

*Examining Contextual Determinants:
Extracting Lessons on Civil War from the Case of Lebanon*

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When the equilibrium was shattered and the state weakened, the dormant inter-communal grievances, competition and hostility forged forward violently. (Azar & Haddad, 1986, p. 1338)

Introduction

From 1975 to 1990, Lebanon experienced a civil war rather unlike any previously observed in the world. The sheer complexity and seeming irrationality of the conflict, which took the lives of over 100,000 people, has left many onlookers scratching their heads seeking to understand the decade and a half of senseless violence. While there is a richness of literature providing historical and journalistic accountings of the war in Lebanon, the body of scholarship seeking to glean lessons from the conflict is startlingly gaunt. In this paper, I assert that there are practical lessons for the avoidance of similar conflicts to be drawn from this case, and in doing so bring the narrative of this war into the more general discussion of civil war phenomena. In order to do so, I provide a factual accounting of the circumstances that contributed to the breakdown of Lebanese society, which synthesizes evidence from sources across a wide range of disciplines. After having done so, I expand the contextual factors into more generalizable phenomena such that they may serve as indicators or avoidable determinants of future conflicts. To complete my analysis, I analyze the identified factors using Stephen Van Evera's method for evaluating the usefulness of hypotheses as laid out in *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (1999).

Background

To inform the understanding of the complexities of Lebanese society during the period leading up to and including the war, I turned to a wide range of sources both from formal cultural or area studies or more informal sources. In particular, the texts assembled in *Lebanon in Crisis: Participants and Issues* (1979), a collection of articles edited by P. Edward Haley and Lewis W. Snider, speak to the fact that the Lebanese civil war was caused by a multiplicity of factors both endogenous and exogenous, that no one factor was sufficient to stir the conflict, and that intensive review of these factors is necessary for the understanding of the war. The editors preface their collection by saying, "With the authors' help one begins to understand the tragedy... and one turns to address the many important questions raised by the Lebanese conflict... How has the conflict affected the parties themselves and their relations with one another? What are the connections between the Lebanese conflict and a general Middle East peace settlement?" (Haley & Snider, 1979). For the same reasons that Haley and Snider identify, this section exists to construct a historical narrative of the relevant conditional developments in the years preceding

the war. There were many specific facets of Lebanese culture that contributed to the onset of war and each deserves coverage in some detail. I focus here on some broad conditions in Lebanon prior to the war, which provide very useful overviews of the war and its causes from a less formal perspective.

Colonial Legacies and State Origins

The Ottoman Empire, which was home to what is now Lebanon until the end of World War I, was in many ways innovative and progressive. Among other mentionable qualities were its legal provisions for the protection of religious pluralism. Through what is called a “millet” system, the Ottoman Empire allowed religious communities to govern themselves with their own laws and in their own courts. The French continued this practice during their control of the former Ottoman territories of modern Lebanon and Syria, lasting from 1918 to 1946¹. Though this system encouraged pluralism, it also encouraged fierce communal loyalties and consequently discouraged national integration.

The establishment of Lebanon itself was subject to the French preference for the Christian Maronites of Mount Lebanon, who sought to establish a land encompassing the mountain and much of the territory around it, an area referred to as Greater Lebanon. The other inhabitants of this proposed territory, particularly the Sunni, Shi'a, and Druze, identified with a united Syrian nation and state, combining the eastern portions of the former Ottoman Empire into one political entity made up of what are now independent Lebanon and Syria. The Maronites, however, identified not with the rest of the Arab world, but with the West, and found it imperative to be independent of the Arab Syrians, but were unwilling to forfeit the lands extending from Mount Lebanon north beyond Tripoli and South to what is now the northern border of Israel. This sense of apartness from the Arab world was the result of a shared myth of origin tying the Lebanese peoples to the ancient Mediterranean civilization of Phoenicia. Asher Kaufman, in “Phoenicianism: The Formation of an Identity in Lebanon in 1920”, states that, according to this self-perception, “The modern Lebanese, of Phoenician-Aramaic origin, are not part of the Arab ethnicity, their contribution to Western culture is priceless, their skills in commerce are incomparable, and their inherent national characteristics are wisdom and tranquility” (Kaufman, 2001). The French were all too willing entertain this romanticized sense of importance and to grant the Maronites their desire for a Greater Lebanon, a coastal state encompassing a diverse population, tying the East and the West. From the beginning, the non-Maronite portions of the population were disenfranchised by this arrangement as they were arbitrarily and involuntarily thrust into a state with which they did not identify.

¹ The French occupation of the former Ottoman territories was not formalized until the League of Nations Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon was ratified in 1923. However, the French occupied these southeastern Ottoman territories immediately following the end of World War I as per the Sykes-Picot agreement. Additionally, the French officially held control of the territories until the establishment of the independent states of Lebanon and Syria in 1943 and 1946, but French troops remained in Lebanon until 1946.

Diversity and Confessionalism

Lebanon, as mentioned above, arose from the assignment of largely arbitrary borders, which bound together peoples of disparate ethnic communities. In doing so, the French formed a state composed of diverse sects with no shared national or political identity. The population of Lebanon was composed of Maronite Christians, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Druze, as well as more than a dozen smaller, less influential factions. In order to incorporate the major ethno-religious sects, Lebanon, following its Ottoman and French colonial traditions sought to erect a political system that would acknowledge and protect its pluralist population, but, unlike their colonial traditions, would also provide for some amount of integration, thus it was arranged into a confessional system of government. Lebanese confessionalism is a unique form of consociational democracy in which representation is divided amongst religious communities instead of political affiliations, primarily the Maronite Christians, Shi'a Muslims, and Sunni Muslims, but also the Druze, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic. Furthermore, the office of president was to be held by a Maronite, speaker of the house by a Shi'ite, and premiership by a Sunni.

