Tripoli (Lebanon) as a microcosm of the crisis of Sunnism in the Levant

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This paper analyses the crisis of Sunni leadership in Tripoli (Lebanon) and argues that it reflects a more global crisis of political and religious Sunnism in the entire Levant. Indeed, the city lies at the crossroads of two structural crises currently faced by various regions in the Middle East: The first one is the weakening and fragmentation of political leadership in the Levant since the 1970s, the second is the problem of authority in Sunni Islam, aggravated by the communications revolution since the 1990s and 2000s.\(^1\) Internet made it easier for local religious leaders to circumvent the official, statist religious institutions and network directly with the transnational Umma. In addition, all the components of the social, cultural and urban crisis identified by different Arab Human Development Reports are also present in Tripoli.\(^2\) Tripoli is a profoundly unequal and segregated city, where the cases of extreme poverty are widespread.\(^3\) The access of the young urban poor to the ‘knowledge society’ is very limited, and school dropout rates and illiteracy rates remain very high, and concentrated in certain areas.

The city is unique because, at least since June 2005, local actors have been receiving funding from the most diverse variety of national, regional and transnational donors. North Lebanon, the poorest and least educated region in entire Lebanon, therefore became a place where actors from the regional, transnational, national, and local political scenes crossed each other,

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\(^1\) In 1970, Hafiz al-Assad took over power in Syria. In 1975, the Lebanese civil war broke out, and in 1976, the Syrian army entered into Lebanon, as part of an Arab Deterrence force. In 1978, the non-Syrian elements withdrew from Lebanon, and Syria was left alone to patrol Lebanon. In 1982, the Israeli invasion into Lebanon led to the demise of the Lebanese left and the disintegration of the National Movement, and to the evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon.


and rivalled for control over the future of Sunnism. Tripoli is arguably the city with the most varied and fragmented spectre of religious Sunnism within the Arab Middle East. This is the question to be discussed in the paper, in light of John Dewey’s notion of a political public. Indeed, in the spring of 2005, after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal, North Lebanon became one of the strongholds of the Future Current, the political movement established by Rafiq Hariri in the late 1990s. The Future current attempted to create a political public in Lebanon, mobilized against Assad’s Syria and against Hassan Nasrallah’s Hizbullah. In this endeavour, leaders of the current used as resources particular legacies of the interaction between political Sunnism in North Lebanon and the Syrian army. One example was the political instrumentalization of the collective memory, shared by the majority of the population in North Lebanon, of suffering during the Syrian tutelage. This legacy was a double-edged sword: it released dynamics that the Future current was not able to control, given the two structural crises to political leadership in the region (the weakening and fragmentation of political leadership and the problem of authority in Sunni Islam).

Isolated from the Lebanese political time and space during the war as well as during the 1990s, Tripoli is today a binding joint between the Lebanese and Syrian political spaces. This explains why solidarity demonstrations with the Syrian people against its regime occurred weekly since 15 March 2011 in Tripoli. The study of the crisis of Sunnism in Tripoli therefore provides important heuristic and epistemological instruments to interrogate the confessional impulses of the Syrian revolution. The question of creation of a Sunni political public in North Lebanon is also relevant because it has never been dealt with in an in-depth scientific study.

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4 Funding to local Islamism shaykhs in Tripoli is channelled from states such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, and Egypt, hybrid para-state actors such as Hizbullah and Hamas, as well as from transnational organizations: the Muslim brotherhood, the global Jihadi network, and Hizb al-Tahrir.

5 Lebanon’s confessional system hinders or renders extremely complicated the creation of a non-confessional political leaderships. Given the specialized nature of the workshop panel, the issue will not be introduced here, because it would imply to deal with it only in a superficial manner. For a discussion of the confessional system in Lebanon, we refer to Ahmad Beydoun, La dégénerescence du Liban ou La Réform orphéline, (Paris, Actes Sud, 2009) and Sofia Saadé, The quest for citizenship in post Ta’if Lebanon, (Beirut, Sade publishers, 2007).

6 See next section.

7 It was in North Lebanon that the imbrications of the two Syrian and Lebanese political realms reached the furthest during the Syrian tutelage. See, Tine Gade, ‘Pax syriana in Tripoli (Lebanon) 1986-2005. A revelatory of the contradictions within the Syro-Lebanese political space,’ forthcoming.
The existing literature on Sunnism in North Lebanon is both sparse and contradictory. The publications on post-2005 Tripoli notwithstanding, few in-depth studies exist in European languages. The Arabic-language literature on North Lebanon is somewhat more extensive but not suffer from inaccuracies and political bias. The last in-depth publications on politics and society in Tripoli, Lebanon, in European languages in the disciplines of history, political science, and anthropology date back to 1984 and 1967. The only more recent publication is published in 1996, but its analysis starts from a very specific (and post-modern) point of view, on discourses, power, and violence. Other publications deal with specific phenomena such as poverty, claiming that a culture of poverty prevails in certain suburbs of Tripoli. The symptoms of such a ‘poverty culture’ are a lack of self-esteem, a culture of being assisted, and the transmission of illiteracy from father to son. The report provides much needed information on social conditions in North Lebanon to a European public, but does not at all deal with political issues, with the large spectre of Islamist groups in Tripoli, nor with the legacy of the Syrian domination in north Lebanon. A very recent book written by Bernard Rougier historicizes and conceptualizes the forms of Islamist militancy in north Lebanon. However, the book does mainly address the question of institutional political leadership.

This paper, drawing upon a range of new sources from North Lebanon, aims to fill this void: It will start from the point of view of the institutional leadership and analyse grass-roots movements (Islamist or not) to the extent that these are relevant for the institutional leadership.

A key problem prior to 2005 was the difficulty for foreign scholars to gain access to good primary sources in the heavily Syrian-controlled region. During 1993-2005 period, the Lebanese press was subject to heavy restrictions, which made it virtually impossible for sociologists to analyse local politics in Tripoli in any significant detail. This changed in 2005, after Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. A number of Tripolitan political actors,

12 It is partly based on secondary sources and similar such reports written in Arabic by Tripolitan economists, which are more difficultly available.
14 A new media law made it illegal to criticize the Lebanese president or any foreign heads of state publicly. Charges were raised against journalists in the mid-1990, and many were imprisoned.
journals, and sociologists lifted the veil on the issue and published a series of articles in the Lebanese press and books about the Syrian regime’s repression of Sunni Islamist movements\(^{15}\) and on local notable’s relationship to the Syrian regime.\(^{16}\) Although, much of the material was written by actors, not observers, and therefore suffer from inaccuracies and political bias, it can be complemented with other issue-specific material, such as memoirs of political actors\(^{17}\) and biographies on political and religious leaderships in North Lebanon.\(^{18}\) It can also be supplemented with sources both in Arabic and European languages on the parliamentary elections in Tripoli and North Lebanon,\(^{19}\) on social and cultural changes in Tripoli\(^{20}\) and the mainly English-language sources published by various Human Rights agencies.\(^{21}\)

The reading of these sources and of Lebanese newspaper articles from the period was complemented with empirical data gathered during fieldwork in Lebanon, carried out during a four-year period in North Lebanon. The author met with politicians, religious shaykhs, grassroots activists, university professors, and journalists, from all sides of the political spectrum.\(^{22}\)

Because confidence was built up with the informants over time, revealing, hitherto unknown,


\(^{22}\) 134 semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2008 and July 2011 with 84 actors.
anecdotes and more precise information were obtained. Triangulating the different sources, the present study attempts to describe, the crisis of political leadership in Tripoli.

The paper will proceed in two main parts. First, we identify the resources used to create political leaderships in North Lebanon. Second, we discuss the obstacles inherent in attempts to create a public in North Lebanon. These obstacles are related to the two structural crises introduced above, the weakening and fragmentation of political leadership and the problem of authority in Sunni Islam.

1. Creating a political leadership in North Lebanon

In 1927, the American philosopher and pragmatist John Dewey wrote a book called *The Public and its Problems*, which discussed conditions inclined to facilitate, or not, the formation of a political public.\(^{23}\) A public is a collective of individuals united in political action. They join forces and organize themselves because they have become aware of being affected by pervasive and broad-ranging consequences pertaining to the same external decision.\(^{24}\) They decide to join forces in order to avoid those consequences that are undesirable (such as prohibiting the sale of alcohol) and/or to seek those consequences that are desirable (such as the creation of a railroad). The public has a democratic potential, and the state is the most completed form of a public.

The coming into being of a public supposes the sharing of a certain set of common signs and symbols.\(^{25}\) Without these, and without a minimum of values and ideals in common, it is difficult to communicate and to become aware of shared interests. The members of the public not only feel they are equal victims of decisions taken elsewhere, they also share certain values. The concept of a public therefore provides a synthesis of Weber’s two concept of communalisation (*vergemeinshaftung*) (or communal relationship) and societization

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\(^{23}\) The book was written in reaction to Walter Lipmann’s *The Phantom Public*, published in 1925. Lippmann argued that the degree to which public opinion was manipulated during the first world war manifests the weakness of the democratic public (hence, of democratic institutions). John Dewey, who is somewhat less categorical, recognizes the important influence of this book as well as Lippmann’s earlier (and more well-known) book, *Public Opinion (published in 1922)*, on his thinking. John Dewey, *The public and its problems*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927), pp. 116-117.

\(^{24}\) Dewey’s discussion of the formation of a public is based on his analysis of the expansion of the duties of federal government of the United States from the rural, isolated colonial settlements of the 17th century till declaration of independence in 1766 and the adoption of the constitution in 1788. Dewey also discusses the transformation (and eclipse) of the American public due to technological advancements of the 19th century and bossism of 19th and 20th century (see next section).

Agency is key to the formation of a public. Within a public, only a small minority, a few persons, know what they are doing, while others are more passive followers. Since causes and effects in today’s interdependent world are intrinsically complex and broad-ranging, it can be difficult to single out one series of causes and effects the attention on which should be prioritizes over other matters in the political mobilization processes. This is why agency (or leadership) is needed. Leadership helps the public identify itself: It may provide a specific ‘collective action frame’, greatly facilitating the issue of problem identification and of attributing causality. Indeed, beliefs, theories, ideologies or ‘frames’ are often used to identify causes and consequences when impossible to empirically trace them by empirical study. Frames simplify and identify the source of perceived suffering (diagnosis), by identifying the problem as well as an attributing blame or causality. The public only exists when it has a spokesperson, a name, and a clear banner. This is why the naming of the public becomes a political problem, and subject to competing frames.

In Lebanon after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the 14 March movement attempted to create a political public, using the two complementary registers of civil society and confessional society. Within the Hariri family, Saad was chosen to take over the political legacy of his father. Along with his father’s former aides, he attempted to create a public, sharing certain values: a moderate Arab identity, the idea that the economic prosperity of Lebanon necessitates a working relationship towards the United States and

26 The notion has also been translated as ‘communal relationship’ or ‘formation of community’. It is a community with a sense of belonging together (such as families, religious brotherhoods, or nations). Whereas ‘vergemeinschaftung’ is the creation of a community based on norms in common, ‘vergesellschaftung’ (translated as ’societalization’) is the formation of a community with (instrumentally) rational interests in commun. Contrarily to Ferdinand Tönnies, Weber does not see ’gesellschaft‘ and ’gemeinschaft‘ as mutually exclusive categories, but as a continuum. The great majority of groups have elements of both communal and associative relationships. Max Weber, Economy and Society, (New York, Bedminster Press, 1968, first edition in German: 1922), chapter 1. Cited in Richard Swedberg and Ole Agevall, ’communal relationship‘, The Max Weber Dictionary. Key words and central concepts, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 43-44.


28 The culpable agents may be either individuals or collective processes and structures. In addition to the problem identification (diagnosis), a ‘collective action frame’ pr also consists of a prognosis – the solution to the problem – and a rationale for further action. John Wilson, Introduction to Social Movements, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), p. 95.


32 Saad is the second son of Rafiq Hariri’s marriage with the Iraqi lady Nidal al-Bustani.
European governments, and a position towards the Arab Israeli conflict aligned with Fatah. Yet, as will be shown in the next main section, regional conjuncture in the Middle East is not very favourable to this synthesis. In the following two sub-sections, the historical evolution and variety of resources deployed to create a political public and leadership will be scrutinized. First, it will be shown that Tripoli has witnessed a shift in leadership type during the last decades: from conventional patron-client relations where a non-material component was part of the exchanges, towards transactionalism and outright vote-buying. Charity is an important passage point towards ‘political money’. Second, the importance of virility and combat experience shall be analysed. The tendency is towards a loss of control over central grass-roots leaders, which goes hand-in-hand with the findings on ‘leadership through distance’ in 1.1.

