The Arab Spring and Lebanon.

A critical perspective on the struggle for power in Lebanon.

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The Arab uprisings have been received with enthusiasm, support and optimism across the whole spectrum of the political leadership and Lebanese society. Many have even gone so far as to say that the ‘Arab Spring’ had originated and was inspired by the 2005 Lebanese ‘Independence Uprising’ which successfully ended a 30 years Syrian occupation. Nevertheless, even in the earlier stages, voices of concern over minority issues were heard. While Lebanon had long been the center of attention, it seemed to be watching the events sweeping across the region from afar. Was Lebanon to glide through the regional instability? and, was Lebanon not going to have its own radical Spring? Different media outlets hypothesised as to why Lebanon seemed to be unaffected by the regional events.

As the uprisings reached Syria, anxiety soon took over the political rhetoric in Lebanon. The uneasy relationship that binds these two countries was to aggravate an already precarious situation. The two leading political blocks had been in a stand-off since 2005. Simply put, Lebanon has been at a crossroads and the direction forward has been fiercely fought over. As regional showdowns continue to be vividly mirrored in Lebanese politics, the Syrian events were seen as the perfect opportunity for the two leading blocks to entrench their positions and escalate their mobilization.

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2 Particularly following the violence against Copts in Egypt. Pro-March 14, Lady of the Mountain Christian gathering announced their stance towards the Arab Spring. It reiterated their support for the quest for justice, freedom and democracy, reiterated their belongingness to and role in the region, rejected their association with the ‘oppressive regimes’, and emphasised their common destiny with their Muslim compatriots: ‘Determining the Christian role in the Arab Spring is not a private Christian matter, but it also concerns the Muslims, and it is their mutual concern, since "Christians in the Levant",(...) are inseparable from the cultural identity of the Muslims. And the Muslims in the Levant are inseparable from the cultural identity of the Christians. In that sense, we are responsible for one another before God and history.’ Lady of the Mountain Gathering Rejects ‘Bids to Link Christians Fate to Oppressive Regimes’. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/18308-lady-of-the-mountain-gathering-rejects-bids-to-link-christians-fate-to-oppressive-regimes. Accessed on 27/10/2011
Repercussions of the regional situation were felt in Lebanon when the uprisings seemed to take over Syria; this paper, therefore, focuses on the impact of the Syrian events over Lebanese politics and security. Drawing from critical security studies, this paper also highlights the intricate relationship between identity and security, and proposes a more comprehensive approach to reconstructing a common identity.

- Background:

The 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri had seismic effects on a long stagnant domestic political scene. Armed with international support, Lebanese marched the streets in protest at the prolonged Syrian presence. What was then dubbed the ‘Beirut Spring’ was soon met with counter-demonstrations in support and recognition of the stabilizing Syrian role and in rejection of Western influence. This created a schism in Lebanese society and gave birth to what would become known as the March 14th and the March 8th blocks. The Lebanese political scene has since been deeply polarized. This polarization has had deep socio-economic, political and hard security effects. This has manifested itself through one stalemate after another, government paralysis, politicization of every aspect of the public sector, and unresolved remnants of war and of 30 years of Syrian presence such as weak public institutions and security services. Meanwhile, justice and development have slipped further down the priority list and armed clashes or security incidents have maintained a relatively steady presence in everyday life. The whole public service seems to have been put on hold. People are tired but do not know what to do about it; they feel stuck in a game much bigger than themselves; and most of all, they feel the environment and the system do not provide a way out.