The specific proportional divisions were based on the census of Lebanese peoples of 1932, the first and only census in Lebanon before the war, which placed Christians broadly in a 6:5 ratio with Muslims and Druze. From that point until the civil war, any official population figures were purely estimates and included Lebanese both domestically and abroad, but neglected any foreigners residing in Lebanon, such as the Palestinians living in South Lebanon. In lieu of sufficient evidence to justify a reorganization of its structure, the Lebanese government maintained the status quo, an action that failed to represent the changing demographics of the Lebanese population and disenfranchised the growing Muslim portions of the population.

This system of confessional representation structurally divided the population into its various political communities, with which the population often identified far more so than with the state or nation. Further contributing to this strong sense of communitarianism was the geographic distribution of various sects, which often clustered in particular regions or cities. Even in those cities that were shared among different groups, the groups often housed themselves in separate neighborhoods and were typically highly socioeconomically stratified.

Stagnation and Weakness of Political Structures

Even from its origin, the Lebanese government was seemingly more concerned with the maintenance of existing political roles than with the effective stewardship of the Lebanese state. This was largely a result of the fact that it was comparatively easier to do nothing than to attempt to assert sovereignty, due to the unequal confessional distribution within the Lebanese administrative bodies. For example, the exertion of the legitimate use of force by the military was made extremely difficult by the divisions between the predominately Maronite corps of

officers and the Muslim infantry. The overwhelming loyalty to confession before country led to similar breakdowns throughout the rest of the government. In the parliament and in the bureaucracy, influential members were typically selected from the *zuama*, the local confessional “bosses,” whose role it was to procure political and economic benefits for their respective groups. Typically, this political clientelism resulted in minority interests overriding public interests. Consequently, faith in the effectiveness of the Lebanese government was lost on a large scale.

In a 1977 survey of just over 1,300 Lebanese college students, Nafhat Nasr and Monte Palmer attempted to capture a glimpse of the political sentiments and participation of Lebanese students in political and civic culture by analyzing a demographic that was typically rather well informed and engaged. Nasr and Palmer found that 63% percent of students thought the public opinion of the Lebanese political institutions was poor and that 77% thought these institutions were in need of “radical change” (Nasr & Palmer, 1977). Furthermore, Figure 1 summarizes Nasr and Palmer’s findings on the level of involvement of these students in political activities that were not part of mainstream political institutions, demonstrating that a plurality of students were highly involved in political culture.

Figure 1. Activism Among Lebanese College Students (Nasr & Palmer, 1977)

| Activity | Total Participation |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Meetings and Rallies | 39.5% Active or Highly Active |
| Student Organization | 45.8% Active Support or Leadership |
| Nonviolent Protest | 43.2% Active or Highly Active |

Clearly, there were many perceived shortcomings in the governance conducted by the Lebanese state. Richard Hrair Dekmejian summed up some of these issues in the article “Consociational Democracy in Crisis: The Case of Lebanon,” stating that

“The [ruling] elite lacks a social conscience in terms of the amelioration of manifest poverty... To complicate matters Muslim groups have a larger lower class than the Christians—a factor which exacerbates existing confessional cleavages. This factor, coupled with the elites’ unrepresentativeness and tendency for bribery, has contributed greatly to the decline of systemic legitimacy” (Dekmejian, 1978).

Because of these shortcomings, citizens grew further disenchanted with their government and moved further from the legitimate political system in Lebanon, losing their identification with the nation and its leaders and developing a greater propensity towards extra-political actions ranging from non-violent protest to coordinated acts of terrorism.

A Crisis of Identification and the Rise of Political Parties

One of the great divisions in Lebanon leading up to the war, and possibly the most significant fundamental cleavage between the major factions, was the dispute

over moving away from the sectarian confessional system and towards parties based on political affiliation. In an essay titled "The Social Context," Halim Barakat states succinctly that, "The lack of consensus on the national identity of Lebanon is accompanied by and coincides with disagreement on many other ideological issues including social and political reform, relations with the West, support of the Palestinian causes, and socialism" (Barakat, 1979). The fundamental failure to consolidate a shared national and political identity in Lebanon is manifest in the rise of political parties directly opposed to the structure and function of the Lebanese state, and, more importantly, the failure of the state to effectively accommodate the grievances of these political entities.

Dekmejian effectively captures some of the contrary political ideologies and motives in Lebanon leading up to and during the war.

"As the cleavage became cumulative, the communal conflict often took the trappings of a class war; hence the rationale of the Muslim-leftist-Palestinian coalition, each fighting against the Maronite-led establishment for substantially different reasons. The Muslim insurgents who are not avowedly leftist would like to replace the Maronite dominance in the country, without effecting major ideological and structural changes in Lebanese society. On the other hand, the doctrinally radical leftists and communists are committed to the destruction of the capitalist economic and political order and its replacement by a socialist Lebanese state which could serve as a revolutionary model for other Arab countries to emulate; their efforts are supported by smaller leftist-radical Palestinian groups. Finally, there is the main body of Palestinian forces under Yasir Arafat whose aim is to preserve and even expand their political and military position in Lebanon for the express purpose of intensifying armed confrontation with Israel" (Dekmejian, 1978).

Clearly, the existing system of confessionalism was inadequate to facilitate the realization of the political goals of the developing factions due to the fact that the confessional system was largely predicated on the maintenance of the status quo of relative power relations. Thus, political parties with transitional aspirations began to form on the fringes of political culture in Lebanon, but these parties were different from those we see in the West. Michael Suleiman wrote that, "Their primary function appears to be the 'education' of the public in their particular point of view," and that, "They have never exercised much direct influence in shaping Lebanese domestic or foreign policy" (Suleiman, 1967). This exclusion from electoral and legislative power was due to the confessional nature of the Lebanese government, which, combined with the dominance of the *zuama*, effectively barred the participation of political groups. In fact, there was only one occasion, in 1960, in which party-affiliated representatives controlled even one third of the seats in parliament, an amount often perceived to be the critical threshold of representation necessary to promote legislative action (Suleiman, 1967). Instead, these groups were only proximally represented through their respective sects whose loyalty lay first and foremost with their local sectarian communities, relegating these political

parties to merely critiquing the government and its policies instead of affecting change.