1.1 The transformation of the patronage system: towards transactionalism

- Classical-patron client relations: services and conventional patronage

Classical patron-client relationships can be defined as an exchange of services for protection between two persons of unequal status. Exchanges, however, are not only material. Conventional patron-client relations are stable and long-term, and involve more mutual obligations and a moral, often also local cultural, component. What often drew the population to a particular za‘îm was to many extents an identification with the za‘îm’s family, built up over generations. Part of this identification was result of face-to-face interaction and personal friendship – especially for voters of other notable, bourgeois families, partly, it was the reputation of the family. When the Iraqi Baathist candidate in Tripoli, Abd al-Majid al-Rafai, was elected MP in 1972, for instance, he drew on resources such as ideology, party membership, and services, but what mattered most was the reputation of his family. The Rafai family was shattered throughout the cities of Greater Syria and had produced many of

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33 Interview with Mohamed Chatah, Beirut, July 2010, and interview with Mustafa Allouche, Tripoli, 2008-2011. As we will see in the next section, the alignment of these two positions necessitates an Arab Israeli peace.

Tripoli’s most distinguished Islamic scholars and jurisconsults, and, more recently, intellectuals, poets, and liberal professionals.35

Sunnis were during the Ottoman Empire rulers and co-religionaries of the Ottomans. Unlike the Lebanese minority communities, their historicity was not shaped by a collective memory of persecution. In the history of pre-war Lebanon, Sunnis enrolled consistently less in political parties. In Tripoli, Sunni pre-war leadership was centred around one political figure, Rashid Karamé, who had forged alliances with the important merchant families. His relation to the Beiruti Sunni zu’ama was one of rivalry for the control of the post of Prime Minister. His main rival was Sa’ib Salam. Both were urban notables of the ‘Muslim right’. They were both highly educated with liberal manners, and belonged at the same time to the intercommunal bourgeoisie. At the same time, they spoke in the name of the Sunni populace and presented themselves as leaders of (moderate) Arab nationalism.

During the war, many traditional za’im families lost touch with the urban population.36 The outbreak of the civil war created a situation of anomy and availability of foreign funding directly channelled to militia leaders, which circumvented the traditional za’im. Some families re-appeared as a political force after the war, yet others were replaced by new leaders, who had gained prominence during the war.37 Many never disappeared, but re-gained influence over larger segments of the population.

- Leadership through proximity: the pre-war ‘populist Sunni za’im’

The archetypes of the populist politician in the Arab world are Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Abdel-Karim Qasem in Iraq (1958-1963).38 These two figures based their leadership on

35 Interview with Abd al-Majid al-Rafa’i, Tripoli, April 2010, and informal discussions with members of the al-Rafa’i family in Tripoli. Poets of the Rafai family include Abd al-Salam Rafai, a son of Tripoli’s mufti Fuad al-Rafai, born in Tripoli in 1905. Abdel-Salam Rafai, who was also a practicing medical doctor educating in Montpellier, France, has published books such as Aiwan min al-ghiram (Amman: Dar al-Manhal, 2009). Shaykhs of the Rafai family include the jurisconsult Abd al-Ghani Rafa’i (1817-1890), Abd al-Qadir Sa’id Rafai (born in 1910), the mufti and poet Umar Rafai (1881-1920).

36 Some sons of notable families became prominent party- and militia leaders, however. Examples from Tripoli include Abd al-Majid Rafai (the representative of the Iraqi Baath party in Tripoli, very prominent during the 1958 events yet exiled during much of the civil war, because his party’s conflictual relationship to Assad’s Syria), Farouk Muqaddem (a leader of a Nasserist group, very active in the 1970s but expelled from Tripoli by IUM in Autumn 1983 and converted into a defender of the Lebanese legality), and Rashid Miqati (member of the IUM, today an Islamist notable working in charity and education).

37 Abd al-Majid Rafai returned from his exile in Iraq but did not present himself for the legislative elections before in 2005, after the rapprochement between the Iraqi and the Syrian Baath party in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq. Farouk Muqqaddem died in 1999, after years of exile in France.

hegemony, ideology, closeness to the population, and to some extent a populist and redistributive economic policy. In Lebanon, prior to the civil war, when Sunnis still were custodians of the Palestinian cause, Sunni notables had a stronger moral and physical presence in popular neighbourhoods. Lebanese Sunni MPs, although they could never become seen as such large heroes as Gamal Abdel-Nasser, were loved for their care for and closeness to the population. Political leaders (zu‘ama) did rely on intermediaries, often strong-arms men (qabaday’s), to control and mobilize the poor areas for them. Yet, control through the qabaday’s was combined with the za‘im’s own presence in the neighbourhoods. Sa‘ib Salam, for instance, lived in the crowded and popular area of al-Mussayybté in West Beirut, his children mixing with the children on the Sunni crowd. Salam had a forceful and popular style of leadership and was known locally as ‘Abu Ali’, a name normally reserved for for strong-arms men of lower status with a notorious reputation and womanizers. Rashid Karamé, the za‘im of Tripoli, had a different, quieter, personality is known for his habits of strolling through the poor neighbourhoods almost every day he was in town, having lunches with every one, visiting houses, and greeting every one on his way.39

The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed the rise of local leaderships, based within one neighbourhood. The prime example in Tripoli is Khalil Akkawi, a young and enlightened man from Tebbaneh, one of the poorest areas in Tripoli. His brother founded in the 1960s a popular, leftist organization in Tebbaneh in the 1960s, inspired by the experience of the Tupamaros in Uruguay. When his brother died in prison in 1974, Khalil inherited his social movement.40 Nahla Chahal, a sociologist but also a close friend, described Khalil as follows:

Khalil knew how to deal with reality. It was a profoundly sincere man. He knew that the area counted dealers, drug addicts, prostitutes, people from the lumpenproletariat, who in order to survive had recourse to illicit activities... How could he do then something meaningful with the area? His father had a traditional bread bakery in Tebbaneh. Khalil’s apartment was situated at the top of this bakery: his house was therefore very warm. One day, a merchant offered an air conditioner to Khalil. His wife and children were very content because they would no longer be worn out of heat. Yet, Khalil insisted that he could not accept it. Because he could not accept the AC as a gift, and he could not afford to pay it. So, he said to his family, I shall have to give it back. Because, as he said, the next day the merchant asks me something, I will have to keep quiet [and cannot continue my protest activities]. In addition, others, if they see me accepting a merchant’s gifts, will begin to accept gifts, and there will be a mess. This episode illustrates Khalil’s idea of obtaining the allegiance of the people, without using force, by using himself as an example.[...] His political enemies feared him, because he had a great power over people.41

39 Private conversation with a close personal friend of Rashid Karamé, Danniyeh, July 2011.
40 Michel Seurat, ‘le quartier de Bab Tebbané à Tripoli (Liban)’, p. 128.
41 Interview with Nahla Chahal, Tripoli, July 2010.
Another populist leader managed to become elected to parliament. Abdel-Majid Rafai, although as we mentioned he won a lot of support also because of the reputation of his family, was also appreciated because of his proximity to the people. He was a doctor who treated people for free, and who was constantly accessible for patients, even at night. He accumulated many of the resources identified in this paper, because he had combat experience -- he was the main leader of the ‘revolution’ in 1958, came from a notable family, and gave out services. Unlike the services offered by the new post-war Sunni elites discussed below, Abdel-Majid Rafai gave out of his own time; not charity which could be measured in monetary terms. Hence, he classifies as a populist politician, and was someone in between Rashid Karamé and Khalil Akkawi.

A populist politician in post-war Tripoli is Mohamed Abdel-Latif Kabbara. He is however very different from the models of Abdel-Majid Rafai and Khalil Akkawi. He is famous amongst Tripolitans for being the one who helps people get out of prison. This leads him to surround himself with thugs in official celebrations.

- Charity: from Islamist movements to billionaires

The ‘new’ Tripolitan Sunni parliamentarians elected in the early and mid-1990s (in 1992 and 1996) had their legitimacy less anchored in combat experience than in charity. For some reason, the importance of charity as a resource for parliamentarians increased throughout the 1990s. In the 1990s, the charity provision and association with an Islamist movement went hand in hand. Amongst the 5 political leaders elected for the Sunni seats in Tripoli in the 1992, only two were active in charity. These two had their power basis as leaders of Islamist movements. The same numbers for Sunni MPs in the entire North Lebanon region were three active in charity (all Islamist movements) (it included Asad Hermouche, a member of the JI in Akkar). In 1996, as Islamists suffered a setback (only one MP, compared to three MPs in 1992), only one of the Sunni MPs from Tripoli and one JI representative from Akkar were active in charity: From Tripoli, Umar Misqawi, who had an official Islamic charity institution, Makarim al-Akhlaq al-Islamiya from Akkar, Khaled Daher, member of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya, who, in addition to the services provided for through JI also had established a school in Akkar.

42 The Christian boycott of the 1992 elections facilitated the electoral success of Islamist parties in 1992, as much as did their reputation gained during the war.
The beginning of the 1990s signalled however the rise of charities as springboards for entry into parliament at the national level: Rafiq Hariri was the one who introduced service provisions in a very large scale to Lebanon. Even his huge fans do acknowledge – in private – that he was the one beginning the large-scale trend of ‘political money’ in Tripoli. Charity was an integral part of the economy of war, and had become pressing in Tripoli after the war of 1985 to make up for the state absence – just like it did in Beirut after the Israeli invasion, giving Rafiq Hariri an occasion to profile himself as a ‘saviour’ at a period. Issam Fares, a Greek Orthodox philanthropist born in 1937 in Beyno, Akkar, was the first philanthropic, apart from Rafiq Hariri, to be elected as MP, in 1996. The Fares foundation, which has done many good deeds for North Lebanon and Akkar, was established officially already in August 1987.

With the 2000 parliamentary elections, ‘financial dinosaurs’ such as Naqib Miqati and Mohamed Safadi were elected to for the first time. These new merchant and philanthropic élites had similar profiles: they were nouveaux riches and had made fortunes abroad during the war – in the Gulf, in Syria (Nagib Miqati), or in Africa (Mohamed Safadi). Their entry into politics passed through charity. Party program was less anchored in ideology than pragmatism. For some, parliament was just another business. Hence, philanthropy, service provision and political money took the place of party militancy and populist leadership. Mohamed Safadi hails from a middle class merchant family, which gained notable status during the 1930s. He travelled to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and returned to Tripoli in 1995. In 1985, after the war of Tripoli, he unofficially established a charity in Tripoli, and made donations to hospitals. The Safadi foundation was officially funded in 2000, and today occupies a significant part of the charity market in Tripoli, cooperating with the UNDP, the World Bank, and the Tripoli municipality. During the 2000 elections, Mohamed Safadi and Nagib Miqati presented themselves on a common list, on which were also Suleyman Frangiyé

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44 Interview with Ahmad Safadi, Mohamed Safadi’s nephew and political advisor, Tripoli, July 2010.

45 In 2004, Safadi presided over an opposition list for the municipal elections. The list succeeded in gaining 15 out of 24 seats representatives in the municipal council, through alliances with different Tripoli leaders. Mohamed Safadi became cabinet minister (of transport and public works) in Fuad Siniora’s first cabinet. In July 2008, he became cabinet minister of commerce in Fuad Siniora’s second cabinet. The Safadi foundation building, constructed in 2009, also houses a theatre, a cultural centre giving language lessons, and a gym. The clientele is mainly the Tripolitan bourgeoisie. The Safadi Foundation has since its creation transformed itself from philanthropy to an organization for sustainable development. Mohamed Safadi continues philanthropy, but in his own name. In 2010, he donated a million dollars to the Lebanese university. (Interview with Ahmad Safadi, political advisor, cousin and secretary general of the Safadi foundation, and Riad Alameddine, director of the Safadi foundation, July 2010).
and Boutrus Harb. Miqati became the highest vote-earner in Tripoli at that election. Miqati’s charity, al-Azm wa’l-Saadé, was established in 1988: It has today become the absolute largest in Tripoli, occupying up to 90 per cent of the shares of the charity market.