3 The political and security dimensions are covered in this paper but further research could discuss the socio-economic repercussions of the Syrian events on Lebanon. On this note, and in light of the regional as well domestic instability, Prime Minister Miqati has voiced concerns over a different aspect of national security—‘economic identity’. He called on the different parties to set their political differences aside and rally to ‘maintain Lebanon’s economic identity.’ Also, the IMF ‘noted that domestic political uncertainty and regional unrest eroded market confidence in 2011, bringing an end to Lebanon’s four-year spell of impressive economic growth.’ Miqati Meets Economic Committees, GLC: Cooperation Needed to Preserve Country’s Economic Identity, 8/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29363. Accessed on 17/2/2012. And, Lebanon Economy at Risk from Syria Unrest: IMF, 10/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29605. Accessed on 17/2/2012.
In the aftermath of the Syrian withdrawal, several ‘historical’ and long overdue reconciliations necessary in war-to-peace transitions have taken place. The ‘Independence Uprising’ had brought together an unlikely alliance between Hariri, Gemayel, Geagea, Jumblat, and for a brief period of time Michel Aoun. For many Lebanese, it finally seemed that the civil war was behind them. And in spite of the rift with other factions, the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement was another important step in this direction. Christian representation in both camps meant that the divide was no longer between Christians and Muslims as clearly as it had been the case in the civil war; the tension was more visible in Shia-Sunni relations. But, that is not to say that the Arab Spring did not spur old threat perceptions. The dividing lines were merely redrawn, between two divergent political paths: March 14 and March 8. That said, the concerns, representation and the mobilization remained largely sectarian.

By examining the different Lebanese reactions to the Arab Spring, this paper highlights endemic attitudes and fears which have prevented a break from traditional politics. Traditional politics in Lebanon have focused on sectarian identities. And, sectarianism had long been institutionalized—under the Ottoman Empire, the French Mandate and since independence. Security, for each of the communities, had been equivalent to a zero-sum game. Securing sectarian identity continues to be the main referent. But, since 2005, the reconfiguration of power conceded to alliances which recognized the dynamic between

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5 Heads of the major Sunni, Christian and Druze parties.

6 As the clashes in Tripoli as well as several quotes mentioned below illustrate.

7 Maronite Patriarch Beshara al-Rahi voiced his concerns ‘over a possible Sunni-Alawite civil war in Syria that “might lead to displacing the Christians from the region, like in Iraq.”’ He also emphasised: ‘we are not with the ruling regimes, we are with the reforms that are essential for the Arab peoples.’ Al-Rahi Fears Possible Syria Civil War, Displacement of Christians. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/18159-al-rahi-fears-possible-syria-civil-war-displacement-of-christians. Accessed on 27/10/2011


9 MP Teini had said: ‘The current system means I only represent my sect. I would rather represent my country and not my sect and hope that one day Lebanese politics will not be based on sect.’ Al Jazeera interview. from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vesotnraN5g&feature=channel. Accessed on 10/2/2012
interests and identities. It has been argued that ‘identity and interests (…) are dynamically interrelated’ and ‘cause each other’; the new alliances illustrate this argument as the rallying of different sectarian groups with some, and against others, consequently created new umbrella identities—March 14th and 8th.

Georges Corm talked of a ‘torn identity’; Krayem noted that ‘polarization among the Lebanese and their efforts to defend or promote their interests invited and facilitated external intervention.’ Allegiances and identities in Lebanon have not been bound by territorial borders. Throughout the years, it has required the intervention of the same foreign powers that supported the crisis in the first place, to put the ‘Lebanese “Humpty Dumpty” back together’. The different sects have needed outside powers to support their position in the distribution of power; they have survived as extensions of larger regional and international forces. Since 2005 the cards were reshuffled; as Lebanon is ‘in the middle of a showdown’ between Iran and Syria on the one hand, and most of the international community on the other hand, these unlikely alliances changed the face of the power composition—giving way to a more complex and diverse one. That is not to say that sectarianism is withering; Karim Knio speaks of neo-sectarianism where ‘it is clear that “old/new” cleavages that characterise Lebanese politics is omnipresent.’ Constellations of sectarian identities make up the two main factions struggling over the future of Lebanon: one representing the so-called axis of moderation, the other, representing the axis of resistance. One can therefore say that ‘representation’ and ‘resistance’ are key components of any political discussion on Lebanon.