Many of these parties, in fact, were closely aligned with the sects that housed the plurality of their members. Given that the one of the few roles these parties could take on was the recruitment and conversion of new members, they sought to engage in this activity as vigorously as possible, which often meant appealing to political grievances possessing confessional elements as well, such as income or educational inequality, both of which tended to coincide with ethno-religious lines. Recruitment in this fashion merely reinforced the preexisting sectarian divisions in Lebanon and left many disenfranchised groups to coalesce under these new political banners, which were structurally forced to operate outside of the legitimate political system. Additionally, the geographic dimension of emerging political parties meant that, “apart from Beirut in which almost all religious groups [were] represented, each party [had] a regional stronghold” (Suleiman, 1967). The general disillusionment with the existing political system of Lebanon among these new political parties allowed for a somewhat smooth eventual transition into militant organizations operating entirely outside of the political system in an attempt to seize greater power.

Geopolitical Role and Regional Influences

The Lebanese political system, with all of its aforementioned ills, was at least passable in the best of times. The years leading up to the war, however, were not the best of times. Situated on the eastern banks of the Mediterranean, Lebanon was poised to become a hub of transit, commerce, and political mediation. While this brought considerable benefits to Lebanon it also brought considerable strains. Lebanon, from its birth, was a microcosmic representation of the tensions between the West and the Middle East, and this was no secret to the powerful figures surrounding it. Torn between Western economic liberalization and clientelism, democracy and monarchy, isolationism and pan-Arabism, Lebanon was a figurative battleground during the years leading up to and during the war. As many threats to this fragile ecosystem as there were from within, there were nearly as many threats from without, whether due to dependency or direct antagonism.

Several states had stakes in Lebanon due variably to trans-national ethnic sympathies, ideological commonalities, political aspirations, or economic interdependence. Among these states were Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United States, France, Egypt, Jordan, and Libya. Each had varying interests and influence in Lebanon but each played at least some role. These roles, however, would take volumes to outline effectively. Suffice to say, then, that these states were able to tug on the sectarian strings of the various factions in Lebanon due to the minority composition of each individual group and the limits this composition placed on their abilities to effectively assert influence without foreign support. As such, Lebanon became a venue for these groups to proximally assert their wills, undermining the Lebanese political system and tugging at the unity of the nation.

Economic Structure and Struggles

Largely thanks to its aforementioned regional importance and Lebanon's economic liberalism, there was not another country that was able to successfully compete with Lebanon for the role of economic intermediary between the East and West. Thus, the Lebanese economy quickly became one that heavily depended upon international commerce via trade, currency exchanges, and tourism in order to make up for its relative deficiency of natural resources. Salim Nasr wrote that, "Because of its geo-political position, specific history, socio-religious equilibrium and the cultural characteristics of its bourgeoisie, Lebanon has been, since the 1880s, one of the principal points for the economic penetration of the Arab East by the capitalist industrial countries" (Nasr 1978). This led to a level of economic performance unparalleled by many of Lebanon's neighbors. In an index comparing various countries with the U.S. (U.S. being a value of 100), Lebanon's relative real GDP per capita in 1970 was estimated at 26.5, higher than that of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Syria (Kravis, Heston, & Summers, 1978).

In this case, like many others, the rising tide unfortunately did not raise all boats. The commercialism and trade orientation of the economy led to the establishment of a privileged socio-economic class, a bourgeoisie, in Lebanon. This class, largely composed of urban professionals and financial middlemen, pursued wealth untethered by policy restrictions, as Lebanon, throughout its early history, took a strict noninterventionist stance towards its domestic economy. For the trade and commercial industries, intervention in the form of investment was unnecessary, as large amounts of monetary and human capital flowed into Lebanon regularly. This caused the tertiary sector in the Lebanese economy to boom, expanding to compose 72 percent of the Lebanese economy in 1970 (Nasr 1978).

Intervention in the form of regulation or redistribution, on the other hand, was unheard of. An economic survey in 1961 found that 4 percent of the population received approximately 32 percent of the national income (Russell, 1985). This level of economic disenfranchisement fostered ill will towards the status quo among the more impoverished classes, which were generally partitioned among sectarian lines. The Maronites, having long-standing ties to the West, experienced considerable preference during the integration of Lebanon into the Western-dominated international economy and typically occupied higher-earning professions. The diverse Muslim populations, on the other hand, occupied much of the impoverished, rural, northern and southern provinces of Lebanon, and were typically not faced with the same economic opportunities as those living in Beirut.

Further complicating the economic issues in Lebanon was the fact that trends in economic inequality, like so many political issues, overlapped with sectarian divisions. A study in 1978 found that poverty was "especially manifest among urban Sunnis, Shi'ite refugees from the Palestinian-Israeli wars in southern Lebanon, and the Palestinian refugees living in crowded camps" (Dekmejian, 1978).

Income inequality took on an additional political dimension due to the fact that commercialism and trade were fully advocated for by a government that was content to watch its domestic industries wither as a result. One needs only look at the agricultural sector (which employed nearly 20 percent of the Lebanese population in 1970) to see the Lebanese government's neglect of its interior, with only 2.3 percent of the state budget being made up of agricultural expenditures in 1973 (Nasr, 1978). Throughout the 1960's and 70's, this led to a flight of rural farmers into slums in the peripheries of urban areas, generating a state of urban pauperism. This pauperism like, so many other conditions of the time, further bifurcated the haves and the have-nots both economically and politically.

The Palestinian Presence

It would be impossible to neglect the role of the Palestinian presence as an instigating condition in Lebanon. With the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan following the Black September conflict in 1970, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees relocated to Lebanon, where they made up an estimated 200,000 members of the approximately 2.3 million-person population on the eve of the war according to later studies (Soffer, 1986).

