be violated and the spree of killing and destruction to continue with renewed vigour. In 1990, the Ta’if agreement brought peace – perhaps more through mutual exhaustion and a recognition that, for fifteen years, this had been a pitilessly pointless conflagration. Little if anything substantial had been gained by any side or any group – except the destruction of the state, a death toll of between thirty and forty thousand people, the invasion of the Syrian army (Cleveland & Bunton: 383), the invasion of Israel in 1982, and a traumatised country. And the Ta’if agreement, although it laid the foundations of a rocky, but enduring peace, also placed Lebanon firmly under the heel of Syria. It could also be argued that it additionally saddled the Lebanese with a sinister legacy: a young generation, warped by war in all its hideous manifestations, and now imbued with a cynical state of mind that potentially poisoned the future. Fundamentally, little had changed or been reformed. Confessionalism still shaped the political arena, Christians and Muslims remained to a great extent divided, reform for the downtrodden and the disadvantaged in Lebanese society appeared as much of a mirage as it ever had been.

The events that led up to the Civil War of 1975 and the underlying causes are a complex skein, but it is clear that extraneous influences played a significant role in dragging Lebanon into the mire of a particularly damaging conflict. The Palestinians were a major *casus belli*, but was there a core religious element? Perhaps not. Religion, it could be argued, did not have to play a part when defending the integrity of a sovereign state against interlopers and usurpers. On the face of it, the PLO’s mere presence in Lebanon was the fuel, while

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27 These were later to become bitter rivals, the Tigers losing out to the Phalange after the former’s ruthless suppression at the hands of Pierre Gemayel’s younger son, Bashir (Hirst:122). Bashir, as President of Lebanon, was assassinated in 1982, an action that is mooted to have been carried out by the Israelis.

28 Fisk claims that when Bashir Gemayel was told of the shooting of four Christians, he instructed Phalangist officers to kill forty Muslims in reprisal. Road blocks were subsequently set up and Muslim men, travelling home with their families to East Beirut, had their throats cut. Muslim militias responded in similar fashion, setting up road blocks and slaughtering innocent Christians. Fisk estimates that, in this spate of violence, some three hundred Muslims were murdered, and, he speculates, a similar number of Christians (Fisk, 1990: 79).

their subsequent actions were the spark. But we are then perhaps ignoring other factors. The respective Israeli and Maronite power bases shared a fundamental distrust of Islam and Arabism. Supported by the Arab world at large, Islam may have been suspected by both the Maronites and the Israelis of being predominantly energised with a militant opposition to the existence of Israel and to Christianity per se, perhaps seeing Christianity as Western orientated and Western leaning. Conversely, Maronites may have been viewed by many Muslims as the enemy within, if only because they consorted politically with ‘the enemy’ without.

Another main player was Syria, with President Hafiz al-Asad (1930-2000) arguably regarding Lebanon as his personal fiefdom. On a rare visit to Lebanon, he declared that the two countries were “one people, one nation” (Deeb: 8). This declaration of a united front, a reference to an almost familial unit, was an expression of solidarity, of simpatico. Syria was a significant force within the region, ruled by a dynastic administration intolerant of any opposition. However, holding such a prominent position, suggests that it may have been seen by some in the region as a useful mediator between the warring factions and as a potentially effective operator in a dangerous theatre of war, one that might negotiate deals and, if necessary, use its muscle to persuade and cajole.

Israel, Syria, the Palestinians were all external factors, who had had a hand in Lebanese affairs. But were they actively, albeit covertly, intervening to promote or protect their own interests? The question has been asked as to whether ambushing the Ein al-Rumaneh bus was the work of agents provocateurs; if so, was it sponsored by Syria? The motive would have been clear – provoke hostilities in order to mediate, for the mediator holds an influential and powerful position.

How much of the responsibility can be attributed to Lebanon? The socio-economic imbalance and the polarisation of the privileged and the underprivileged begins to seem like a semi-permanent, socio-political characteristic and one that does little to promote social stability. Religion, as was argued above, is perhaps scarcely a factor except confessionally, if only because the threat to Lebanon affected all confessional groups, whether Muslim or Christian. In this instance, it would seem, the destiny of the state in general superseded most other interests.