13 Maronite Patriarch: ‘Pluralism is a big treasure for Lebanon (…)’ But we have another illness (…). It is our loyalty to outside Lebanon,’ (…)’We can’t live and have loyalties abroad both in the East and West.’ Al-Rahi: We Can’t Survive if we Have Loyalties Abroad. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/17186-al-rahi-we-cant-survive-if-we-have-loyalties-abroad Accessed on 15/10/2011
15 While the Christians have traditionally looked towards the West, the Shia to Iran, the Sunnis first looked to Syria and now to KSA.
17 He notes that ‘behind the simplistic and short-term distinction between an anti- and a pro-Syrian camp lies a clash of a multitude of different Lebanese national projects tailored around the interest of every sect respectively.’ Karim Knio (2005). Lebanon: Cedar Revolution or Neo-Sectarian Partition?, Mediterranean Politics, 10:2, 225-231. P 226
Despite the many years of conflict and the many attempts to patch the domestic “mosaic”\(^{18}\), it is not contentious to note that the Lebanese domestic canvas remains incomplete. Pinning this to threats to identity is no novelty; nevertheless, this paper examines how the Arab Spring further exacerbates the already precarious stability of Lebanon. And, argues in favour of a more comprehensive conception of identity which leads to reinventing a more inclusive and interdependent security.

- Perceptions, Representation and Resistance:

There is a long-standing belief that Lebanon is ‘affected positively or negatively by the regional situation;’ Interior Minister Marwan Charbel warned that the ‘repercussions will not be easy on Lebanon’.\(^{19}\) March 14\(^{th}\) member, head of the Phalange Party, Amine Gemayel had stated that ‘we sympathize with the Arab people calling for freedom, but we believe Lebanon should not be involved, other parties’ interferences in our affairs affect our country [negatively].’\(^{20}\) There have been many positions of caution regarding the situation in Syria; that any spill over could spiral out of control. Charbel reminded both camps to be ‘aware that we are on the same boat together and if the boat sinks all of us will drown.’\(^{21}\) Weakness, orders, a political choice, or a security measure, the March 8\(^{th}\) government has taken several tangible steps to dissociate itself, as it claims, from any role in the Syrian crisis.\(^{22}\) The first of which had been to abstain from voting for Syrian expulsion from the Arab League, another was the reservations over the Arab League’s decision to send a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping mission, and a third was the refusal to participate in the ‘Friends of Syria’ conference. ‘Our best decision is to disassociate Lebanon from the developments in Syria’ reiterated PM

\(^{18}\) A term used by several Lebanese specialists (Salibi, Hudson etc.). For Halim Barakat, a mosaic society differs from a pluralistic one; the level of integration between the different groups is considerably lower in the former than it is in the latter. Barakat, Halim. ‘Social and Political Integration in Lebanon: A Case of Social Mosaic.’ *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1973), pp. 301-318. P 301,302.


\(^{22}\) In taking up this role, the government has been seen by some as an accomplice to the Syrian regime. For example, the deployment of the LAF along the border has received mixed responses, going as far MP Moein al-Merehbi condemning the deployment of the army as ‘Syrian orders to President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, and Army Commander General Jean Qahwaji.’ *Jumblat Asks State to Aid Syrian Refugees instead of Flexing Military Muscle in North*, 6/2/2012. Naharnet: [http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29112](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29112). Accessed on 17/2/2012.
Miqati’s position was reinforced with the French and American “understanding” of the government’s position. But, these moves have not been popular across the spectrum of Lebanese society—by the opposition and a large portion of the Lebanese population—not the least for humanitarian purposes. Druze leader Walid Jumblat, although part of the current government, has consistently condemned Assad’s regime and has recently called to intensify assistance to Syrian refugees. The scene in Lebanon is nuanced and complex, the dividing lines are unclear. Nevertheless, it is worth to note that March 14th has taken an opposite stance. For Sunni leader former PM Saad Hariri, the Lebanese have ‘a national duty and a responsibility’ to stand by the Syrian people. And, as he noted that the regime in Syria is ‘engaged in the last battle to defend a regional axis’, he called on the international community and Arab countries to ‘take practical steps beyond condemnation, and even beyond imposing economic sanctions.’ His alliance recognized the Syrian National Council ‘as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.’ March 14th alliance is very optimistic as to the fall of the Syrian regime. Hariri believes that ‘the establishment of a pluralistic democratic system in Syria will give great immunity to the Lebanese democratic experience.’ Head of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea agrees; it ‘means a stable Lebanon that has demarcated borders and its arms limited to the state (…) ‘A democratic regime in Syria supports Lebanon’s independence.’ Amal and Hezbollah, the two main Shiite parties however, do not agree; they have accused the international community of targeting Syria because of its support to the Palestinian and the Lebanese resistance; furthermore, Hezbollah is convinced that March 14th’s manoeuvring is aimed at changing the distribution