Prior to the Six-Day War in 1967, the Lebanese government, while housing Palestinian refugees, was largely indifferent to the Palestinian cause. After the war, however, the Lebanese were forced to more actively address the actions of the Palestinians who were becoming much more politically and militarily active as they grew independent of their Arab state patrons. From Lebanon, these refugees, many of them militants of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine fresh from their combat in Jordan, launched continuous attacks into Israel, creating a paralyzing dilemma for the Lebanese government to face.

The Cairo Agreement of 1969, which gave the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon the right to self-govern, became a centerpiece of the tension between the Palestinians and the Lebanese government. As an ideological matter, isolationist conservatives perceived this accord as an offense to Lebanese sovereignty, while pan-Arab sympathizers viewed it as a sign of solidarity with the Palestinians. On a more practical level, this arrangement served as a tacit endorsement of the increasingly regular raids into Israel carried out by the Palestinian *Fedayeen*. These raids increased significantly after the aforementioned arrival of Palestinians from Jordan.

The raids into Israel and Israel's reciprocal attacks drove a spike through the fragile bubble of the Lebanese state, pressuring a decidedly inert government to take a hard stance, which, not surprisingly, it failed to do. It was not long before the Kataeb, a technically secular though predominantly Maronite, militia (also known as the Phalange) began violently clashing with the Palestinians who had seemingly worn out their welcome. Palestinians and Muslims with Palestinian sympathies due variably to pan-Arab, socialist, or revolutionary ideologies responded in kind, forming several militias of their own, which were broadly encompassed by the

Lebanese National Movement. As the ranks of these two broad factions grew with members touting any of a number of grievances, the violence between them escalated severely. There isn't a consensus on the exact start of the Lebanese Civil War, but a watershed moment in the culminating violence may have been the Black Saturday massacres on December 6th 1975, which resulted in anywhere from 200 to 600 casualties, mainly civilians, after the discovery of the bodies of four Kataeb members in a car in East Beirut sparked violence throughout much of East Beirut and its surroundings.

Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to simultaneously examine this war both as a unique event and as one observation among many. This does create a discernable tension, but acknowledging this tension and proceeding regardless is, in my opinion, likely to produce a more nuanced understanding of this particular case while also drawing generalizable lessons from it. I have already provided a broad factual background of the conflict, thus, to provide a framework for my analysis, I will now draw upon broader theoretical literature on civil wars. This is by no means an exhaustive review of the literature on the topic, but is a selective sampling of texts most relevant to this conflict.

In their 1998 paper, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler seek to determine whether or not there is empirical evidence to support the role of economic factors in causing civil wars. Using Singer and Small's civil war data sets (1982 and 1994) to test their hypotheses, Collier and Hoeffler found that four variables were "significant and strong determinants of the duration and the probability of civil war": "initial income, ethno-linguistic fractionalisation [ELF], the amount of natural resources, and the initial population size" (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). Collier and Hoeffler then tested the robustness of their model by adding a number of other variables, but found that the core variables remained significant with similar coefficients of variation, suggesting that they are highly robust. This paper, among others by Collier and Hoeffler, serve as the foundation for the Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war analysis, which examines the start and duration of civil wars based on economic decision-making models. Additionally, this sets the stage for the development of the greed vs. grievance perspectives on civil war analysis.

Also of interest, ELF, in this case, is used as a proxy for the cost of coordinating a rebellion. Not surprisingly, states with minimally fractionalized populations will typically have a lower likelihood of grievance leading to rebellion or secession (while coordination cost is low due to homogeneity, opportunity cost is still high due to the relatively low gains from rebellion), where as in the most highly fractionalized populations, rebel groups will have higher costs associated with coordination as they will have to reach across ethno-linguistic boundaries to form forces of sufficient strength to rebel.

Collier and Hoeffler's findings clearly illustrate that the relationship between ethnic diversity, as represented by the ELF index, and the likelihood of civil war is non-monotonic, meaning that increasing degrees of diversity do not necessarily lead to an increased likelihood of civil war. From their empirical findings, Collier and Hoeffler infer that, "it is not ethno-linguistic fractionalisation which is damaging to societies but that degree of fractionalisation that most facilitates rebel coordination," which in their study is a value of 38 (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). The distinction that diversity itself is not sufficient to elicit rebellion is a very important one for the understanding of ethnic civil wars, later scholars such as Nicholas Sambanis and Marta Reynal-Querol will work towards unpacking ideas of diversity and the notion that not all wars, and subsequently not all causes, are the same.

The article, "Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?" written by Nicholas Sambanis in 2001, was the first attempt to establish a distinction between the factors contributing to ethnic civil wars and those contributing to nonethnic (e.g. revolutionary, ideological) civil wars. Sambanis finds that the distinction between ethnic and nonethnic civil wars is necessary in order to construct useful policy to respond to civil wars. He states that a conflict is an ethnic civil war

"If (1) there were more than 1,000 war-related deaths during the entire war and in at least a single year of the war, (2) the war challenged the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state, (3) the war occurred within the territory of that state, (4) the state was one of the principal combatants, and (5) the rebels were able to mount an organized military opposition to the state" (Sambanis, 2001).

Additionally, Sambanis expands the examination of civil wars causes to include factors beyond the realm of economics, which had previously dominated the field, to include analysis of political and historical causes. He also seeks to enhance the conversation by bringing theories of international relations and those pertaining to ethnic violence into the examination of civil wars. Sambanis ultimately finds that identity (ethnic) civil wars are significantly predicted by issues of political grievance, as opposed to nonidentity civil wars, which are predicted more by economic factors. Furthermore, he finds that systemic and regional factors may be more important conditions of civil wars than previously asserted.