Safadi and Miqati’s charities gained large dimensions in Tripoli. Just like when Rafiq Hariri entered Saida in the 1980s, Miqati and Safadi’s financial giants led small charities to loosing autonomy. The associations that remained independent of politicians became very rare. The problem was that the charities were used as a platform to gain wealth or improve one’s social status. Although aid was given to all, irrespective of political preferences, the different charities displayed the name of the political sponsors on the gifts distributed (for instance on the food boxes distributed in Ramadan). Sometimes, when financial aid was distributed visibly in the public space, the name of the parliamentarian was not displayed, only the name of the charity, yet all knew who was behind. For instance, Nagib Miqati donated 1,25 million dollars to build a new municipality in al-Mina.

The inauguration took place just a few months after the parliamentary elections. His name was nowhere displayed, yet on the building the name of al-azm wail-saadeh was displayed: all knew who owned al-Azm wa’l-Saadé. It was an electoral publicity.

Charity has thus become a springboard, which transforms economic capital into political capital. It provides a supplementary advantage of bringing international legitimacy and renommé. For instance, Issam Fares and Nagib Miqati are both honorary doctors at several prestigious American universities.

Charity is also, more generally, an attempt to de-politicize the social. An idea is spread according to which the state is no longer responsible for social and economic problems; such problems are the concern of private charity. Indeed, charities never sufficed to make up for the absence of the state. Charity was self-perpetuating, and increased assistantship and dependency in the poor segments of the population. Jobs became rarer, unemployment and under-employment spread, and infrastructure did not develop. A similar tendency is present in very many countries in the Middle East.

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46 Interview with Katya Kartenan, head of the Tripolitan branch of hte Lebanese, non-sectarian development organization, the Social Movement (al-haraka al-ijtima’iyya), Tripoli, April 2010.
47 Interview with a social worker in the Tripoli municipality, Tripoli, August 2009. The informant did not mention that Miqati was able to get property rights to land next to the municipality in exchange, on which he is currently finalizing building to large palaces for himself and his brother.
48 Bozarslan, Sociologie politique du Moyen-Orient, p. 59
Additionally, civil society beyond the charity sector – i.e. civil society associations engaging in advocacy – is very weak.\(^{49}\) It is therefore very different from the kind of civil society that led to a wave of democratization in Poland and Latin America in the late 1980s.\(^{50}\) The motivations proper to the charity sector became over-run by political considerations. The imbrication of the two fields of charity and politics led to a decline in the professionalism of charities, in addition to a deterioration of the quality of political life of the city.

- **Electoral keys, ‘anonymous relations’, and transactionalism**

As a result of the extreme wealth of the political leaders, the socio-economic differences between political leaders and the population, impoverished during the war, widened in the 1990s. With the disappearance of the middle classes, social stratification polarized. Many segments of the population adapted to the rules of the game, and became more cynical. After the end of the civil war, a new, simpler form of clientelism emerged in Lebanon, and reached its paroxysm in Tripoli: vote-buying, based solely on material exchanges, and simplified to the extreme: patrons become interchangeable. Votes could be bought for a set price, and the people tend to vote for the one who offers the highest price. A consequence of this phenomenon was a high volatility in the leadership structure and loss of the importance of ideology and conviction. This difference was very large to the patronage ties of the pre-war period, where the za'im helped his clients find work in private and public sector jobs, but never gave out large sums of money. The Karamé family and the other notable families in Tripoli had the reputation of being extremely stingy, to the extent that they only rarely did offer coffee to those who came to ask for services at their house.\(^{51}\)

Prior to the war, no one paid. Buying votes was shameful. Today, shame is only on those who do not buy votes.\(^{52}\)

Notables who were elected MPs before the war regretting the politics of the post-war era. They recounted that the current price for each vote was more or less set at a hundred dollars. ‘He takes the 100 dollars, votes, and leaves’, explained a former MP.

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\(^ {50}\) Quintan Wiktorovicz, Civil society as social control. State power in Jordan, Comparative Politics, 33 (1), Oct. 2000 (pp. 43-61), p. 44.

\(^ {51}\) Discussions with inhabitants in Tripoli, 2008-2011.

\(^ {52}\) Interview with Maan Karamé, Rashid Karamé’s brother and political advisor. This argument is very politicized, in the sense that Hariri’s opponents use it against him. In reality, those responsible for spreading the practices of ‘political money’ in Tripoli were more numerous than just Rafiq Hariri.

They address the ‘key’. They visit houses, asking: ‘how many votes have you got?’ Let’s say a person has five votes; he is paid 500 dollars. Every za’im, Mayor, every mukhtar is awaiting the electoral season to see how much he can earn.

It was the Hariri family that introduced large-scale ‘political money’. Rafiq Harir not only clientelized electoral politics and religious leaders, he also put important state leaders on his payroll, including Syrian officials such as Ghazi Kanaan and Hikmat Shehabi, and gave large monthly salaries to Lebanese President Élias Hrawi.

The practices of vote buying peaked after the Syrian withdrawal with the rise of Saad Hariri’s power in Tripoli. Saad Hariri lacked the combat experience of Samir Geagea, Hassan Nasrallah, or Walid Jumblatt, necessary in order to prove his physical courage, virility, and dedication to his community. He was a businessman, not a warrior, and does not have the same “military credentials” as the leader of the minority communities. Because he could not reply on his proven courage, nor a clear commitment to Arab nationalist ideology (since the Future current had a very good working relationship to American ambassador), Saad Hariri came to rely in an exaggerated fashion upon other resources: In addition to the legacy of his father (whose mobilizing potential diminished over the years), he mobilized mainly on charity and sectarianism.

Four of the elected candidates from Tripoli – including Safadi, Miqati – used together four billions of dollars to be elected. They will enter the Guinness Book of Records for their use of electoral fonds. They don’t have any project, but they were supported by the security services.

‘Political money’ became pervasive and intruded many formerly specialized domains, such as religion. Philanthropy extended to paying Islamic shaykhs (and the Dar al-Ifta in Tripoli. Miqati funded about 50 imams, while Safadi only funded approximately 15. In August 2009, Miqati gave out a total of 264,000 dollars during a religious ceremony, organized jointly with Dar al-Fatwa, to celebrate 220 persons from Tripoli who had learned the Qur’an by heart. The measure was criticized by secularists, economists, and (unofficially) by cadres in the Dar al-Fatwa itself, who asserted that the money could have been better invested in creating needed infrastructure or employment opportunities in the north. Miqati has since February 2006 sold

54 Interview with a post-war parliamentarian, Beirut, July 2011. The sum was approximately 500,000 dollars monthly.
55 Interview with the parliamentary candidate of the Islamist movement IUM, Bilal Shab’an, who presented himself on the opposition list, and obtained 18,000 votes. Bilal Sh’ab’an is the son of the historical leader of the IUM, Sa’id Sh’aban, who died in 2000.
56 Approximate numbers given during an informal discussion with a close associate of Future current parliamentarians in Tripoli, April 2010.
all his investments in Lebanon, as not to link politics and personal interests. Dar al-Fatwa deplored the situation, that ‘everyone pays for something’, arguing that ‘the one who paid the most’, was Saad Hariri.

- Leadership through distance

The difference between the leadership structure in the 1960s- and 1970s and the Future current, secluded in their homes and hotel rooms during the political crisis of 2005-2008 is very striking. Hariri, not only does he lack a military experience similar to that of Michel Aoun, Walid Jumblatt and Hassan Nasrallah, he also is perceived by some as “distant”, and “in lack of virility” (something often commented upon in jokes). A Future current militant, one of the few who because of his personal history is very close both to the local population in Tebbaneh and the Future MPs in Tripoli, stated “if you are interested in the degree of control of the Future Current in the poor neighbourhoods, you will be chocked. The control is not zero, it is below zero”. This is partly because of the lack of physical presence in the poor neighbourhoods, but even more because of the lack of moral presence. Indeed, from 2005, few Future MPs showed any interests for political processes at play in the poor neighbourhoods but left these to lieutenants who could not be trusted. The priorities were elsewhere. Many inhabitants in the poor areas voiced very strong criticism against the MPs, because they never visited their areas.

The main occasions of physical proximity between political leader and the electorate are currently during ‘events’: especially large demonstrations on March 14 every year and commemoration ceremonies (in front of Hariri’s tomb). These events are subject to important scenography, moulding a Sunni martyr through carefully selected scenography.

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Buying votes might not strictly speaking be illegal. Yet, there is a strong analogy, on the one hand, in the shift in Tripoli from political clientelism, based on thick, stable social networks,

57 Bruno Dewailly shows that this argument has little accuracy. Although Miqati in the media claims to have sold the stocks prior to his accession to the post as Prime Minister (April 2005), he did not sell them before months later, in 2006. B. Dewailly, ‘les transformations du leadership tripolitan. Le cas de Nagib Miqati’.

58 Private conversation with a supporter of the Future current in Tripoli, close to the political leadership circles and active in one of the Future current’s charity institutions in Tebbaneh, Tripoli, April 2010.

to vote-buying and, on the other, the shift from economic clientelism to corruption, based on a quasi-anonymous market with clear prices and full fungibility of actors, which we have seen in some MENA contexts. In the populist republics, such as Egypt, for instance, the privatization and retreat of the state has led to a similar phenomenon of decline of state hegemony, and vote-buying. It leads the political leadership to turn to a set of strategies in order to ensure regime survival: leadership through distance – rise of gated communities, urban practices (gentrification). The idiosyncrasies of the Lebanese case is that it occurs within a post-conflict scenario, with specific challenges of a war culture in many pockets of the post-war Lebanese landscape. The exclusion of specific social groups (especially: Sunni urban poor) has a political explanation. In Tripoli, the young urban poor Sunnis were excluded not simply because they were a potential source of contention for the leadership, but because they were the losers of the Lebanese civil war. Syria as the winner of the war set them aside politically, socially and economically, in order to consolidate its presence in Lebanon.

1.2 Combat experience as a key political resource for ‘communal champions’

Another important ‘parliamentary resource’ utilized by leaders of all communities and at least vis-à-vis certain segments of the population in pre-war Lebanon, was combat experience. Participation in war was seen as a proof of courage, dedication, and selflessness. It was the indicator of concern with and closeness to the population. It was meant that the za’im was a sort of ‘communal champion’, who protected the population physically from external dangers. If the ‘long history’ of the region was considered relevant to our analysis, it could be recalled that the Arabic term za’im has long been used in the military sense. Under the timar system, the za’im provided the Ottoman ruler a military contingent, in exchange for the right to collect taxes in a given area. Tax farming over time became hereditary. After the

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60 Bozarslan, Sociologie politique du Moyen-Orient, p. 63.
61 It is mostly cultural approaches, as opposed to political economy or state-centred approaches that take into account the 'long history'. Cultural approaches may be criticized as culturalist, yet Jean Leca argues that cultural approaches anchored in 'long history' are not culturalist. Jean Léca, “L’Économie contre la culture dans l’explication des dynamiques politiques”, Bulletin du CEDEJ, 23, 1st semester semestre, 1988.
Tanzimat reforms, the za’im became an intermediary between the (Ottoman, French) state and the local population.

The demand is not a specifically Arab, Mediterranean or Lebanese phenomenon. According the philosopher Georg W. H. Hegel, “objective morality”, i.e. serving the interests of the people, is needed to lead a community. In European societies, qualities such as courage, virility, and closeness to civilians in danger, have been appreciated in times of crisis: PM Georges Clemenceau participated in the Paris commune and was evacuated by balloon from Montmartre in 1871, while Churchill remained in London in 1940 during the German bombings.

Proven courage and combat experience was fundamental to the leaders of Lebanese minorities. These communal groups were aware of themselves as compact minorities, and their social realms were structured by collective memories of persecution. Post-war leaders such as Hizbullah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, as well as the Christian communal champions Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea have all experienced war and escaped assassination attempts in the 11th hour. Hassan Nasrallah has in addition ‘sacrificed’ his son, Hadi, to the resistance. Because of their ‘proven’ loyalty and sacrifice to the community, they are able to demand absolute loyalty from the population. If combat experience does not appeal to all, at least it attracts some segments of the populations.