6. The 2006 War

See, for example, Hirst: 37-44. In particular, he quotes Eisenberg and “a Lebanese Christian proverb – ‘After Saturday, Sunday’ – [which] conveys: once the Muslims have done away with the Jews the Christians’ turn will come." (Hirst: 39; Eisenberg, 1994: 13).

“…any opposition to Assad’s rule was regarded by the authorities as treachery,” (Fisk, 2005: 1005).

Deeb asks the question, but wonders also whether it was carried out by Phalangists who were trying to provoke action against the PLO on a wider scale (Deeb: 9).
There were multi-dimensional aspects to the Lebanese civil war of 1975, one of which was the Israeli invasion of 1982, their subsequent withdrawal, and the establishing of a buffer zone between Israel’s northern frontier and Lebanon’s southern border. From Israel’s point of view, it was necessary to occupy this strip of land inside Lebanon as a security buffer; the Lebanese, on the other hand, saw it as illegal occupation; but it was Hezbollah who took action.

As a theocratic Shī'ite party that had emerged during the last war and had subsequently grown in prominence, Hezbollah was infused with an almost nationalistic mission. Although treated to disapproval by many Lebanese, it committed itself to the expulsion of Israel from Lebanese land, in particular the Shebaa Farms (Barak: 191). Supported by Iran, Hezbollah was seen as engaged in a just cause and this gave them legitimacy and the gloss of ‘respectability’. Eventually, in 2002, after conducting a relentless campaign of guerrilla warfare, Israel withdrew and Hezbollah’s status rose. It was the measure of this military success that allowed them to create a political persona with a two dimensional character – in plain words, they were a party of the gun and the ballot box. Having ousted the Israelis, they continued their campaign of provocation, firing rockets into Israel; but it was the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers in July 2006 that brought matters to a head with swift and full-bloodied retaliation.

The 2006 war began with an all out attack on Lebanon by Israel. Although Hezbollah had a good position on the ground, Israel dominated the skies. They launched a series of raids on Lebanon, blasting strategic targets, bombing bridges, roads and general infrastructure, which had only recently been restored after the destruction of the 1975-1990 civil war. Apart from the concomitant human cost, the effect on Lebanon was catastrophic. It has been suggested that Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, would not have agreed to the kidnapping had he known in advance the level of Israel’s response (Hirst: 329-30). Israel was less open about its strategic thinking.

In the eyes of the international community, Israel was going to war to secure the release of their abducted soldiers and, most probably, to give Hezbollah a bloody nose. Hirst suggests there was another reason. Clearly, the Israeli government cared about the fate of their soldiers, but, he asserts, it would have been assumed that they had probably died of their wounds or been killed while they were being taken away from the scene. As a result, there was scant reason for igniting a firestorm and sending in ground troops (Hirst: 332). In reality, the Israelis had a broader agenda: they wanted to eradicate two threats on their

33 “Retaining a presence in the Strip [of land in south Lebanon] was a fundamental error. ‘We let the genie out of the bottle’, Israel’s most decorated soldier and future prime minister, Ehud Barak, once said of Hizbullah.” (Hirst: 204, citing Wright, 1985: 238).
34 “Iran is, after all, the fount of Hizbullah’s brand of Shi’ite fundamentalism and a source of an estimated $2 billion in support since the early 1980s.” (Khalaf, 2012: 60).
35 See, for example, Hirst: 274. He argues that Hezbollah had proved to “many Arabs, secular as well as Islamist” that Israel could, as they saw it, be defeated.
borders – Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The aim of the 2006 war, which the Israelis had dubbed ‘Operation Just Reward’, was ostensibly to knock out, or at least to neutralise, the latter (Hirst: 332). For this to be accomplished, it was believed necessary to destroy Nasrallah and his high command; to implement it, Israeli warplanes bombed the area where Hezbollah had set up their headquarters, destroying homes and killing hundreds of Lebanese, the vast majority of whom were civilians.\(^{36}\)

If the majority of Israelis, outraged by Hezbollah’s actions, were supportive of their government’s action, it is said that “Lebanese public opinion was almost as outraged” (Hirst: 339). There was concerted condemnation of Hezbollah in Lebanon for acting in defiance of a democratic state’s sovereign rights by effectively, unilaterally, declaring war (Hirst: 339). Indeed, much of the outrage may have been fuelled by the widespread destruction and loss of life in Lebanon. How did the party assume the authority to do this? It did so, it was claimed, under the auspices of Iran (Hirst: 339).