The arguments advanced by Marta Reynal-Querol in her 2002 work, "Ethnicity, Political Systems, and Civil Wars," may have consequences for a theoretical understanding of the events in Lebanon. Reynal-Querol alludes to the distinction between the causes of ethnic and the causes of revolutionary civil wars first illustrated by Sambanis (2001), placing her article in the ethnic civil war field. This distinction between ethnic and revolutionary civil wars, however, may not always be as clearly delineated as would be preferred. Additionally, Reynal-Querol finds herself on the grievance side of the contending greed vs. grievance explanations for civil wars.

Reynal-Querol has three key findings: 1) religious diversity contributes more to the instance of ethnic civil wars than does linguistic diversity, 2) religious polarization is a more critical factor than religious fragmentation in determining the incidence of ethnic civil wars, and 3) mid-level democracies are more likely to experience ethnic civil wars than either highly inclusionary democracies or highly exclusionary regimes. Reynal-Querol's findings suggest that the critical role of religion in ethnic conflict is due to the relative complexity of religious differences as compared to linguistic or political differences. This complexity arises out of the fact that religious ideologies, unlike linguistic or political affiliations, are almost always composed of a fundamental worldview, filled with values that, if compromised, can lead to significant personal consequences. The key finding here is the assertion that it is actually religion, not other factors of ethnicity, which is the more salient issue in many civil wars.

James Fearon and David Laitin wrote an article, titled "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," in 2003 in which they argue that the civil wars in recent decades have not been caused by ethnic or religious factors, but that favorable conditions for insurgency also lead to an outbreak of civil war. Among these conditions they include "poverty..., political instability, rough terrain, and large populations" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Furthermore, Fearon and Laitin argue that the increase in civil war is not the result of drastic changes in the international state system after the fall of the Soviet Union, but rather a continuation of ongoing conflicts whose roots lie further back in history than the end of the Cold War.

Fearon and Laitin also push for a more constructivist view of civil wars and ethnic conflict, one in which less emphasis is placed on civil war being the inevitable outcome of long-standing historic grievances, desires, or biases. The authors assert that to place significant stock in long-term grievances only serves to legitimize them, and much more emphasis should be placed on more immediate conditions that justify civil war as an immediate opportunity, not the culmination of decades of centuries-old issues. Furthermore, the policy implications of their findings demand increased work towards the development of effective and uncorrupted administrative institutions in developing countries, as these are the mechanism through which marginalization and subsequent insurgencies and civil wars may be avoided. That said, the authors offer the caveat that there are countries that experience such severe state failure that they "should be left on their own or, when there are major implications for regional stability or international terrorism, be viewed as candidates for 'neotrusteeship' under the United Nations or regional military and political organizations" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

In an additional paper in 2007 titled "Ethnic Minority Rule and Civil War Onset," Fearon and Laitin return to address the question of whether rule of a country by a minority group is a sufficient condition for the onset of civil war. Fearon and Laitin state that, "an ethnic group 'controls' or 'dominates' a state or government to the extent that its members monopolize major government offices

and also determine significant policies” (Fearon, Kasara, & Laitin, 2007). Upon analyzing the heads of state of 161 countries since 1945 using this criteria, they found that, “although there has been a tendency for states with ethnic minority leaders to have had a higher risk of civil war, the tendency is weak. It is neither statistically significant or substantively strong” (Fearon, Kasara, & Laitin, 2007). In the Middle East and North Africa in particular, the percentage of country-years (total years observed multiplied by the number of countries observed) experiencing civil wars was 2.58 for those countries with ethnic minority groups in power, versus 1.63 for those with plurality groups in power, meaning a nearly 60% greater likelihood of civil war occurrence. It is added, however, that even in the most strong and significant of cases, the correlation between ethnic minority rule and civil war still appears to be weak. Based on this, Fearon and Laitin effectively rule out ethnic minority rule as a necessary condition for the onset of civil war, as so many cases have occurred without having ethnic minority leaders.

Building on concepts forwarded by both Reynal-Querol (2002) and Fearon and Laitin (2003 & 2007), Ravi Bhavnani and Dan Miodownik’s 2009 article “Ethnic Polarization, Ethnic Saliency, and Civil War” addresses the relationship between ethnic polarization and civil war while introducing ethnic saliency as a moderating variable. Essentially, the authors argue that ethnic saliency, defined as “the importance individuals attach to ethnicity,” is a key variable when examining ethnic motivations for conflict (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009). The author’s find that when ethnic saliency is high for across the population of a given country, “conflict onset is more than twice as high at the lowest levels of ethnic polarization, with the difference decreasing as polarization reaches its highest or maximal level” (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009). The authors also reaffirm the Fearon and Laitin’s finding that minority domination can increase the likelihood of civil war onset and, like ethnic polarization, is manipulated by ethnic saliency. At high levels of ethnic saliency, the likelihood of conflict in countries with minority group domination increases with the size of the minority group relative to the contending ethnic sect, “peaking when the groups are close but not yet equal in size” (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009).

In a 2003 working paper titled “The Lebanese Civil War, 1975 – 1990,” Samir Makdisi and Richard Sadaka conduct a case study of Lebanon in which they directly apply the Collier-Hoeffler model in order to determine whether Collier and Hoeffler’s explanations for instance and duration of civil wars apply in the case of Lebanon. This is the only inquiry that I am aware of that attempts to fit the war in Lebanon into the existing scholarship on civil war. Primarily, they find that only the application of Collier and Hoeffler’s findings on the impact of ELF are useful for the understanding of Lebanon, and they posit that it is better understood as religious fractionalization for the purposes of Lebanon, because Lebanon is otherwise ethnically homogenous.

Ultimately, the authors suggest that the Collier-Hoeffler model is weak in explaining the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon, but does a fair job using economic

determinants to explain the duration of the war. The authors suggest that more examinations should be made into the role of grievance in the Lebanese civil war, and mention that variables such as population density and population growth rates might also be relevant factors to examine in future comparative studies. Examination of these and other variables is left open to further inquiry.