Having an image of virility mattered to the Sunni, Shia, and Druze feudal lords. Alike the Shii and Druze feudal leaders in south Lebanon and the Beqaa, the Sunni feudal leader of the countryside gave patronage and protection in exchange for loyalty. Physical courage was therefore important.

- **The manipulation of a qabaday’ (Sunnis in pre-war Lebanon)**

Having an image of virility was still necessary for Sunni urban leaders in pre-war Lebanon, although they distanced themselves from associating themselves with thugs and from carrying arms. They therefore relied on the figure of the qabaday’s, or “strong-arms men” and popular heroes or the poor quarters, to cultivate a ‘virile image’. The qabaday’ embodied the values of the poor urban quarters and controlled the clientele for the za’im. Qabaday’s also helped upholding confessional identification within the population. At the time, the potential for a

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64 Michael Johnson, *Class and client in Beirut*, p. 83
loss of control related to popular Nasserism’s strong mobilization potential. Nasserism, the ‘ideology of the city’ in the 1950s and 1960s, had a communal component in Lebanon, because Nasser was not seen only as the leader of the non-aligned and of the Arabs, but also of Arab Sunnis. Sunni urban notables had a stake in controlling the display of sectarian identifications, including Nasserism, in the poor quarters, to portray themselves as communal champions of Sunnis in negotiations with Maronites for state resources. The Sunni zu’ama needed to downplay the sectarian awareness of their clientele in order not to undermine their own secular nationalism.

In 1958 and in the early 1970s, the Sunni zu'ama safeguarded control over the Sunni population, by playing on communal themes’ and profiling themselves as Arab nationalist leaders. During the Chehabist period, the Deuxième Bureau (army intelligence) infiltrated most of the poor urban areas by giving out monthly salaries to the qabaday’s.

The outbreak of the civil war created a situation of anomy and availability of foreign funding directly channelled to qabaday’s and militia leaders, which circumvented the traditional za’im. This in many cases led to the autonomization of the qabaday’s.65 One example is Ibrahim Quleyat, who benefited from Libyan funding to emerge as a leader of the Popular Nasserite Organization in Tariq Jdaydé in Beirut.66 He was later co-opted by Syria.

In Tripoli, many qabaday’s associated themselves with the greatest funders within the city: the PLO (until 1983) and, later, Islamic Unification Movement. After the entry of Syrian troops into the city centre of Tripoli, all local leaders (qabaday’s), most of whom were associated with the IUM, were subdued by Syria, and either let themselves be co-opted. Or fled. The phenomenon of the qabaday’ therefore no longer exists in Tripoli; it has been supplanted with the figure of the ‘electoral key’.

- **War leaderships and recycling of the militia leader as a parliamentarian**

Alike the situation in other communities, the militias recruited from within the Sunni community hailed from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Joining militias was a mode for social mobility. Contrarily to the other Lebanese minority communities, no militia was created in the name of protecting the Sunnis in Lebanon: Lebanese Sunnis did join militias, but fought in the name of popular Arab nationalist or leftist ideology, and in the name of the

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66 See his biography in Johnson’s *Class and Client in Beirut*, p. 84.
Palestinian cause. The national movement regrouped all leftist and Muslim movements, but was dissolved after the Israeli invasion in 1982. In Tripoli, the post-1982 period witnessed a period of radicalization, sponsored by Iran, similar to those processes taking place in Baalbeck. An Islamist militia was able to mobilize 3,000 youth and important Islamic scholars and activists, who all made their declaration of allegiance within few weeks.\textsuperscript{67}

The militia leader was one of the types of ‘new elites’, which entered into Parliament after the end of the civil war. The phenomenon of militia leader recycled into parliamentarians was particularly visible within the Lebanese minority communities; it was not as clearly visible in Tripoli: The only former leaders of militias elected as MPs after the end of the civil war was Ali ‘Id, an Alawi who responded to the separate logics of the Alawi quarter in Tripoli.

The Sunni Islamist IUM militia was defeated by the Syrian army in 1985, and, like other Lebanese militias, was disarmed in 1991. These youth were de-mobilized. Unlike the practice elsewhere recycling of militia leaders into parliamentarians recurrent in other Lebanese communities, few Sunni militia leaders entered into politics in the after-war period. This was because of a lack of motivations; it was because pro-PLO and pro-Islamist activists were blocked from presenting themselves at elections by the Syrian tutelary power. Radical Sunnis Islamist leaders were hence not in a position to convert itself into politics. Those Sunnis who had been fighting in pro-Syrian militias (such as the SSNP and the Syrian Baath party, however, obtained parliamentary representation). The same was true for militias and popular groups linked to al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya. The Islamic group obtained three MPs in the first parliamentary elections, including one from Akkar and one from Tripoli. Yakan, from Tripoli and an intellectual hailing from the first generation of JI’s founding fathers, had not been active in combats. Asad Hermouche from Akkar (elected in 1992) had carried weapons during the war, however.\textsuperscript{68}

Amongst many Sunni Middle classes, the situation was different. Sunni traditional leaders (‘conservative Muslim leaders’ or the ‘Muslim right’) had not led militias, and had maintained their role as mediators and ‘peace brokers’, with one foot within state institutions and multi-communal arenas, and the other within his community. Indeed, the Sunni bourgeoisie did not expect their communal leaders to carry arms. Indeed, carrying arms or associating oneself with armed bands could, at least in bourgeois areas, have the opposite


\textsuperscript{68} Interview with Asad Hermouche, Tripoli, July 2009.
effect. For instance, once after Yasser Arafat and a group of his guerrilla fighters visited Rashid Karamé at his house, the neighbours complained. They insisted that it was not appropriate for a leader of Karamé’s calibre to surround himself with ‘thugs’. After this event, the Sunni PM insisted that Arafat should not bring with him visibly armed men to his house. 69 This point, and the fact that Sunnis during the war did not create militias fighting in the names of Sunni community, is of extreme importance to the self-perception of Sunnis in Tripoli (and elsewhere in Lebanon, probably).

• The Future current’s use of bodyguards and private security companies

The rumours of the militarization of the Future current, prior to May 2008 brought in some ways the paroxysms of the tendencies already mentioned, of money in politics and of volatile loyalties and militarization. In the context of the rising security challenges, the Future current established private security companies, including the company secure plus. Many of the men employed in such companies were recruited from north Lebanon, Akkar and the poor suburbs of Tripoli. They continued living in their homes, and were transported in special buses every evening to protect the city centre of Beirut during the night. This is because Hariri could not find any men knowing to use arms in West Beirut, where the population consisted of merchants. 70

Many of those employed were very young, in the beginning of their twenties, and did not have experience in the security sector prior to hiring. Discussion with employees in one such company showed that the majority had no experience in the security sector, and had recently been hired. Prior to their hiring, they had been working in short-time jobs, in nightclub, or in the Gulf. 71

The same observation can be made about bodyguards working for Future current officials. Because of the important security risks in the 2005-2008 period, parliamentarians and regional coordinators for the Future current were obliged to increase their number of bodyguards following them and posted at their private residences. Although these were – as one might expect – part of the notable’s patronage network, as members of the extended

69 The anecdote was related to the author by a former friend of Rashid Karamé, himself a notable of the Alameddine family (hence related to Rashid Karamé’s mother). It constitutes a revealing tell-tale sign of the values of the notable families, who admired Karamé for his calm nature and controlled manners. These values may, at times, contrast with the demands of people in the poorer areas.
70 Interview with Sofia Saadé, Beirut, April 2010.
71 Discussions on board a bus transporting around fifty employees in a security company from Tripoli to Beirut, April 2010.
family of the notable or sons of ‘electoral keys’, serious deficiencies of were revealed concerning the recruitment mechanisms. Future officials regret having made enough scrutiny into the background of those employed. Few were specialized in the security sector; many had other supplementary jobs. For instance, one of Misbah al-Ahdab’s bodyguards was also a taxi-driver. Their attitude towards weapons during their time off was not necessarily one of a man of profession: the author has in private experienced repeatedly that bodyguards have been playing with and showing off their weapons in their leisure time.

Although these observations are perhaps not singular to Tripoli and reflection of a ‘war culture’ in Lebanon after Ta’if, they amplify the risk of misuse of weapons, from security employees, were ‘only rented and not bought’. The degree of loyalty to the organization and of professionalism is also very different from that of Hizbullah. The degree of loyalty to the principles of the Future current, and the public it wants to create, is also very different from that of Hizbullah: some of the bodyguards, especially those from Tebbané, had close family members who were in jail accused for being part of the Jihadi group Fatah al-Islam.

The volatility of loyalty of the private security companies was revealed on May 7, 2008, when Hizbullah and its allies targeted houses belonging to the Future current in West Beirut. One informant living in West Beirut recounts the following of Quraytem on May 7:

‘The Hariri home was full of fighters, they were like ants. My neighbour saw them from his balcony. On May 7, 2008, Quraytem was immediately surrounded. It surrendered after four hours. I saw it with my own eyes, I live in this area. Like many people living in the area we were sitting on the stairs, because we were afraid that rockets could come in our windows. We went out. Sitting on the stairs we saw Sunnis running away. They did not want to die. Some hid in our building, they were so scared. A neighbour opened for them. He told me that these were his relatives, that they did not want to fight, they wanted to live, and that this was why they wanted the salaries [accepted to be paid by the Future current].’

The military weakness of Hariri, confirmed by May 7, when the opposition took over West Beirut in less than six hours, made the Future current lose a lot of credentials as a ‘communal champion’. Hence, the lack of ideology and the lack of clarity on the common values of the Future current’s public led to a very low degree of loyalty, which in turn translated into

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72 Observations in Tripoli with bodyguards, family members of parliamentarians, and charity associations, 2008-2011.
73 Informal conversations with a close associate and family member of a leading Future parliamentarian, Tripoli, March 2010.
74 Informal conversations with one of Misbah al-Abdab’s bodyguards, Tripoli, March 2010.
75 Observations during a visit to one of the Future current’s bodyguards, Tripoli, August 2009.
76 Interview with Sofia Saadé, academic, Beirut, April 2010. The informant is close to the SSNP, thus anti-Hariri.
military weakness, and indirectly, into a loss of credibility as a communal champion. Leadership without a cause made Saad Hariri’s followers not support him when it really counted.

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Hence, the study of how the Future current attempted to establish a political leadership, and create a public in North Lebanon, is a telling example of the contradictions and crisis within the Sunni leadership in the Middle East. The leadership has been weakened, and has come to rely increasingly on charity and on sectarian rhetoric. However, there are limits to how far leaderships can get with ‘political money’. Because of a lack of hegemony, the leadership needed to rely on private security companies, which was not effective after all. This is because of the lack of ideology, in particular, which shall be dealt with in the next main section.

2. The obstacles to the creation of a political leadership

In the following, it shall be shown that Saad Hariri’s attempt to create a leadership – through creating a public – did not succeed, because of different factors identified below. The obstacles were related to the two structural crises of which Tripoli was the crossroads: the crisis of authority in Islam and the crisis of political leadership in the Machreq. The obstacles related to the fragmentation of political leadership are first, the lack of social cohesion within the Sunni community; second, the lack of ideology after the death of Arab nationalism, the third is the lack of leadership skills. Other obstacles are related to the problem of authority in Islam are: first, the popularity of pan-Ideologies as competing publics, second, the transnationalization of religion with new information technology, and third, the fact that Islamism weakens the Sunni community. In the following, we shall first deal with the obstacles related to the crisis of leadership in the Levant, secondly, to the obstacles associated with the problem of authority in Sunni Islam.
2.1 obstacles related to the fragmentation and weakening of leadership

- Two competing ideas of the public – and the underlying problem: a lack of social cohesion within the Sunni community

The assassination of Hariri opened a window of opportunity for different groups of people, with little in common at other conjunctures, to be associated politically. The Future current became a mass movement because of its success in mobilizing different status groups, at least two, which coexisted within the movement:77 Grossly speaking, the first group consisted of middle class people, who associated themselves with the Future current because they saw it as a moderate, middle-of-the-road Lebanese and Arab movement, which supported free enterprises and safeguarded an Arab identity. Most were Muslims, but there were also members of the Lebanese minorities. One particularly attractive feature, in their eyes, was the Arab identity claimed by the Future current, different from that of the Arab military regimes of the populist republics and closer to the Arab nationalism of the notables. The Arab identity of the Future current was closer to that of the urban notables: In Lebanon, Rashid Karamé and Sa’ib Salam, and in Syria, the Syrian urban notables prior to the 1963 coup. The Future current attempted to reconcile a working relationship to Western governments with a clear support for the Palestinian cause. This posture became more controversial and criticized, however, as the prospects of an end to the Arab Israeli conflict turned more illusive. The Future current also accommodated and respected values essential to conservative middle class Muslims.78 For the middle class adherents of the Future current, the Syrian withdrawal and the formation of the first Sinira government, provided a national opportunity: the possibility of creating a sovereign Lebanese state and uniting Christians and Muslims around a common project. Coexisting with this group, however, was another segment of Lebanon’s population, constituted by people of the lower middle classes and the proletariat, who were exclusively Sunni Muslim. Indeed, the poorer segment amongst the supporters of the Future current had sought in it a Sunni movement, and a saw to claim rights for Sunnis and to oppose the politics of the Shia.