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26 Emphasis added.
28 March 14th alliance announced, at the 7th commemoration the Hariri assassination, its alliance with the SNC. Hariri’s Murder Anniversary to be Marked by Announcement of Alliance with Syrian Opposition, 14/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29972. Accessed on 17/2/2012
of power.\textsuperscript{31} There are now two opposite but concrete directions taken by the two camps; this further reduces chances for near-term pacification and stabilization.

In brief, all parties were initially excited about the Arab Spring.\textsuperscript{32} Although categorization and the sectarian narrative are too simplistic and reductionist of a method, mainstream assumptions identify Sunni-shia tension as a standing issue;\textsuperscript{33} therefore, the Syrian events, and to a lesser extent those in Bahrain, have received contradictory responses. And, Christians have expressed some concerns over unintended repercussions of the Arab Spring.\textsuperscript{34} But, there have also been many reassurances. Hariri\textsuperscript{35} and Nasrallah\textsuperscript{36} reiterated their keenness on civil peace,\textsuperscript{37} and both singled out a common foreign enemy but no domestic one. Having said that, both camps continue to slam each other as the Syrian events magnify the political rift.\textsuperscript{38} And, in the face of regional changes, perceptions of identity threats are spreading.

\textsuperscript{31} Deputy Secretary General Qassem: ‘To the March 14 bunch I say: stop betting on regional developments to alter the balance of power in Lebanon, you betted on America, Israel, the West and all the outside schemes to no avail.’ Qassem to March 14: Stop Betting on Regional Developments, 15/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/30179. Accessed on 21/2/2012.

\textsuperscript{32} Including Hezbollah. Nasrallah had differentiated between the popular uprisings and the “conspiracy” against Syria or the ‘injustice’ in Bahrain. He noted that ‘the Arab Spring was against the regimes run by (former U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza) Rice, (Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey) Feltman and (U.S. Secretary of State Hillary) Clinton, the same people who were supervising you in 2006.’ Nasrallah Slams March 14, Says Hizbullah Won’t Kill ‘Ordinary’ Israelis to Avenge Mughniyeh, 16/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/30320. Accessed on 22/2/2012.

\textsuperscript{33} Both Hariri’s and Nasrallah’s statements quoted elsewhere in this paper have alluded to this.

\textsuperscript{34} Several Christians leaders have expressed this concern but also reiterated their Arab affiliation and integration to Muslim society. Pro-March 14 Lady of the Mountain gathering and repetitive Al-Rahi statements of a common future and the risk of Christian displacement illustrate this.

\textsuperscript{35} In terms of Sunni-Christian relations, Hariri repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to Mounassafa. As for Sunni-Shiite relations: ‘we do not hold our Shiite brothers responsible for the assassination of Rafic Hariri’, and that ‘Israel is our only enemy and let us defend our country together and be victorious for Lebanon.’. Hariri: I Will Bear Responsibility of My Solidarity with Syrian People, 14/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/30061. Accessed on 17/2/2012

\textsuperscript{36} ‘It is true that in 1982 we had made speeches calling for the rise of an Islamic state in Lebanon,’ but that objective has long been abandoned just like others from the opposite camp have abandoned partition. Nasrallah Rules Out Govt. Collapse, Urges ‘Real’ Dialogue in Syria, 7/12/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29255. Accessed on 17/2/2012