Analysis

Stephen Van Evera, in *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (1999), provides very helpful criteria for weighing contending hypothesis and choosing which to further examine. He establishes three main criteria: *explanatory power*, *prescriptive richness*, and *degree of satisfaction*. *Explanatory power* is measured by importance, “how strongly does the causal phenomenon of the hypothesis affect the caused phenomenon;” explanatory range, “how many classes of phenomena does the cause affect;” and applicability, “is the causal phenomenon that the hypothesis identifies common in the real world” (Van Evera, 1999). Due to the limited time and resources of this project, tests of the strength of causal relationships will be bypassed and the range of phenomena explained is fixed within the realm of civil war. This means that we are left with measuring *relative applicability* from the *explanatory power* category, as well as *prescriptive richness* and *degree of satisfaction*. *Prescriptive richness* refers to the manipulability of the hypothesis, or the likelihood that its effects can be mitigated. *Degree of satisfaction* speaks to the level to which the hypothesis has the potential to satisfy our curiosity about the relevant phenomenon. I will use these criteria as a rough analytical framework to analyze the usefulness of explanations for the onset of war in Lebanon in light of recent scholarship on civil war.

Given the extreme and ongoing impact of civil war, most recent studies of civil war phenomena seek to provide prescriptively useful conclusions based on broad quantitative analyses, however, these analyses don’t tell the whole story. Such analyses, as previously illustrated, rely heavily on the application of economic models to the question of civil war onset. Among other issues, such methodology suffers from the inability to clarify specific causal mechanisms in individual cases. Through examining the case of Lebanon, I do not hope to test the existing theories, but to introduce some nuance to the examination of civil war onset. First and foremost, I must illustrate that the events in Lebanon do, in fact, qualify as an instance of civil war. Collier and Hoeffler, using a definition first laid out by Singer and Small (1982), provide a tidy checklist for identifying instances of civil war.

“Singer and Small (1982) provide an operational definition of civil war. The authors define wars in terms of violence, not in terms of the goals of the protagonists or the results of the war. A civil war in Singer's and Small's (1982) typology is based on four dimensions. First, one of the primary actors in any conflict identified as a civil war must be the national government in power at the time hostilities begin. Secondly, the concept of war requires that both sides have the ability to inflict death upon each other. As a rule of thumb Singer and Small (1982) define that in a civil war the stronger forces

must sustain at least 5% of the number of fatalities suffered by the weaker forces. This rule enables them to distinguish genuine war situations from massacres, pogroms, and purges. Thirdly, significant military action must take place. Only civil wars that resulted in at least 1,000 battle related deaths per year are included... Fourthly, the war must be internal to the country” (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998).

In the case of Lebanon, the state, and later fragments of it, was directly involved in the violence via the state military, which later broke into internally warring factions due to the confessional divisions within the government and military. The majority of the military factions involved were capable of inflicting death upon one another. Estimates of the death toll in Lebanon range from 130,000 to 170,000 over the course of 15 years, far greater than the requisite 1,000 deaths per year. Finally, the war was internal to the country and succession was not an apparently significant motivation of the warring parties.

Admittedly, the case of Lebanon is likely not representative of the population of countries facing civil wars, however, that does not disqualify it from raising useful questions about our theoretical approaches to understanding civil wars. Furthermore, it is my belief that the application of theories to individual case studies can, in any circumstance, assist in unpacking the theories themselves, allowing scholars to understand the complex causal relationships between conditions and the outcomes that they theoretically induce. In this case, the most prominent model of examining civil wars is the Collier-Hoeffler model, which attempts to establish a rational, micro-economic decision rule for civil war, assuming both the fundamental rationality and economic-mindedness of rebel groups and the ability of scholars to test a micro-economic theory using macro-economic variables and data (population, natural resources, income, ethno-linguistic fragmentation). Sambanis effectively sums this issue up by stating that, “the [Collier-Hoeffler] model and the literature on civil war more generally suffer from such a ‘missing link’ between micro-level theories and macro-level data, we need a different approach to better understand how the variables used in our empirical models influence the probability of civil war” (Sambanis, 2004).

Additionally, I find myself convinced by Sambanis’ assertion that “the [Collier-Hoeffler] model’s distinction between ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ as competing motives for civil war is illusory, because greed and grievance are usually shades of the same problem” (Sambanis, 2004). In Lebanon this claim is highly salient. Most, if not all, of the contextual determinants of the civil war had both economic and socio-political dimensions. The most important shortcoming of the Collier-Hoeffler model in instance, as was found in Makdisi and Sadaka (2003), is that it failed to predict civil war onset in Lebanon the year that it occurred.

The rent-seeking model of civil war onset may have some applicability in Lebanon, however, though possibly not for the reason’s implicit in the Collier-Hoeffler model. In the case of Lebanon, various military factions were able to

establish boroughs of sorts, extorting neighborhoods for mafia-esque protection money. In this sense, the warring factions have a greed incentive to initiate violence. There are two present difficulties in examining this kind of condition, however. First, operationalizing this phenomenon would be difficult, as finding a proxy for the “ease of extortion” of a country would be difficult. Immediate suggestions, such as population or national income (the assumption being that the greater the population and/or income, the greater rent to be extorted as in the Collier-Hoeffler model) lack specificity and therefore do not exempt other causal mechanisms, potentially leading to unintentional conclusions. Secondly, this rent-seeking behavior is not necessarily exclusive to civil war as a form of political violence and could just as easily be present in cases of terrorism or insurgency. Regardless, this is one manifestation of a greed motivation for conflict.

Another condition for violence was the income disparity in Lebanon. As mentioned previously, Lebanon was quite wealthy in comparison to its neighbors leading up to the war; however, economic stratification was a considerable issue. Again, we see an issue that is partially economic and partially socio-political, as the trends in wealth inequality overlapped with ethnic-sectarian divisions. As with the extortion issue mentioned above, however, this income disparity could have led to issues other than civil war, such as general strikes or terrorist attacks on banks, customs houses, and other symbols of the commercial economy, therefore it is not possible to view it as a necessary or sufficient condition for war.