Both Hariri’s middle class supporters and the supporters hailing from poor backgrounds were

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77 Interview avec Mohamed Chatah, former Cabinet minister in Fuad Siniora’s first and second governments, August 2010.
78 Hariri’s sister, Saida MP Bahia Hariri, for instance, veiled and wears the veil in Parliament. Rafiq Hariri’s son, Baha Hariri, who is married to a Tripolitan, financed the restoration of the Great mosque of Tripoli, inaugurated in Ramadan 2010.
therefore were vehemently anti-Syrian, yet, for entirely different reasons. What separated
them were their very different interpretations of the reasons behind Hariri’s killing. The first
group of Saad Hariri’s followers saw it as intolerable because it targeted one of Lebanon’s
most central statesmen at a time when 15 years had passed since the end of the civil war: It
implied that a foreign state – i.e. Syria, the main suspect – had the capacities to interfere in
Lebanese politics so deeply that it was able to assassinate the chief of the executive. Political
assassination as means of censorship was simply no longer acceptable in the 2000s.79 There
existed however also a far more confessional interpretation of the Hariri assassination. Indeed,
the more confessional segment of Hariri’s supporters, many of whom had been subjected to a
very heavy Syrian domination during the tutelage, interpreted the Hariri assassination in light
of what they believed was a history of targeting Sunnis in Lebanon by the Syrian regime.
Rafiq Hariri’s killing was perceived as a generalized attack against Lebanon’s Sunnis,
committed by an Alawi-dominated Syrian regime. The assassination of the billionaire from
Saida became seen as the last case of a long list of ‘Sunni martyrs’, liquidated by Assad’s
Syria: Khalil Akkawi in February 1986, shaykh Subhi Saleh in October 1986, Mufti Hassan
Khaled in May 1989.80 The objective of these assassinations would be to hinder the
emergence of a strong Sunni leader prone to make alliances with the Sunni merchant elites of
Damascus and Aleppo. This sectarian interpretation of reality did not correspond with the
complexity of the Syro-Lebanese relations. It resembled what Jacques Weulersse, for the case
of the Syrian minorities in the 1940s, had called a minority complex.81 This version of the
events corresponded to a similar one, elaborated by Islamist Salafi identity entrepreneurs, who
were anti-Alawi and anti-Shia for doctrinal reasons. Hence, the two groups used the same
signs and symbols but filled them with diametrically different meaning. One group used it to
create a nation, downplay confessional divides, and create a political movement where
Muslims and Christians coexisted (nation-building). The other aimed at creating a particularly
Sunni community, and being mainly anti-Shia, contributed to breaking down the nation.

A postulate of this work is therefore that there was a statistic correlation between the variable

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79 Interview with Abdel-Ghani Imad, sociologist at the Lebanese university (Tripoli branch), July 2011.
80 Interview with Khaled Daher, Future MP from Akkar, between 1996 and 2000 elected to parliament as a
member of the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Jama ’a al-Islamiyya), Tripoli May 2008.
81 A minority complex is according to J. Weulersse a collective and pathological inclination, which makes every
gesture of another community as a threat or challenge to its own community. A minority complex unifies the
community and sees every attack on one of its members as committed against the entire community. Paysans de
Nikolaos Van Dam, The Struggle for Power in Syria. Politics and society under Asad and the Ba’th party,
‘hailing from a Sunni sub-proletarian background’\textsuperscript{82} and the variable ‘having developed a minority complex’. The large bulks of Hariri’s supporters after the June 2005 elections – those who voted for him in the parliamentary elections and who participated in the March 14 demonstrations each year – were poor Sunnis from North Lebanon. Although by no means all persons of the lumpenproletariat were confessional and there were large differences within each status group, we hypothesize that the majority of Future-backers of a sub-proletarian background supported Saad Hariri for confessional (anti-Shia) reasons.\textsuperscript{83} They voted for him because he was the strongest of the Sunni leaders, who was susceptible of successfully fulfilling a purely Sunni project. Very many interviewees have confirmed this hypothesis, and have brought up the question themselves without being asked explicitly. The assumption that sectarianism is a consequence of education and that, hence, working class people tend to be more sectarian than more educated people of the higher middle classes is basic in writings on Lebanon, yet that does not mean that it cannot be challenged. For instance, my upper middle-class friends in Tripoli frequently complained during fieldwork that their parents were becoming more anti-Shia, and, for instance, refused the idea of their (Sunni) sons and daughters marrying a Shia (marrying a Christian was more acceptable than marrying a Shia). This paper is work in progress, and we are yet to confirm the hypothesis of relation between sectarianism and social class (or status groups) through statistical surveys.\textsuperscript{84} There are many factors explaining why people in poor areas would be more prone to embrace a sectarian world-view, first and foremost the history of localized conflict pitting some of these mainly Sunni areas (Bab Tebbaneh and Qubbé) against Ali ‘Id’s Alawi militia in the area of Baal

\textsuperscript{82} Operationalized through the variable of ‘area of residence’ (poor areas and bourgeois, middle class areas). Michael Johnson’s work on Sunnism in pre-war Beirut showed that the sectarian tendencies were most prominent in blue-collar areas. Taking into consideration the structure of the Lebanese service-based economy, the population in these areas were more prone to be auto-entrepreneurs than industrial labourers, a category he named, drawing upon Dubar and Nasr’ study published in the 1970s, ‘service semi-proletariat’. This category is very prominent also in poor areas of Tripoli 24 years after the publishing of Michael Johnson’s work. It is therefore more precise to say hailing from the ‘service semi-proletariat’ or ‘service sub-proletariat’. See Class and Client in Beirut. The Sunni Muslim community and the Lebanese state 1840-1985, (London, I.B. Tauris, 1988), Claude Dubar and Selim Nasr, Les classes sociales au Liban, (Paris, Presses de la FNSP, 1976), pp. 69-70.

\textsuperscript{83} The lumpenproletariat is a social category described by Karl Marx in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. It includes ‘vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped gallery slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, … Brothel keepers, porters, literati organ-grinders, rag-pickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars’, K. Marx, F. Engels, Collected works, Vol. 1, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975). Nahla Chahal, a sociologist hailing from Tripoli, describes the inhabitants of the area of Tebbaneh in a similar manner (personal interview with the author in 2010).

\textsuperscript{84} Surveys are planned for an up-coming field-work in June 2012, in cooperation with al-Jinan University in Tripoli.
Mohsen.\textsuperscript{85} This in turn led the areas to suffer more from the practices of domination of the Syrian army – and local allies during the rest of the Syrian tutelage. Lastly, Salafi movements have since the late 1980s established themselves in the poor areas of Tripoli, and have articulated their doctrinal opposition to Shiism with the local ‘revolutionary’ Sunni history of the poor areas of Tripoli (this point will be discussed in more details below, in a separate section). All these factors made people from poor areas more prone to embrace a sectarian interpretation of the Hariri assassination.

Beyond only interpreting the ‘founding event’ of the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in two diametrically different manners, the two different groups distinguished themselves by their having their respective distinctive values, lifestyles, and economic interests.\textsuperscript{86} Few the classical elites did take a particular interests in the politics in the poor areas. Yet, they did not object to suddenly gaining a very large new pool of voters. The leaders understood they needed mass supporters in their struggle for Lebanon in order to confront Hizbullah, but did not have a strategy on how to create a mass movement: No system of political education was put in place to uniformize the beliefs and values of those who spoke in the name of the former Prime minister. Indeed, every one can call oneself ‘Saad Hariri lovers’ because there is no system of registration or membership cards.

The lack of control mechanisms led to attempts to local quests for ‘autonomization’. Hariri’s public in the poor areas was not completely at his orders, they were driven by their local leaders more than their general ‘love’ and ‘admiration’ for shaykh Sa’ad. Many associated themselves with Saad Hariri because he was the strongest Sunni leader, the most capable of resisting against Hizbullah. When thinking of the reasons why they were against Syria, the first thing that came to mind was the massacre in Tebbaneh, which had killed between 300 and 800 persons in December 1986. This shows that the local patriotisms were too specific to had completely streamline with Hariri’s political public.

\textsuperscript{85} I am grateful to Patrick Haenni for sharing this analysis with me. See See ICG, “Hizbullah and the Lebanese crisis”, Crisis group Middle East Report N° 69, 10 Oct. 2007, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{86} A status group is a type of social stratification elaborated by Max Weber. What unites the collective is not their ownership of the means of production (like Karl Marx’s notion of class) but their lifestyles, identity, and consumption patterns. Michael Johnson distinguishes mainly between the ‘menu people’ or ‘crowd’ and the notables or ‘commercial-financial bourgeoisie’. He identifies the Sunni area of Basta and al-Musaytiba as the ‘heart’ of the ‘Sunni crowd’ and petty bourgeoisie. In the 1950s and 1960s, images of Nasser were prominently displayed in all Sunni areas, and especially in the poor areas (p. 21, 70, 131). He also describes how the common people’s code of honour was different from that of the merchants, who depended on good inter-communal relations. The notables, in order to be popular with the common people had to present themselves as ‘communal champions’. Doing so, notables proceeded to speak different languages depending on the public (pp. 22, 27.).
The poor areas in Tripoli, such as Tebbaneh, were important to the Future current leadership because of the high number of votes and their symbolic importance as the ‘Lebanese Sunni homeland’. The secular elitist politicians of Tripoli therefore proceeded to portray themselves as defenders of Tebbaneh people. The Future current utilized a strategy adopted by very many other political leaderships in the Middle East: using different rhetorics and adapting each specific discourse to different target groups. This is common in the ME because of the lack of a national narrative after the decline of Arab nationalism (see next section). Nazih Ayubi wrote in 1996 that because of the absence of dominant, self-confident social classes in the many countries in the ME, no ideological hegemony has been imposed within the state. The ideology of the state, is often confined to the technocratic elite and the sphere of intellectuals. Amongst other segments of the population, there is more sentiments than coherent political ideology: nationalistic fervour, charismatic arousal, or populist jubilation. The masses are torn between utopian pan-Ideologies and a sentimental, non-theorized attachment to the territory of the state, or to their villages or quarters. To reach out to the masses, political leaderships have had to turn to political engineering.87 This is why a serious re-organization process begun in 2009, when a six-man committee was appointed. In 2010, the party of the Future was created and Saad Hariri was formally elected leader. Control mechanisms between the centre and the periphery were put in place, in addition to a control system over the party’s finances. Yet, it did not escape criticism, especially from those who thought that the Future deputies had not done enough to develop infrastructure and jobs in North Lebanon since 2005. Others claimed that Sunnis were not enough favoured by the Future current, arguing that all other communities had institutions protecting the community. Even many Future MPs voiced criticism over the new leadership structure in private.88

- Death of Arab nationalism – and lack of creed

All leaderships need a sacralised da’awa – i.e. a religious or ideological causes, to provide durability.89 Hamit Bozarslan calls this a ‘total ideology’, capable of articulating all social,

88 Interview with a current Future MP in North Lebanon (who requested that his name would not be cited), Tripoli, July 2011. "Cabinet appoints Abbas Ibrahim as Lebanon security chief", States Times, 18/07/2011.
economic, cultural and political questions with one another; social movement theorists call a ‘master frame’.