For all the damage inflicted by Israeli airpower and the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) with its sophisticated arsenal of technologically advanced weaponry, Israel was not able to achieve its ends. Arguably, they fell victim to the same phenomenon that the Americans experienced in Vietnam – the unrelenting efficacy of guerrilla warfare. This failure to secure its ends had, as described above, another undesired effect – it raised Hezbollah in the estimation of the Lebanese and their Arab neighbours. The mistake the Israelis may have made was to focus on a campaign that was too grandiose, too ambitious. By contrast, Nasrallah’s goal was relatively more modest. Shying away from conventional objectives such as territorial gain, and deferring to a superior enemy’s military muscle, Hezbollah adopted a ‘sniping campaign’ where they could land a series of blows on their opponent, rather than one momentous knockout punch (Hirst: 352).

How this war came about would appear to be comparatively straightforward. Hezbollah’s increasingly aggressive and bellicose stance, compounded by its kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, triggered a massive military response from the IDF. Hezbollah was so positioned – perhaps politically as well as militarily – that it could claim only their forces were capable of defending Lebanon against Israeli attacks and Israel’s “coveting [of] its natural resources” (Barak: 191).\(^{37}\) This reference to natural resources is revealing as it highlights another possible causal dimension of regional conflict – water. And, as noted earlier, there was another subplot: the war was part of an Israeli military operation to eliminate threats on their borders. However, it would seem Hezbollah, for all their operational intelligence skills and their supposed wise reading of their enemy (Hirst: 343, 352), had little inkling of this, and additionally miscalculated Israel’s response. Yet, there is also the enduring Palestinian issue; and Iran. Under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran was arguably more ready to

\(^{36}\) The more widespread bombing was intended to turn the Lebanese against Hezbollah for inciting this level of retribution.

goad and test Israel’s defence. There was additionally Iran’s support for Hezbollah, a Shi-ite party, which suggests an extraneous factor stoking the fires, raising the stakes, and vicariously engaging the enemy on Lebanon’s territory; and it is here that religion, and eth-nicity go hand in hand, for, apart from a Jewish-Muslim, Christian-Muslim dimension, a Sunni-Shi’a one is exposed as well.

7. Contemporary Lebanon
If the 2006 war was a disaster for the country, it was a resounding success for Hezbollah. Previously, it had been marginalised as a terrorist organisation, pumped full of finance by Iran; as a serious political entity, it existed on the fringes of mainstream government. Fouad Siniora, Lebanon’s prime minister from 2005 to 2008, had tried to bring Hezbollah in from the cold through a process of voluntary disarmament in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, but Nasrallah had refused. This provoked the ire of Siniora’s supporters, who claimed that Nasrallah was exposing Lebanon to the wrath of Israel. Caught in a trap – President Lahoud was supportive of Nasrallah’s role as a resistance movement – Siniora eventually declared, in the summer of 2006 and prior to Hezbollah’s kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, that the UN Security Council Resolution 1559, and the sub-sequent Security Council Resolution 1614, were aimed at militia groups; Hezbollah, he said, was not a militia group, it was a bona fide resistance movement (Barak: 192). Following its perceived victory against Israel, Hezbollah maintained its right to retain its arms, declaring it would do so “until the right conditions were in place” (Barak: 193).

Hirst claims that prior to the war only 58 per cent of the population – and this figure com-prised in the main Shiites – believed Hezbollah had “the right to retain its arms. Now, a full 87 per cent supported its ‘resistance to Israeli aggression’; 96 per cent of the Shiites took that position, but other communities – 89 per cent of Sunnis, 80 per cent of Christians and Druzes – where anti-Hizbullah sentiment had formerly been strongest were not so far be-hind.” (Hirst: 357) Hezbollah now sensed that, on the back of its popularity, it was in a position to make demands, including one for a national unity government; but it has been suggested that Hezbollah’s demands increasingly identified it as a sectarian organisation rather than as a patriotic, nationalistic body (Barak: 193). The following year, the Lebanese army’s success in eradicating the group Fatah al-Islam was hailed as a national victory, one that did not emanate from “religious or confessional ideology” (Barak: 194).