Educational disparities also persisted between ethnic groups. Private schools were predominately attended by Maronites, where as public schools were predominately attended by Muslims. There was a regional dimension to the inequality as well, with Beirut and Mount Lebanon, both Maronite-dominated areas, experiencing the highest availability and attainment of education; the regions of the Beqaa and Southern Lebanon, predominately occupied by Shi’ites, lagged behind these two areas; and Northern Lebanon, occupied by Sunnis and Greek Orthodox, lagged even further still (Kliot, 1987). The quality of the private education was typically much greater than the public education, meaning there was a considerable gap between the education of Maronites and the education of Muslims, thus a subsequent gap in economic opportunities. Potentially more problematic, however, was the substance of the education received. The private education of the Maronites had very little state moderation and was typically influenced by Western powers. Often, the ideals imparted upon the students were Western and reinforced a sense of superiority and apartness vis-à-vis the rest of Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world. This contributed significantly to the differing economic opportunities and sectarianism of the two broad groups.

The examination of extortion, income inequality, and educational inequality demonstrates that there isn’t as finite of a distinction between ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ as motivations for conflict, but that is not the only aspect of civil war theory that is questionable in this circumstance. In light of the conflict in Lebanon, Sambanis’ (2001) assertion that there are key differences between ethnic and

revolutionary civil war, while definitely adding precision to inquiries on the nature and causes of civil wars, may not offer as clear of a distinction as is preferable. The Lebanese civil war bridges the gap between ethnic and revolutionary conflict in many circumstances. Using Reynal-Querol's definition, which builds upon those of Singer and Small and Licklider, an ethnic civil war is, "an episode of violent conflict between governments and national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which the challengers seek major changes in their status" (Reynal-Querol, 37). It is clear in the case of Lebanon that there were ethnic tensions between the religious confessional groups and more broadly between those who identified with the rest of the Arab world and those who did not. In many ways, this cleavage was central to the conflict in Lebanon. However, the waters become muddied when one attempts to distinguish whether the ethnic divisions in Lebanon were the motivation for war, the instrument, or both. In order to parse out this distinction, let us take a look at a few of the fundamental ideological disputes in Lebanon, all of which overlapped with sectarian divides.

The deepest wound in Lebanese population was the fundamental failure to establish a shared national identification with the Lebanese state. The French established Lebanon as a geographic area and state without consideration for a plurality of its inhabitants. The tenuous relationship between the various sects in Lebanon was predicated on a mutual desire for independence, first from the Ottomans and later from the French. It was put best by Nurit Kliot, who said "Lebanon was established as a state before a Lebanese nation could develop" (Kliot, 1987). Essentially, the people of Lebanon needed a common enemy in order to co-identify. This system worked well enough when it faced no great internal pressures, but over time a number of issues pushed on the fragile cohesiveness of the Lebanese state.

Among these issues was the ever-widening divide on the issue of political representation, which served as an instigating condition of the war as the country grew further torn over entertaining the idea of a shift to political parties instead of confessionalism. On the one side, the Maronites in particular benefited greatly from the existing system as it placed them in a greater position of power relative to non-Christians. The Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Druze, on the other hand, were largely disenfranchised by the stagnant representation system based on dubious and outdated census data and unresponsive to shifts in the demographics of the population. In the years leading up to the war, political organizations, often with progressive socialist, nationalist, or secular motivations, began to spring up throughout Lebanon. Many of these factions further deepened the wound present in Lebanese political culture by exposing the inelasticity of the Lebanese political system and by militarizing and resolving their grievances through extra-political means such as terrorism and assassinations. By the time of the war, most major political forces had similarly militarized, either training or hiring militias, in order to solidify and expand their territorial dominance. The militarization of these disenfranchised segments of the population was consistent with Fearon, Kasara, and Laitin's (2007) assertion regarding the likelihood of civil war increasing in

situations of ethnic minority rule. This mobilization contributed significantly to the escalation from political grievance to full-scale civil war.

As mentioned previously, possibly the most critical catalyst for the fragile Lebanese civil war was the presence of the Palestinian refugees in Southern Lebanon. On one side, the conservative, Maronite right wing identified with Israel and opposed the presence and activities of the Palestinians in Lebanon. On the other side, the more progressive, pro-Arab left sympathized with the mission of the Palestinians and sought to provide a haven for these displaced peoples. This strict division posed a considerable practical issue for the Lebanese government: allow the Palestinians to undermine the sovereignty of the state by launching unsanctioned attacks into Israel or crack down on the Palestinians and risk breaking ties with the rest of the Arab world and alienating the pro-Arab members of the population. The apparent answer to this question was to do nothing. As the parliament and executives of Lebanon were paralyzed by the question raised by the Palestinian presence, groups on both sides of the issue lost faith in the government, and gravitated ever further from the existing political society of Lebanon, instead draw closer and closer to their long-standing confessional and more modern political affiliations. For many of the inhabitants of the South, this meant militarizing along with the Palestinians living among their population and ultimately engaging in open conflict with the coalition forces that eventually made up the Lebanese Front, which was essentially the military wing of the Maronites.

So how does this all relate back to ethnic divisions? The answer is networks. Collier and Hoeffler found that, on an index of ethno-linguistic fragmentation (ELF) ranging from 0 to 100 (100 being perfectly fragmented) a value of 38 leads to the highest likelihood of war (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). Interestingly, a similar index (from 0 to 1) generated by Philip Roeder using Charles L. Taylor and Michael C. Hudson's ELF formula shows that in 1961 Lebanon had a value .329 and in 1985 this value had risen to .356 (Roeder, 2001). In the Collier-Hoeffler model, this data is meant to proxy the cost of coordinating a rebellion. In Lebanon, this means that the level of ethnic fragmentation was highly conducive to the type of coordination that is necessary in order to arrange an effective rebellion. Long-standing sectarian divisions make for powerful bonds, and when a conflict can take on a sectarian hue, followers of one sect or another are encouraged to coalesce under a familiar flag. Thus we see the arrival of militant factions such as the Shi'a Amal, Hezbollah, Islamic Amal, Phalangists, Murabitun, Lebanese Front, and various other warring parties that all banked on networks arising from long-standing confessional associations.