The Future current leadership was not able to come up with a more global frame alignment between the political ideas and programs of the different status groups who are associated with the movement. Most ideologies have the characteristic of uniting different social classes. Indeed, the core problem for Sunni political leaderships in Lebanon after the civil war is that, in a context where different strands of population were fundamentally segregated in Tripoli and North Lebanon, they lack a coherent and hegemonic ideology to bring them together.

The Future current does have a program and a set of priorities: the International Tribunal, developing state institutions, improving the economy through attracting foreign direct investments. Yet, the movement lacked a transcending cause that supporters were willing to die for: the ultimate proof of loyalty according to Benedict Anderson. Hariri’s movement is anchored in Beirut and too large to fit perfectly into the social reality of peripheral cities, such as Tripoli. Supporting the Future current meant simply supporting Rafiq Hariri’s legacy.

Lacking a militant cause was in itself not a problem: whereas the 20th century was the century of ideologies or age of extremes, the 21st century, after the fall of the Berlin wall, has so far witnessed the rise of so-called ‘liberal’ political parties without a militant cause.

Are we witnessing the death of ideologies? This question is valid not only for Europe, also for Lebanon: Ideologies are no longer what they used to be. Those who speak in the name of socialism are no longer socialists, and those who call themselves liberals, are no longer liberals.

Lacking a militant cause really became a severe shortcoming because the Future current’s main political rival, Hizbullah, had developed such a clear militant cause. The Islamic resistance had successfully frame-bridged the idea of the resistance with the values of Shia Islam, so that Islam came to mean resistance, and resistance meant Islam. In the period between its rise in the mid-1980s as a force of radicalism until its joining Siniora’s government in July 2005 as a moderate political party, the party of God had, mobilized different social groups of supporters within the Lebanese Shia community. This had been possible as a result of the party’s successful monopolization of the resistance against Israel since 1985. Saad Hariri did not have such a militant cause to unify his supporters. After 2005, Sunnis of different regions and social classes were only united by a negative cause, the

90 Ibid., p. 54.
91 Interview with Ahmad Fatfat, Beirut, April 2010.
opposition to Bashar al-Assad’s regime and the growing hostility towards the Lebanese Shia. In Tripoli, few Future supporters would die to defend the Tribunal, yet more would risk their lives to defend Lebanon against a return of Syrian troops to Lebanon.

Hizbullah therefore made tricky ideological competition. In order to best face it, Future officials proceeded to discredit the notion of ideology, and portray the party as a totalitarian party. When discussing with Future current officials, they stress that the Future current is a liberal political movement, adding that ‘ideologies have become obsolete,’ or that ‘ideological parties belong to the past and have totalitarian inclinations’.92

The Future current is not an ideological party. It is a liberal party. There is no ideology, in the sense of the ideology of the Baath party, for example. We do share a set of ideas, but they are not very clear.

You mean that you are not an ideological party meaning not a totalitarian party?
Yes, exactly. The Future current is a liberal party. Certain written documents unite us. We share the general principles. When a political bureau will be elected (in July 2010), it will create the party platform. Today we all accept the general meaning. But amongst us, some are more direct, some have more aggressive styles.93

Political theorists, however, stress that ideologies, in the sense of systems of beliefs, will always exist.94 All human beings utilize and rely on systems of thought. In a complex and specialized society, the choice of instruments to achieve given, complex objectives belie a wide array of uncertainties. Ideologies – rationalized in the forms of theories – remain indispensable.

Most Lebanese political leaders have some form of ideology, either political maronism (the Phalangist party), Arab nationalism (Hafiz al-Assad’s regime, Salim al-Hoss, Mustafa Saad, al-Murabitun), Pan-Syrianism (the SSNP), or communism (the LCP and formerly, the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon, CAOL). Most ideologies were used instrumentally, however, since political parties in reality centred around the personalities of their leaders and patron-client relations. Yet, the Future current fell in between the ideologies of the mountain and of the city: the Arab identity they claimed was not clear or militaristic enough for the conjuncture. Reconciling Arabity and close ties with the West was difficult without any prospects of solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and without any Western support to the idea of a Palestinian state.

92 Interviews with Ahmad Fatfat, Mohamed Chatah, Saleh Faroukh, Mustafa Allouche, Ghattas Khoury, Abdel-Ghani Kabbara, and Samir Jisr, 2008-2011.
93 Interviews with Mustafa Allouche, Tripoli, 4 May 2010.
A fundamental transformation in the structure of Sunni political leadership took place during civil war in Lebanon; it did not however become apparent before after the Syrian withdrawal. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Lebanese Sunni notables became less credible as spokespersons for the Palestinian cause. After the PLO was evacuated from Lebanon in 1982 and 1983, Hizbullah gradually took control over the front line with Israel, and, from 1985, monopolized the resistance. During the Syrian tutelage, the Syrian regime and its allies hijacked Arab nationalist ideology for the sake of a cause that was by many Lebanese considered more connected to raison de regime – or “regime survival” – than raison d’État – state survival vis-à-vis Israel. In Lebanon, those Sunni notables who opposed the Syrian regime in any ways were accused of “lack of patriotism” to the Arab nation. In 1993 and 1994, PLO and Jordan made separate peace treaties with Israel, which implied important concessions. Moderate Arab leaders advocated peace with Israel within the 1967 borders. Since the Palestinian cause was used so much as an excuse and justification by dictatorial minority regimes, moderate Arab leaders have given more priority to local and national issues than regionalist issues such as the Palestinian cause and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. Other regional actors and para-state organizations, such as Hamas and Hizbullah have taken over much of the combat- and resistance ideology, while moderate Arab leaders have increased their dependence on the United States and European powers.

• Lack of management and leadership skills - Hariri’s lethal compromises

Hariri could have made up for his lack of ideology by strong personal skills, in order to obtain a better control of his public. Joseph Nye has identified different soft-power skills, hard-power skills and contextual skills needed to establish effective leaderships.95

The most important soft-power skills are as emotional intelligence, communication skills, and the ability to create and provoke a vision. Whereas most leaders in Lebanon have emotional intelligence, not all have the ability to create and provoke a vision. By a ‘vision’, Nye means a picture of the future. This capacity is very helpful to ‘get things done’ and to attract persons to you. The leader must also possess hard power skills such as managing the information flow and be at the centre of the reward system (control the reward system). A leader may also survive on Machiavellian political skills: know the likes, dislikes, fears and dreams of the others, use it to create a coalition and reconcile the irreconcilable. This is what Lyndon B. Johnson was famous for. As J. Nye states, there is a difference between a bully and a bully w

a vision. Leaders who have hard-power Machiavellian skills combined with a vision are able to attract the most competent people towards you. Thirdly, a leader must possess contextual skills, such as knowing when to act and when not to act, as well as understand the distribution of power and the flow of information.

Hariri lacks many of these skills. First, he lacks a vision. Creating a vision does not necessarily demand a clear ideology; it demands excellent rhetoric skills and charisma. The ‘charisma of Saad Hariri’ – often mentioned by Future current officials and supporters in interviews – seems to not to go beyond his kindness, sweetness and emotional intelligence (being able to master one’s emotions so to attract others). Hariri does have some skills, especially his ability to include the youth, something which gives him an image of dynamism. However, including youth seems to go along with negligence vis-à-vis established political élites in the Sunni community, taking those who are not necessarily the most qualified people. The inclusion is also only partial, because of the lack of visibility of women, young and old, in the leadership. Other Sunni leaders in Tripoli, especially the ‘populist politician’ type, such as Khalil Akkawi and Abdel-Majid Rafai, on the other hand were able to provoke a vision.

Second, he lacks important hard power skills: he is not able to manage information or to place himself at the centre of the reward system. Indeed, the Future current leadership seams to rely far too much on intermediary leaders, leaders at the district level, who manage the information, keeping some information to themselves, and reward flow. The rewards flow in the Future current is as mentioned much related to material rewards. Saad Hariri manages some of it himself: he personally stayed in Tripoli during the week of the 2005 legislative elections in Tripoli, when the elections took place over four weeks, and did manage some of the rewards. Yet, distribution by the Future current only occurred vis-à-vis the electoral key: how the electoral key wanted to re-distribute his gain was at his own discretion. Additionally, during the 2009 elections, the Future current leadership delegated contact with the electoral keys to those responsible for the electoral machine, giving the leader of the latter great discretionary powers.

Indeed, since he did not have a militant cause to consolidate his political leadership, Saad Hariri had to accept differences in the interpretation of his party’s political identity and program. Two sorts of compromises were made, amongst the cadres, who did not agree amongst themselves about the role of Islam, what sort of Islam. Future Current Secretary-General Ahmad Hariri, Saad’s cousin, for instance, is a deeply religious practicing Muslim,
whereas other Future parliamentarians are secular and some even former militants of Marxist groups (such as Ahmad Fatfat and Mustafa Allouche).\textsuperscript{96} At the district level, there was even less agreements on norms: Sultan Harba, an influential Tripoli businessman and former member of Tripoli’s municipal council, for instance, caused controversy when he prohibited serving alcohol in the hotel Quality Inn in Tripoli. The measure was highly criticized by economists, who argued that it would harm the tourism industry in North Lebanon, since Quality Inn was the only hotel in Tripoli with international standards.\textsuperscript{97} Rumours had it that Harba had been pressured by Islamist groups, yet, in reality Harba decided the measure of free will. Harba hailed from a conservative notable family in Tripoli, which built a mosque – the Harba mosque – in Bab Tebbaneh in 1974.\textsuperscript{98} Sultan Harba is close to the Hariri family, and operates at the blessing of the Future current, something that causes the criticism of Harba to be extended to the entire Future current in North Lebanon.\textsuperscript{99}

Another sort of compromise was made with the base. Leadership was consolidated through political engineering. Just like other political leaderships in search of ‘absolutization of the relative’, the Future current approached religious leaders. Just like these other political leadership, it sometimes included striking alliances with extremists.

Thirdly, Saad Hariri and the entire March 14 lacks contextual intelligence, i.e. knowing when to act and when not to act. This is partly because the agenda is set by their opponent, and most of all by Nasrallah’s speeches and ‘media coups’. It is also partly because the Future current officials for security reasons were secluded in hotel rooms, in their homes, or abroad during long stretches of time during the 2005-2008 period.

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In sum, the loose organizational structure of the Hariri current has become an obstacle to its leadership. This is because of the conditions in North Lebanon, long structured by the Syrian tutelage and its increasingly distant local political leaders, who benefitted from their insertion into the Syrian-dominated unofficial economy. The radical position on the Palestinian cause taken by the Syrian regime and Hizbullah made it difficult for Sunni political leaders to speak

\textsuperscript{96} Discontent with Ahmad Hariri is not only linked to his position on religious issues; parliamentarians also hinted that he is still too young to yield true leadership.

\textsuperscript{97} Private conversations with economists and politicians in Tripoli, 2010-2011.

\textsuperscript{98} The mosque was donated to Dar al-Fatwa. The current preacher of the mosque is a former of IUM.

\textsuperscript{99} Harba is also criticized for having accorded public contracts to himself while he was member of the municipal council. Discussions with a Tripolitan economist, Tripoli, 2010.
in the name of Arab nationalism. However, deprived of a cause, it was also more difficult for them to unify their political public and ‘reconcile the irreconcilable’.

2.2 The problem of authority in Sunni Islam

In Sunni Islam there is no sole authority to impose solutions to disputes regarding interpretation of the divine revelation. Contrary to the situation in Shia Islam or in the Catholic Church, there is no hierarchically organised body of clerics, which yield loyalty to one over-arching institution. This creates a problem of authority. The Hungarian Arabist and Islamologue Ignác Goldziher wrote in 1910 that ‘the consensus, the supreme authority to solve questions concerning religious practices, exerts an elastic jurisdiction, in a way that is barely definable, and which is, in addition, conceived in a variety of ways. What is accepted as a consensus by one party is far from being accepted as such by another”.

The authority of the clergy has since the first schisms in Islamic history been contested by ‘heretic’ movements, such as the Kharijites in the first century of Islam, by the followers of Ali (shi’at ‘ali) and subsequently by Ibn Taymiyya. At the core of this problem of authority is the indefinite status of the clergy, whose status remains largely un-established in the sacred texts. Since the twentieth century, the Islamic world has seen the exasperations of movements of political Islamists and Islamic modernisers rivaling the monopoly of the clergy to interpret the divine revelation, with a basis in the sacred texts. It is claimed that every Muslim has an equal right of access to the religious and that Islam does not have a specialised corpse of formally educated clergy, with a monopoly to interpret the divine revelation.