Israeli miscalculation appears to have been significant. When considering that the severity of their response was intended to turn the Lebanese against Hezbollah (Hirst: 395), and one of the Israelis’ primary aims was the death of Nasrallah, everything went horribly awry: as part of the settlement, Israel withdrew from the Shebaa Farms, leaving it in the hands,

38 Khalaf points out that Hezbollah’s shape is conditioned very much by its backers, Iran and Syria (Khalaf, 2002: 14).
39 As a source, Hirst references The Daily Star, Beirut, 29 July 2006.
40 Barak was citing an-Nahar, 8 October 2007.
temporarily, of a UN Peacekeeping Force; Nasrallah had not only escaped with his life, he had survived to triumph over his victory; and Hezbollah had been propelled to the forefront of Lebanese politics to become a real contender for power. To that extent, the 2006 war may have changed the shape of Lebanese politics and re-moulded Nasrallah. Hirst reports how, even though Arabs and Israelis had expected him to respond militarily to the assassination of Imad Mughniyah, a top-ranking Hezbollah operative, Nasrallah limited himself to a denouncement of Israel, adding that if Israel wanted this sort of confrontation, Hezbollah was ready for it (Hirst: 396-7).

8. Conclusion
In looking at these four conflicts, sundry underlying factors and causes have been excluded if only because space does not allow a detailed analysis. However, the aim was to assemble a sufficiency of material that gives a sense of how each one evolved. More specifically, the purpose at the outset was to ascertain main causal factors, including Lebanon’s own culpability in helping to create combustible conditions for conflict; and the extent of extraneous forces or influences. A more central and overarching question was how much can be ascribed to religion?

There have been a number of scholarly appraisals of social conflict in Lebanon, which offer analyses of why and how violence erupts. Many of these works give plausible accounts, others offer intellectual foundations for what amount to axiomatic syndromes, but are valuable expositions nonetheless. Khalaf makes a constructive contribution, referring to horizontal and vertical trajectories, and discussing various causes; he also makes an important observation that protest on the level of socio-economics is relatively containable within pacific limits, but once it is stamped with ‘community’ – and, the insinuation is, this is especially true in Lebanon – protest is transposed into violence, which then tends to escalate (Khalaf, 2012: 36-7).

Is it possible that the violence fomented within Lebanon is uniquely stimulated? For example, socio-economic conditions are a potent base cause of protest on a global scale; their transition into a communal issue less so perhaps. Is there no other catalytic phenomenon other than confessionalism that can transform members of a mass movement into a body capable of violence, both specific and random? It might do well to consider football. As a global sport, football is made up of an international collective of supporters, who form themselves into mass movements based on club allegiance. Membership of a club supporters’ group spawns its own culture, including characteristics of ‘fundamentalism’: uniforms (e.g. club shirts), anthems; unflinching fealty to club and players; intolerance of the ‘Other’; open hostility to criticism, warranted or unwarranted, whether expressed verbally or by way of physical assault; readiness to defend the integrity of club should it be besmirched; willingness to engage in violent action should this be necessary. At the seat of this apparent fanaticism, there is, prima facie, neither religion, socio-economics, nor na-
tionalism, and yet supporters display many of the outward signs of communality without being a community in the Lebanese, confessional sense. If this is the case, we may, in almost reductionist mode, be left with the simple possibility that human beings are innately violent and do not need, necessarily, either external stimuli or internal motivation to commit violent acts. What they do need is a cause – and it does not pertain whether a cause is considered worthy by those outside the group. Winning a match, while of some matter in a microcosmic dimension, is not important macrocosmically. Either way, it harbours no severe socio-economic repercussions, the security of the country is not at stake, lives are not put at risk – in short, life will continue much the same. But this does not prevent violent reactions that can spill over into the streets. Indeed, winning or losing, it is suggested, makes little difference. If violence is to erupt, it will; and it will do so randomly, inflicting damage to neutral property and assaults on innocent bystanders. Consequently, the propensity for violence may not be an especially Lebanese trait, it is a characteristic of behavioural tendencies inseparable from the human condition.