As mentioned previously, Bhavnani and Miodownik (2009) introduced the importance of ethnic salience in determining ethnic civil war onset. In Lebanon, a terribly mal-integrated state, issues of ethnicity were particularly salient given the sectarian confessional communities and the perceived historical distinction between the Arabs and non-Arab Phoenician. The difference between Bhavnani and Miodownik's findings and my own is that they argue that higher levels of ethnic salience instigate grievances; whereas, in the case of Lebanon, it seems more likely

that ethnic salience facilitated coordination once grievances existed instead of acting as the genesis of the grievance. It seems reasonable that this could lead to conflict in many other circumstances, as ethnic salience could lead to a decrease in the coordination costs among ethnically homogenous subsets of the population, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Once again, the ability for aggrieved parties to network was critical in Lebanon and this ability was reinforced by the salience of ethnicity, which is largely attributable to the confessionalism of Lebanon. These confessions became the outlet of grievances associated with both economic and political issues, and focused aggrieved parties into like-minded camps.

My key assertion here is that the ability of opposition groups to coordinate along pre-existing and reinforced sectarian lines was key in the onset of war in Lebanon, not as an intrinsically instigating factor, but as a facilitating condition of conflict through its reduction of the cost of coordination. Essentially, the distinction is that the issue of ethnic diversity was not the *cause* of the war in Lebanon; it instead made the war more likely, through the causal mechanism of coordination. This extreme ease of coordination made the opportunity cost of engaging in civil war so low for the various groups involved that, despite the seemingly minimal real gains to be rendered, war occurred. So now let me examine this idea in light of Van Evera's standards for a useful hypothesis.

On the front of *relative applicability*, deep-seated sectarianism is extremely prevalent throughout much of the developing world, meaning that the same ease of coordination may be a factor in many other countries. It is important to note that sectarianism doesn't have to fall along ethno-religious lines; it can just as easily be an issue of class, geographic location, or political identification. Regardless, a more nuanced measurement of sectarianism and its relationship with coordinating costs may be highly significant in predicting other instances of ethnic or revolutionary civil war.

In order to assess *prescriptive richness*, one must look at the factors that make up this sectarian system to glean possible methods for reducing similar risks in other countries. One of the glaringly obvious causes of this sectarianism is the confessional system of government. Due to the fact that Lebanon's confessional system is the only one of its kind, warning against the dangers of confessionalism seems unnecessary. That being said, we don't need to look very far to see examples of broader consociational representation based on factors other than ethnic quotas, but that encourage sectarian identification nonetheless. The key function of confessionalism in Lebanon, however, was the constraint it placed on the integration of the diverse population into a nation with a shared identity. Instead of a population that identifies as Lebanese, you have samples that see themselves first and foremost as Christian, Druze, Palestinian, or Beirut. In addition to traditional measures such as ethnic fragmentation, examinations of ethnic salience and integration could be useful in understanding how diversity can facilitate civil wars that have ethnic components. Admittedly, a metric of ethnic salience would be methodologically challenging to construct, but the result could be highly fruitful.

Integration, on the other hand, might not be so challenging. Studies of public and private school attendance, educational substance, literacy, mass media targeting, or economic inequality could all be conducted in an attempt to discern trends that may overlap with ethnic or sectarian divides. Data from such examinations could then be synthesized into an index of sectarian integration. At any rate, once the factors contributing to sectarianism have been broken into their simpler moving parts, these individual components can then be addressed through policy in the country involved so that the sort of mal-integration that occurred in Lebanon does not lead to the same coordinated violence elsewhere.

Finally, there is the *degree of satisfaction*. The purpose here is to find some explanation broad enough that the examiner feels it can effectively encompass a phenomenon without becoming so broad that the explanation is lost in ambiguity. In this case, I feel that a more in depth understanding of the relationship between sectarian networks and conflict is highly satisfying. It is broad enough that it, by nature of being a facilitating condition, encompasses many of the more country- and time-specific factors that instigated the war in Lebanon (income and educational inequality, identity issues, Palestinian presence). The same is very likely for wars in many other countries. On the other hand, sectarian coordination is not so broad that it seems to be a residual, indefinable, or immeasurable category. That being said, I am under no illusion that the ability to coordinate along sectarian lines is a sufficient explanation for war as it requires an underlying grievance, but I do find that it is necessary, and that many of the same conditions that lead to the sort of disenfranchisement that inherently incentivizes conflict may also lead to the sort of mal-integration that facilitates sectarian polarization, and thus coordination in opposition.

Conclusion

The case of Lebanon, despite being an admitted outlier in the study of civil war, has sufficiently illustrated the need for the more contextual study of the relationship between extreme sectarianism and coordination in civil war, a condition that is certainly not unique, and is likely highly explanatory and manipulable. While many are quick to dismiss Lebanon's case as inexplicable and uninformative, I believe that the civil war Lebanon experienced was situated within a context not unlike that of many other young, diverse states. Edward Azar and Robert Haddad state this well in "Lebanon—An Anomalous Conflict?" by pointing out that, "As a multi-communal/developing society, Lebanon falls into a large category of emerging states that exhibit the pressures and conflicts of nation-state building" (Azar & Haddad, 1986). Like Azar and Haddad, I believe Lebanon can tell scholars a considerable amount about the conditions in which states fail and people fight. As such, I would encourage the continued study of other phases of the Lebanese Civil War, as they may be similarly rich in questions to be asked of anyone who hopes to contribute to the theory of civil war.

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