\textsuperscript{38} Nasrallah to March 14: ‘You are not in a position that allows you to put conditions or impose conditions (...). You are not in a position to give guarantees in Lebanon concerning the developments in the region.’ As for Hariri, he held the government responsible for ‘the frequent Syrian violations against Lebanese citizens and Lebanese sovereignty.’ Aoun, on his part is frustrated with the political deadlock: he is ‘the one who represents Christians in power.’ He ‘must select the Christian (civil servants) and until now we haven’t gained anything in the administrative appointments.’ Nasrallah Slams March 14, Says Hizbullah Won’t Kill ‘Ordinary’
Manifestations:

The heightened political tension has manifested itself on the ground through a number of security incidents. Since the start of the uprisings, a number of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations have been staged and have gone through peacefully. But, in the South, Tyre has witnessed a number of bomb explosions, the UNIFIL force was targeted, a number of rockets were launched into northern Israel—threatening the cessation of hostilities, and the Palestinian camps have witnessed a number of serious armed clashes. On the North-Eastern borders, arms smuggling has raised concerns over the role that Lebanese and non-Lebanese factions could be playing in the Syrian crisis; and the Defence Minister’s warning that Al-Qaeda members have crossed over to Syria has raised fury. Whether or to what extent these incidents were orchestrated one cannot say; nevertheless, compounded with a divisive and accusatory rhetoric, part of the population is increasingly mobilized along what seem like apocalyptic lines.

Meanwhile, Ayman al-Zawahiri’s call for Muslims to support the Syrian revolution has received concerns despite questioning the timing and the possible role the Syrian intelligence might have had in it. The north of Lebanon is mirroring a flared version of the

39 Three times since the uprisings. UNIFIL Commander Major General Alberto Asarta noted his concern: “after I have praised for a year and a half the ideal security situation in the South, saying that that this region is the most stable,” the situation deteriorated.’ Asarta Fears a Deteriorating Security Situation in the South, 14/12/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/23244. Accessed on 20/2/2012.

40 ‘A few days after his comments, 44 people were killed in Damascus bombings that the Syrian regime blamed on terrorist organizations’. Mansour: Ghosn, Charbel’s information on Al-Qaeda is not contradictory, 2/1/2012. NOWLebanon: http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=348076#. Accessed on 17/2/2012.

41 Nasrallah on March 14th rhetoric: ‘anyone keen on preventing Sunni-Shiite strife must right now stop the statements of their MPs and media outlets that are full of despicable sectarianism.’ Nasrallah Slams March 14, Says Hizbullah Won’t Kill ‘Ordinary’ Israelis to Avenge Mughniyeh, 16/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/23244. Accessed on 20/2/2012