As a result of the problem of authority, the reference to Islam has become “subject to multiple, diverse appropriations, often antagonistic, fighting for the hegemony over meaning

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101 The Kharijites, who contested the authority of both Mu’awiya and the followers of Ali (shi’at ‘ali), are considered the first “heretic movement” in Islamic history. The followers of Ali (shi’at ‘ali) refers to the group of the Companions of the prophet, who remained loyal to Ali, and insisted on the principle of hereditary transmission of the Caliphate (ahl al-bayt), after the death of the Prophet. The community around Ali would later evolve into a fifth school of Islamic jurisprudence, Shia Islam (from shi’at ‘ali). Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1326), is one of the most important Hanbali Medieval thinkers. Witnessing in his lifetime the Mongol invasions, and the fall of the Abbasid rule in Baghdad, he tried to adapt the Islamic ideals to the difficulties faced by the fellow Muslims in his time. He is known as someone who tried to return to the “book and the Sunna” and was the first to introduce the ideas of excommunication, takfir, in Islam. See G. Levi Della Vida, “Kharidjites”, in Encyclopédie de l’Islam, Volume IV, Second Edition, (Leiden, Brill, 1978), pp. 1106-1109; and H. Lahoust, “Ibn Taymiyya”, Encyclopédie de l’Islam, Volume III, Second Edition, (Leiden, Brill, 1971).
102 Malika Zeghal, op.cit., 22.
and values”.

Gilles Kepel shows that the frontiers between the religious field and the political field in Sunni Islam, already blurred in the sacred texts, grows progressively more ambiguous with the rise of political Islam since 1930s, and notably after the creation of Hamas (1987), the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979), and the effervescence of both conservative and anti-establishment Islamism in the aftermath of the Yum Kippur war in 1973:

Usama bin Laden and the al-Qaida movement, Saddam Hussein and his henchmen, the Iranian as well as the Saudi leaderships, [the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, as well as preachers close to the Muslim brotherhood], but also Sunnis as well as Shias, who count a billion of peaceful believers spread all over the surface of the globe all claim to represent the Islamic reference with a similar conviction, but with profoundly differing interpretations – beyond the reference to a common religion.

- The existence of competing publics

The rise of communication technology consolidated transnational loyalty ties. Sunni Islam has never been confined to the state borders; there has always been interaction between Islamic scholars across cities and countries. Yet the territory in which Muslim scholars in Tripoli interacted has been expanded, from being confined mostly to Cairo’s al-Azhar and Istanbul, into including non-Arab areas in the ‘peripheral Umma’ such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, and Muslims living in a minority condition in the Diaspora.

The centre of gravity and the main area of reference for Tripolitan Muslim scholars has changed from Egypt to the Gulf. Islamic authority has been privatized. The network in which Tripolitan Muslim scholars operate has therefore been transformed from regional to transnational.

Salafism as a social theory has, since it was dispatched to Tripoli at the beginning of the 1980s and during the 1990s, transformed much of the face of the city. Islamism, and particularly Salafism, can be seen as being reminiscent of what the American sociologist David A. Snow would call a “movement with world-transforming goals”. The course of the last century, sometimes characterized as the ‘century of ideologies’ or the ‘age of extremes’, is a clear illustration that theories of what a society is or should become play an enormous

104 Ibid.
105 For instance, Tripolitans living in the Australian diaspora fund an Islamist educational institute in Tripoli. The leader of this institute was jailed between 2008 and 2011 for being (allegedly, no sentence was ever pronounced) the second in command of al-Qaida in Lebanon. The most important leader in the Tripolitan diaspora in Sidney is Bilal Khazal, who had ties with the al-Qaida central leadership.
106 Movements with world-transforming goals seek total change and are comparatively greedy in terms of time, energy, and orientation. David Snow, “Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation”, op.cit., p. 476.
role in helping actors to define where they stand, who they are, whom they should take into account, how they should justify themselves, and to which sort of forces they are allowed to bend.\textsuperscript{107} This is also very true for Salafism, which completely changes the perceptions of the self and the other.

The major factor of transformation was not only the rise of Salafism from the 1980s, when students of religion from Tripoli began travelling to Saudi Arabia to study in stead of Egypt.\textsuperscript{108} Studies abroad and interaction with scholars from other realms had always been part of being a Muslim scholar. The rise of communication technology however transformed conditions for the religious leaders in Tripoli: it made it much easier to communicate with peers abroad for advice, and facilitated, keeping contacts with former schoolmates from the Islamic University of Medina.\textsuperscript{109}

As Salafism was internationalized during the encounter between Saudi Wahhabism and Egyptian socio-revolutionary Jihadism in Peshawar, the Arab and Islamic world also witnessed a series of transformations, with the development of the new means of communication, new satellite TV channels first, and soon afterwards, the development of the Internet. These channels, or ‘imaginary exits’, created a common virtual space and facilitated the Umma’s growing together into one small ‘global village of Islam’. In this ‘common ground’, the matters of concern of Muslims worldwide would become homogenized and the words used to express these concerns standardized. As we shall see below, this facilitated the Lebanese Sunnis in identifying themselves and their situation with that of other marginalized Muslims elsewhere in the Umma. In addition, common broadcasts help the development of common references and standards for the populations in the different countries across the regions.

Of particular importance is, of course, al-Jazeera, which started its first broadcasting in Qatar in 1996, with funding from its Êmir, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa. With its ‘hands-on’ style

\textsuperscript{107} Bruno Latour, \emph{op.cit.}, p. 230.

\textsuperscript{108} Of a sample of 19 important religious leaders interviewed in 2008 in Tripoli, seven (the majority) were educated in Saudi Arabia, almost all at the Islamic University in Medina, and only one in Egypt. The rest were educated in Lebanon or Syria. Most of those educated in Lebanon, were students at unofficial institutions, not universities. It was mainly those close to IUM who had studied in Tripoli, while the salafists had almost all studied at the Islamic University in Medina. The sample also included five lay-men – members of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and Hizb al-Tahrir.

\textsuperscript{109} Shaykh Raid Hlayhel, who studied in Medina at the end of the 1980s, became, and still remains, close to Safar al-Hawwali and Salman al-Awda. In an interview with this author in April, 2008, he revealed that he still kept regularly in touch with the Sahwist leaders and last visited Safar al-Hawwali in Saudi Arabia a year ago. Hlayhel’s friendships were not limited to the two Sahwist leaders: he also kept in touch with many others from his days in Medina and had just returned from 12 days in Saudi Arabia, where he met with Nasir al-Umar.
message, the new satellite channel gained notoriety as a controversial and independent alternative to the traditional state-censored Arab television stations. Its most watched programs, such as ‘The opposite direction’ (al-ittijah al-mu’akas) and ‘More than one opinion’ (akthar min ra’i), have become tantamount to ‘nodal points’ structuring and homogenizing large parts of the political discourse among the populations in the Arab world. Contrary to Western media, which depicts wars and catastrophes as “exceptions” of a rule of stability, close-up shots of human suffering constitutes one of the bearing narratives of most of al-Jazeera’s programs. The satellite channel broadcasting throughout the Arab world has become a medium through which to express grievances, reminiscent of what Albert O. Hirschman would call ‘voice’. With its style based on antagonisms stretched to the extremes, the channel leaves its spectators exhausted with intense impressions of having witnessed the very moment of the last downfall in the region’s Manichean struggle for survival. In addition, its images of war rapidly passing over the screen more easily makes the spectators create parallels between the different historically situated conflicts in various countries. Images of children injured in war and their crying mothers do after all resemble each other regardless of whether the interviewee speaks a Palestinian, Iraqi, or Lebanese dialect of Arabic.

The new conditions consolidated the transnational ties of Islam, and strengthened the strength of transnational Islamic loyalties in the practising part of the wider population. Persons in Tripoli could not connect to the Internet and enter into community with transnational publics. This made them exit virtually –in their imageries – from the national political time and place, and hence from the political public that national political leaders attempted to create. Virtual religious communities were indeed political associations, and their existence threatened the established national political associations and communities. Internet consolidated a yawning transnational religious public, in competition with the national political public that institutional political leaders attempted to create. It elaborated a competing schema of interpretation – or framing – which provided a different problem identification and distribution of causality than the national political leader.

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110 For a definition of Ernesto Laclau’s concept of a “nodal point”, see “al-hidayah wa’l-ihsan as a nodal point of Tripoli Islamism in the 1990s”, Chapter One, Part Two.
The adherence to a virtual community and local presence were not necessarily in contradiction. Yet, in the long run, it was difficult to stay present continually and at the same time in the national political public and the transnational religious public. The vulnerability for institutional political leaders inherent in this growing transnational pressure was that the religious public had a much clearer and more efficient ideology than had the national political public.

The situation created by the rise in new information technology resembled a situation described by John Dewey almost a century earlier. Analysing the impacts of the first communications revolution in the late 1890s and the beginning of the 1900s on political society in the United States, he stated that the mobility of exchanges and the rapidity of communication turned upside down the conditions for political action. New much larger communities came into being, which did not have the same democratic potential. Conditions for long-distance political association differed from those of face-to-face interactions, especially because persons who formed the new public were not using the same signs and symbols and therefore could less easily communicate to create a common public. Dewey’s insights are easily transferrable to today’s situation: Internet and social media have created new possibilities for connection and creation of virtual communities beyond state borders. The difference for the transnational Islamic public is that it is based on a community that already has common extremely strong symbols (the prophet) and signs (the Qur’an, the hadith). The problems related to long-distance publics discussed by Dewey, \(^{114}\) of communication and of identifying a public that is not visible to the crude eye, therefore did not apply.

Technology was more prone to create emotional ‘affections’ than political and rational ‘attachments’: the forms of association became more mobile and ‘floating’. Yet, a public, to realize its democratic potential needed to develop its political identity over the long-term and in stable conditions. In Tripoli, the national political time was over-run by the global crises in the Muslim world. The development of satellite broadcasts, and later, the Internet in the Arab world therefore had an important role in uniformizing the matters of concern among the otherwise very different populations in the Arab world. With its use of the image, portraying the crises witnessed by the various populations in the region, the pan-Arab al-Jazeera provides cognitive openings which enable individuals in one place to identify with causes

geographically far away from themselves. The local field of Islamism was streamlined and standardized with other Islamic arenas worldwide.

Religious scholars, to re-centre the attention on religious and not political issues, used easy causes to exploit for mobilization purposes, causes that were prone to unite all Muslims. They strengthened the appeal of their ideology by organizing different ‘collective action events’. One example was the issue of the cartoons of the prophet.

- **Campaigning for the honour of the Umma in Ashrafiyyeh**

On February 5, 2006, an initially peaceful demonstration against the caricatures of the Prophet was transformed into a mob assault storming the Danish consulate in Ashrafiyyeh, Beirut, and setting it on fire. Demonstrators also burned one nearby Maronite church, the Mar Maroun Church, in addition to private cars and houses. The ‘Ashrafiyyeh events’ (*ahdath al-‘ashraifyyé*) became subject to a controversy between different and even contrasting interpretations, and created fears in Lebanon of renewed sectarian strife in the country: Even in the days of the civil war, Muslim protestors had never touched the Christian sanctuary of Ashrafiyyeh. What is significant is that in Damascus, where the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Abu Romané were vandalized and burned, the neighbouring John the Baptist church remained untouched. Saad Hariri, was quick to denounce the acts of violence, stressing that ‘those responsible for these acts are taking advantage of the noble sentiments of believers for purposes that have nothing to do with Islam in order to inflict harm on Lebanon, on its national unity, and also the image of the Lebanese in general and that of the Lebanese Muslims in particular’.¹¹⁵ Al-Jamā‘a al-Islamiyya also condemned the riots. The organization had initially taken part in the peaceful demonstrations, but had decided to withdraw from it when ‘the peaceful protest deviated from its track, and after the organizers of the protests failed to control the demagoguery of certain elements, inserted among the protestors’.¹¹⁶ The a-political so-called ‘scientific’ Salafists maintained almost the same thing. In a joint statement, three prominent directors of Saudi-sponsored Wahhabi Islamic Teaching institutes

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denounced the riots as “sabotage acts”, while at the same time stressing their condemnation of the caricatures”.117

A significant part of the two hundred zealous demonstrators arrested by the Lebanese police, in connection with the demonstrations were of Syrian nationality, something which led anti-Syrian forces to advocate the belief that the demonstration had been ‘staged by Syria’, in order to create chaos and sectarian strife in Lebanon.118 Yet, the police investigation of the event also showed that most of the demonstrators in fact had been transported to Ashrafiyyeh from Tripoli and Akkar by initiatives emanating from Salafi mosques and teaching institutes in Abi Samra. One of the young demonstrators who was arrested, Umar Mohamed Wurur, said he had gone to Ashrafiyyeh, along with his brothers: ‘Just like everyone else that was there, I took a mini van with ten others, from Beddawi. I did not have to pay, because there was somebody donating’.119 Another young, zealous man, Abdallah Mahmud Abad, told the police investigators that he had decided to participate in the demonstration after a call from a shaykh in his municipality in Akkar.