Could the four conflicts discussed be said to have a causal nexus to religion? It depends, perhaps, on what is meant by religion. If religion is, even in theory, separated from the state, then there is perhaps less likelihood that the one will be contaminated by the other, and thus less influential. But in the case of Lebanon, there is a confessional society where identity, or belonging to a community, hinges on a religious tag. It has been eloquently emphasised how religion has, for many people, become a mere symbol of communal identity, which may mean that religious observance is, perhaps, kept to a level of ritual rarely exceeding a sense of duty. This, we suggest, is scarcely surprising because the sacred and the profane are on divergent paths, particularly so in the contemporary world where communications technology and social media dwarf the relevance of spirituality in people’s diurnal routines. Belief in God may be what many people will admit to, but it is something that can be slotted at the back of one’s mind; permitting religion into the forefront of daily, even weekly, life and holding firmly to religiously ordained precepts, which codify personal behaviour and define social positions, may be a commitment too far. Are all Israelis regular visitors to the synagogue? Do all supporters of Hezbollah attend the mosque? Is it the case that every Sunday will find all Christians in church? In this sense, religion plays little or no part in many people’s lives; instead, it acts as a backdrop to their activities in the world – there to situate them politically, communally, sociologically, but basically not to be heeded.

Does this let religion off the hook? Not entirely. In 1860, there is a clear religious division between Christians and Muslims in one part of the country, but insurrection is intra-Christian elsewhere. And it may be difficult to accept that the Druze who indiscriminately slaughtered Christians were deeply religious; or that the Christian fighters who murdered

41 There may be clubs where religion, in part, defines them – Celtic and Rangers being two. But we believe these are, generally, exceptions.

Palestinians in Sabra and Chatila\textsuperscript{43} with such barbarity were devoted followers of Christ. Religion, although important, may be merely a subsidiary symbol of who people are and irrevocably connected to their sense of identity. Neither a Christian nor a Muslim will restrain their murderous intent if the ‘Other’ proves to be religiously unobservant. So religion is part of the problem, but it is a spiritually neutralised religion; nonetheless, religion \textit{qua} identity is the glue that binds together these various contributory factors of conflict.

Ethnicity, extraneous circumstances, geographical location, natural human propensities, all play their part in subjecting Lebanon and the Lebanese to a cycle of violence. To single out one as a primary cause, it is suggested, is to underestimate the other factors, which symbiotically feed off each other and into the state of Lebanon today; these factors are interdependent and the resultant complexity of this relationship is so entwined in a Gordian knot that to disentangle one from the other is an immense task, if not an impossibility, because each is part of the other. By way of illustration, geographical location as a contributory factor to violence is governed by the interplay between the remaining three. Is it not possible then to break the cycle of violence?

Perhaps looking at ethnicity, or religion, or outside forces as possible causal factors of violence is to be misdirected, and a more positive way ahead would be to consider the nation’s collective state of mind. A contented population is, arguably, more productive, less prone to protest, and more stable. However, so long as Lebanon, in the form of governmental inactivity and private sector countenance, is allowed to flounder amidst the toxic tides of social polarisation and self-interest, few seeds of optimism will ever flourish. A fundamental overhauling of Lebanese society may be required, one that will create a new generation of Lebanese, who will have little reason to burn inwardly with resentment; a series of wide-ranging officially sanctioned social policies may have to be drawn up, addressed to the unemployed army of ‘disaffected in waiting’, the disenfranchised youths with no job, no prospects, no money, an underdeveloped sense of nationalism, little or no education, who will bite off the hand of the next militia leader who offers them $100 a month and a Kalashnikov.

The financial burden of such social schemes is not to be underestimated. It will cost, but, it is suggested, a greater cost may have to be paid by the Lebanese again and again for generations to come into a bleak future, unless social inequalities are earnestly addressed. It will take a change of heart, a transformation from an acquisitive culture, that deems ever greater corporate and personal wealth as acceptable and worthy activities, into a vibrant commercial economy balanced by a pragmatic altruism. It is not beyond the fiscal skills of the Lebanese, who have a history of respectable mercantilism coupled with enviable commercial skills; neither is it beyond their humanitarian capabilities, for, despite a history of intra-communal conflict, there have been times when they have lived together in pluralistic harmony and have proved they can come together on matters of national importance.

\textsuperscript{43} Two separate camps in Beirut where Palestinians were massacred in 1982.
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