42 For a number of reasons, his message can be seen to be directly pertinent to Lebanon. One, the proximity of some of the Syrian resistance cities to Lebanese territory; two, political and sectarian affiliations match most of the Lebanese northern border area; three, cross-border smuggling has been an integral part of the informal economy of the two border areas; four, the historical conflict between the Sunnis and the Alawites in Tripoli has repeatedly escalated into armed clashes; five, the spread of weapons amongst the various Lebanese sides as well as the Palestinian camps continues to be a problem. Zawahiri: ‘I appeal to every Muslim and every free, honorable one in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, to rise to help his brothers in Syria with all that he can.’ Zawahiri Urges Lebanon’s Muslims to Help Syrian Rebels, 12/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29781-zawahiri-urges-lebanon-s-muslims-to-help-syrian-rebels. And Jumblat: Syrian Intelligence behind Zawahiri’s Support for Syrian Revolt, 14/2/2012. Naharnet: http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/30038. Accessed on 17/2/2012
domestic and regional political polarization. Fears that Syrian instability is spilling further into Lebanon have been escalating. ‘Residents [are] increasingly seeing themselves as part of the conflict’; in Tripoli, anti-Assad Sunnis and pro-Assad Alawites fought a two-day armed battle along ‘Syria Street’ which necessitated the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to broker a cease-fire.\footnote{Three people were killed in this incident and seven in the June clashes; today ‘Bab al-tabbaneh (…) could be mistaken for a free Syrian Army enclave across the border: scrawled graffiti (…), the green, white and black flag of the Syrian opposition hangs on walls and bullet casings litter the street.’ Josh Wood, \textit{Military in Lebanon Is Caught in the Middle}, 15/2/2012. New York Times: \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/16/world/middleeast/syrias-unrest-felt-by-military-in-lebanon.html}. Accessed on 17/2/2012} Furthermore, a special report by \textit{Al-Akhbar} newspaper has investigated border cities such as \textit{Wadi Khaled} used as a safe house for the Free Syrian Army (FSA).\footnote{For recuperation, medical attention and hospitalization, as well as a base for media outreach and ‘political activis[m].’ Radwan Mortada, \textit{Wadi Khaled: The Free Syrian Army Base in Lebanon (III)}, 8/2/2012. \textit{Al-Akhbar} Newspaper: \url{http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/wadi-khaled-free-syrian-army-base-lebanon-iii}. Accessed on 17/2/2012} The issue of Syrian incursions into Lebanese territory, Syrian defectors, refugees, the disappearance of a number of Syrian opposition figures are also part of the polemic. Both blocks, March 8\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th}, have called for the deployment of the LAF along the borders. The request of the former aims at preventing arms smuggling, fighters crossing and using Lebanon as a ‘Launchpad’\footnote{Hezbollah deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem said: ‘We reject to transform Lebanon into a \textit{launchpad} for attacks against others, a place where to score political gains or implement the projects of the United States and Israel.’ \textit{Qassem Lauds Army Deployment in North, Stresses Government Provides Stability}, 12/2/2012. Naharnet: Accessed on 17/2/2012}, while the latter’s request aims at protecting refugees, defectors, the FSA and prevent further incursions.\footnote{Josh Wood, \textit{Military in Lebanon Is Caught in the Middle}, 15/2/2012. New York Times: \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/16/world/middleeast/syrias-unrest-felt-by-military-in-lebanon.html}. Accessed on 17/2/2012}

- Alternative voices:

As the events are unfolding, and fear that the Syrian crisis further exacerbates Lebanese politics and security, there have been calls to renew dialogue between the two camps. The Muslim-Christian Summit urged ‘officials in Lebanon to be in agreement for the sake of peace and stability in Lebanon and the unity of the people’, and it called ‘for a unified stance and a nationalistic rhetoric at a time when Lebanon and the region are going through these difficult and complicated times.’\footnote{Muslim-Christian Summit Urges Unity and Nationalistic Rhetoric, 7/2/2012. Naharnet: \url{http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/29163}. Accessed on 17/2/2012} President Michel Suleiman has tried to bring the two sides...
back to negotiation noting ‘Lebanon is in dire need for dialogue.’ Maronite Patriarch Beshara al-Rahi called for a ‘new National Pact to neutralize Lebanon’, stressing that ‘advancement of Lebanon is a joint mission.’

While the Lebanese public seems to be divided along two broad lines, I argue that the image is much more nuanced. There are voices trying to break free; left on their own however, they might wither or be co-opted. Pockets of light can be seen in MP Tueini’s words: ‘it is time to start thinking of the rights of the individual ahead of the rights of minorities.’ In a sense she is referring to human security concerns. Despite enthusiasm over the ‘Cedar Revolution’, Lebanese youth have not emulated its neighbours in standing up against socio-economic, development as well as political injustices.

Other efforts from outside the ruling establishment are worth considering. Matters of personal status in Lebanon fall under the jurisdiction of religious courts. With 18 recognized sects, there are 15 religious codes. A person only exists in Lebanon as a member of a sect. Since 2009, however, the Lebanese gained the right to remove their sect from their identity cards. An article in NOWLebanon captures sentiments shared by a growing number of Lebanese: ‘I’m here today to say that I am aware of what sect on ID means’ said 87 year-old Nader Jaafar. The ‘National Campaign’ however has not been received with much optimism: ‘some saw the move as purely symbolic, others saw it as the beginning of a wider change in Lebanese attitudes, conceding that it will take time for the full benefit to be felt.’ But, even this campaign was eventually politicized as groups affiliated with different coalitions refused to work together.

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50 MP Nayla Tueini. Kalam Al Nass interview with Marcel Ghanem. 22/12/2012
51 Such as marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance, birth & death certificates.
52 “The main idea,” explained Marc Daou, “is that during the civil war, several people were killed because they carried their sect on their identity cards. They were stopped at checkpoints of opposing factions and were killed for the simple reason that they belonged to a certain sect and had that sect stated on their ID cards.” Nader Jaafar, 87 years old: “I’m here today to say that I am aware of what sect on ID means, and I have been putting all effort to keep myself away from it, me and my family”, “I’m doing it to encourage the younger generation to do so. This event, even if doesn’t lead to anything, it is an expression of the people to say that it is a good step and it is important.” Hani Adada, 21: “I’m here to fight the war that is living in us and among
Another symbolic voice comes from the popular movement ‘Laique Pride March’. It is an annual march held since 2010 in protest against Lebanon’s sectarian system.\textsuperscript{53} As one journalist said, ‘you probably didn’t hear news of this demonstration, though.’\textsuperscript{54} A number of reasons can explain this: no violence ensued from either side-state or demonstrators, and because it did not represent any of the major and traditional parties, oligarchs or leaders. Although phrases such as “revolution against the regime” and “people want the fall of the regime” were chanted as in Egypt and elsewhere across the region,\textsuperscript{55} it was not seen as a threat to the ruling establishment.

- Reinventing identity and security:

Over the past few years, Lebanese society has been involved in many forms of resistance and protest, ranging from the armed to the peaceful. But, authority and power in Lebanon are fragmented; therefore, aside from the Syrian occupation, the Lebanese have not had a center to rally against. There has not been a unified large-scale movement for change in Lebanon.

For most Lebanese, threats to identity or societal security are the main impediment to organized and wide-scale calls for change.\textsuperscript{56} Lebanese society remains highly entrenched in traditional security discourse that has monopolized Lebanese politics since and before independence. Despite widespread acceptance of the unsustainability of the system, Lebanese society remains subordinate to traditional leaders and imprisoned by a stringent identity discourse.

Needless to say, a state as weak as the Lebanese one struggles in managing a common national identity, when its legitimacy and its monopoly over the use of force is contingent on sectarian leaders. Although, as some claimed, ‘the very weakness of the center has protected

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\textsuperscript{55} Idib.
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the country from replicating the regional unrest; it could also be argued that this same weakness hampers genuine progress and replicates survivalist strategies and threat perceptions.

May Chidiac said ‘today’s protests across the Arab world echo the spirit of the Lebanese model;’ that is fair until she alluded that Lebanese, like ‘Arab youths have abandoned traditional ramblings (…) for legitimate demands: economic opportunities, political freedom, and an end to corruption and regime exclusivity.’ Sadly, the day has not yet come, where Lebanese youth, have put these ‘legitimate demands’ ahead of their sectarian and political affiliations. In the 2005 February demonstration, in a bid to showcase the diversity of groups taking part against the Syrian presence in Lebanon, ‘sending out “shout outs” to the shiites, the Sunnites, the Druzes, the Maronites, and the Greek Orthodox Lebanese’ was part of the rally. It is worth noting that the Lebanese identified themselves through their sects not through a common identity, or a political affiliation. It is the construction that the different groups are a threat to each other’s existence that is hampering progress towards a common goal and identity.

Fear or insecurity is not unjustified given the history of conflict in Lebanon. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that identities are social constructs, and even though they seem to transcend other considerations, they are not the only value to secure. Although they seem structural and embedded in the system, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed; reinvented in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. Identities and security that refer to the individual do not have to be individualistic, exclusivist or restrictive. Such an approach emphasises the reciprocity of rights and the reverence of the individual above all. The corollary of this is that the security of other collectivities—society, groups, minorities and the state—can be guaranteed. Some of you would have by now made the connection that I draw from critical security studies to put forth a vision of security that is deeper, wider, and non-deterministic.

59 ‘The constituents of identity (...) are not given by nature or fixed by history;’ identity is fluid, changeable and adaptable. McSweeney, B. (1999) Security; 211.
The role of international and regional powers is essential. The Lebanese cannot do it alone. As in Northern Ireland and European integration in the aftermath of WW II, they will require an enabling environment. As long as the regional and international powers do not support, push, finance as well as provide the appropriate atmosphere to dissuade tension; the Lebanese’s quest to climb out of the cycle of identity threats will remain marginal.

International pressure was instrumental in 2005 to pressure Syria out of Lebanon. Subsequently however, foreign intervention aggravated the rift between the Lebanese and created two opposing blocks contending for the future of Lebanon. A different type of regional and international role is required: not impositions or Chapter 7 resolutions; not isolation or an ultimatum between a Western vs. an Iranian axis, and not widening the divide between the two groups by setting them against each other. The strategy currently adopted is a Cold War one—standoffs and proxies—and it is unsustainable. What is now advised is engagement, rapprochement, incentives and a common vision—‘a seduction model’. This vision needs to address deep rooted fears and identity threats, while identifying common interests and shared values for the purpose of constructing a common national identity.

Meanwhile, a lot needs to be done domestically, at the individual, societal, and state levels. It is the role of non-state actors to make sure that time is ripe for change, that the social infrastructure is receptive and capable of supporting a new vision for security. Eventually, it will rest upon, not the state as such, but on individuals in the ruling establishment both sectarian, state, and social, to champion this cause for it might be the least costly path to sustainable long-term security. The youth need to liberate themselves from the grips of traditional sectarian, feudal and tribal leaders; and to recognize that their interests are intertwined. Bill McSweeney noted that ‘security depends on how we choose our identity and interests;’ the Lebanese can choose a more inclusive conception of security, based on a long-term vision that their future is shared, and their security mutually reinforcing and

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64 Believing in the duality of identity and interest, McSweeney argued that ‘it is idealistic to imagine individuals or collectivities, socialized by habit and history into a particular sense of self, will choose to change without the incentive or pressure of self-interest’. He therefore spoke of a seduction model which encourages actors into a ‘new school of learning’ to forge a ‘cooperation habit’ or a ‘coordinated reflex’. He illustrates his argument by referring to EU integration and the Belfast Agreement. McSweeney, B. (1999) *Security*; 172,197,210.


67 He stresses on human agency and choice to defy determinism. McSweeney, B. (1999) *Security*; 214
interdependent. Change can start through a bottom-up approach until leaders are convinced there is no safer or long-term alternative. This paper does not claim to suggest a detailed plan to overcome some of the structural and historical obstacles to stability in Lebanon; however it suggests a ‘process by which participants (…) come together actively to transform it, and in the process transform themselves.’

- Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Arab Spring is exacerbating an already precarious situation by providing the two camps with more reasons to ossify their positions. In light of the two camps’ fixation on political gains to secure their separate identities, the Lebanese system is unsustainable. The current situation prevents human security concerns such as development, access to justice, rule of law, social injustice and security from being addressed. Having said all this, the Lebanese experience is not one to dismiss entirely. Lebanon remains the most democratic state in the region, with periodic elections, free media and an open opposition. Furthermore, the system has been flexible enough to thwart several near fatal relapses. UK ambassador to Lebanon tweeted that the Lebanese experience could be seen as an enabler for the region rather than a disabler. Those who are optimistic, such as another Western diplomat in Lebanon, noted that the Lebanese are used to grey shades rather than black and white. Arab NGOs and institutes are looking towards Lebanon’s power-sharing experience; towards a culture of working with each other rather than ruling each other, and to adopting a more inclusive approach. Some of the pillars for cooperation and integration are there, the Lebanese need to run the extra mile.

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68 Authors in this quote are referring to emancipation. Ruane, Joseph and Todd, Jennyfer. The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict, and emancipation (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 15