Important representatives of transnational Salafism in Tripoli were those pulling the treads. Altogether, there had been four mini vans, each taking eleven passengers, which had come to pick up residents in Qubbeh, Tripoli. In fact buses were bringing people from most of the neighbourhoods in Tripoli and from the nearby Palestinian refugee camps. Al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya had also mobilized prior to the demonstrations and had arranged buses. Most of those interviewed in the media coverage subsequent to the events, say that they had gone to campaign in Ashrafiyyeh, because they ‘wanted to defend the prophet’ and were called upon to participate by local clerics.120

The slogan of ‘defence of the Prophet’ was exported to Tripoli from Denmark through a campaign driven by a group of Muslim clerics from the Egyptian and Lebanese Diaspora, living in Denmark. The group had taken the name The European Committee for Honouring of the Prophet (ECFHP) and founded and presided by Raid Hlayhel, who had left Tripoli in

117 The D’awa Institute (Hassan al-Shahhal), the Bokhari Institute (S‘ad al-Din Kabbi), the Tripoli Institute, and the Amin Institute (Raid Hlayhel, at that time Bilal Haddara. See “The Salafi associations met and criticized the Ashrafiyyeh incidents” (“tajamm‘at rumuz al-salafiyya fi-trablus wa-naddaddat ahdath al-‘ashrafiyyé”), al-Nahar, February 9, 2006.
119 Interview in al-Nahar, See coverage of the investigation subsequent to the Ashrafiyyeh incidents in al-Nahar (Lebanon), April 2, 2006.
120 See coverage of the investigation subsequent to the Ashrafiyyeh incidents in al-Nahar (Lebanon), April 16, 2006.
2000 to install himself in Denmark. Hlayhel was the one signing the petition letters of the group and in charge of the delegation which toured Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. Imam Ahmad Abu Laban publicly played an important role in the campaign against the caricatures, until his death in February 2007 from lung cancer, yet, because of a record of Islamic activism in his student years, he was banned from travel to the Emirates and his native Egypt, and therefore Hlayhel was appointed in charge of the delegations. During the visit to Egypt, in December 2005, the delegation of Danish imams met with Mohamed Tantawi, grand shaykh of al-Azhar, representatives of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and General Secretary of the Arab League Amr Moussa. The delegation, led by Hlayhel, visited Lebanon few months later and was received by the Mufti of Lebanon, Rashid Qabbani, Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, and Grand Shiite Ayatollah Mohamed Hussein Fadlallah. In Syria, Raid Hlayhel arguably succeeded in convincing the Alawi leaders of the benefits of engaging in joint actions with Sunni Islamist movements. The Syrian regime, and subsequently the Iranian leadership, would later successfully appropriate the slogan of ‘Prophet honouring’ in order to mobilise the zeal of Muslim youth to their own political advantage, only to further blur the lines between the religious and the political spheres of Sunnism in Lebanon. As for the “Prophet honouring committee”, other individuals travelled to Turkey, Qatar, Algeria, and Sudan, mobilising support for condemnation of the caricatures.

In Tripoli, the message was well received, especially after Raid Hlayhel chose to install himself in Abi Samra, as a protest gesture against the Danish Legal system finding the publication of the Prophets as within the acceptable borders defined by Danish Law. Most of the clerics in the city are today actively involved in the campaign against the caricatures. A visit to the city in March 2008 revealed that almost all Islamic Institutes or associations in the city, from Dar al-Fatwa to the scientific Salafists via the Hizb ut-Tahrir had put up posters calling for a boycott of Danish products, with the slogan ‘boycott those who mocked Him’. The continuous campaign seems to be partly driven by shaykh Hlayhel’s private initiative. He was recently, after a meeting in Venice, appointed the person in charge for keeping the

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121 Raid Hlayhel describes himself as the founder of the ECFHP See “Communiqué concerning the new offences in Denmark, form the founder of the European committee for honouring the Prophet (SAW)”, shaykh Raid Shafiq Hlayhel”, posted on Sayd al-Fuwaid web forum, undated (probably from 2007), http://www.saaid.net/mohamed/246.htm, accessed September 2008.
123 Interview with Raid Hlayhel, Tripoli, April 23, 2008.
relations with Europe in view of the ‘support to the Prophet and (the people of) Gaza’ (*nusrat al-nabi wa’ghazza*).\(^{124}\)

The linking of the condemnation of the caricatures against the Prophet with that of Israeli or American civil rights abuses is rhetorically very efficient, because it creates a parallels between Israeli policies towards the Palestinians and the Danish difficulties to find an equilibrium between the freedom of press and the respect for the rights of minority groups. It seems reminiscent of what the Canadian sociologist Ervin Goffmann calls “keying”, i.e., re-defining activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework, in terms of another framework, such that they are now “seen by the participants to be something quite else”.\(^{125}\) As a result of the “keying” process, the experience of prospective participants of what is going on is “radically reconstituted”.\(^{126}\) The “keying” between the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza (re-identified as “Muslims”) and the mocking of a prophet make the believers more prone to resort to simplified, uniform interpretations of the two events, and to believe that there is a plot against Muslims world-wide organized by the West and Israel. And in fact, an organization which calls itself *The Lebanese campaign to confront the Danish Caricatures* issued a statement in connection with the demonstration in Ashrafiyyeh, where they indicated there was evidence that Israel was behind the publication of the caricatures.\(^{127}\) They called on the Lebanese government to sever diplomatic ties with Denmark and all the other countries that supported it.

Hence, the banner of ‘defending the Prophet’ (or the even stronger one, “Prophet honouring”) turned out to be extremely mobilizing. No zealous Muslim can refuse taking part in campaigns organized to “restore the honour of the Prophet”. Such a slogan can be seen as similar to what Bruno Latour would call a ‘collecting statement’. Bruno Latour argues that groupings have constantly to be made, or re-made.\(^{128}\) In the case of the protest of the caricatures, we could say that it contributes to mobilizing various strands of Muslims, who

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\(^{124}\) Interview with Imad Issa, Tripoli, May 9, 2008.


\(^{128}\) Bruno Latour, *op.cit.*, p. 34.
would not, save this collective action event, have found much in common, in a campaign where the very honour of Muslims (karamat al-muslimin) is depicted to be at stake.

Collective statements, such as ‘Prophet honouring’ and ‘Jihad in Iraq’ are crucial to the self-definition of a social group.\(^{129}\) In the case of the mobilization against the Danish caricatures, the campaign itself contributes to spreading a perception that Muslims are targeted specifically because of their Islamic doctrine. It facilitated a change of register where what is targeted is no longer defined as ‘civilians’ or ‘Muslim civilians’, but ‘the Qur’an’, ‘the Prophet’, or ‘Islam’.

The 6 February 2006 event therefore created a headache for the Future current in different ways: first, it showed that a distinctly ‘religious Sunni public’ existed in Lebanon. That public fragilized the Future current’s project of consolidating its influence over the Sunni community and create of a ‘Sunni political public’ in the name of national emancipation vis-à-vis Syria and of organizing it politically and institutionally. It also threatened the coherence of the inter-confessional coalition of the Future current.

The local centrifugal obstacle (described in 2.1) goes hand-in-hand with the rise of religious loyalties and transnational Salafism as an alternative public. This is because it is most often those entrenched in the poor neighbourhoods who thorough internet and social media network with transnational Islamism. Many of these are local leaders and some even former or actual ‘electoral keys’. They are able to sell their neighbourhood patriotism to the one who offers the most. Contrarily to Shia Islamism, where the clergy is a structuring factor unifying the Shia community, Sunni Islamism contributes to the weakening and destructuration of the Sunni community. The communitarian society opens towards the political society. The opposite is true for Sunnis. Hizbullah’s ‘resistance Islam’ is a political asset that the Sunni political leaders can only dream of holding.

- **Sectarian Islamism as a resource – and a threat for the political leadership**

Communal identifications have become more important in post-war Lebanon: the wounds of the war have not had a chance to heal, since they have not been dealt with official (since war is a tabou).\(^{130}\) Élizabeth Picard describes ‘the new clothes of the Lebanese confessionalism’ as ‘militia neo-communitarianism’. (p. 8) By this, she means that communitarianism not only


changes clothes but also changes character; it is transformed and becomes more exacerbated.

Communitarianism has become accepted after the war and takes the place of the ‘communal modesty’ of the pre-war period. This is true also within the Christian communities: studies show that Greek orthodox political leaderships are becoming increasingly confessional.

Communal mixing, measured in rates mixed marriages and existence of inter-communal areas, was more widespread during the period of economic growth in the pre-war period than it is today. Religious identity has been strengthened and the communal belonging, previously one of several belongings, have become the main belonging, socially and politically. Communalism became the motor of politics.

The rise of communal identifications went along with an increasing instrumentalization of religion, even amongst regular Sunni notables: the reference to Islam was always important amongst traditional Sunni notables, as a source of traditional legitimacy. It became more important with the civil war. Becoming elected was easily compromised if it became known that candidate in question was an atheist. According to analysts in Tripoli, ‘an atheist would not be elected in Tripoli’. This led even secular notables in Tripoli to portray some kind of communal and Islamic identities. Attending the Friday prayer and utilizing the ‘right’, conservative Islamic type of expressions (when entering a car, for instance) were integral parts of the electoral strategy for even for very secular notables. It was also important to portray oneself as a communal champion.

After the decline in leftist ideologies and the Shia monopolization of the front line with Israel, Islamism supplanted Arab nationalism as the most important new ideology for Sunni Arab leaders, but has many shortcomings. The specificity of this ideology is that it contributes to weakening and dismantling the political organization of the Sunni community. Indeed, many Sunni Islamists question the authority of established political leaders and the extremists of this ideology (the Salafists, jihadists) do not recognize the established political system at all.

131 Ahmad Beydoun coined this concept, analyzing the pre-war period. See Liban: Itinéraires dans une guerre incivile, p. 51. He wrote that the creation of a viable state necessitates 'la pudeur des communautés': submitting without loosing oneself.

132 Rayan Haddad argues that the Kosovo war catalyzed communal sentiments and anti-Muslim sentiments amongst the Lebanese Greek Orthodox, which had not during the Lebanese civil war formed militias (although many Greek Orthodox enrolled in Maronite militias or the SSNP): positioning on the Kosovo war followed communitarian lines in Lebanon and spitted Lebanese Sunni leaders, solidarized with the Bosnian and Albanians against Greek Orthodox, whose communal leaders supported Orthodox Serbs. See Rayan Haddad, Les processus d'insertion de conflits exogènes dans un espace public communautarisé : captations libanaises des crises du Kosovo, du 11 septembre, d'Afghanistan, et d'Irak, PhD dissertation, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, Septembre 2007.
and do not participate in it in any way (do not vote, for instance). In such a new context, notables who aspire to become elected as MPs need to be perceived as true ‘believers’ in order to become accepted by the population. Often superficial gestures suffice, such as attending Friday prayer in a mosque, employing the traditional phrases, for instance saying the name of God when entering a car. In popular quarters, they rally intermediary leaders, lesser notables, who have established ‘Islamic credentials’ and who are perceived as courageous. Yet, the above discussion has shown that the loyalty of these actors, is very volatile. Few moral ties unite them with the political leaders. In the event of the emergence of a higher bidder, they may disappear.

The consolidation of Sunni identity as sectarian and often Islamist increased the emotional distance to the other Lebanese regions, and isolated emotionally, socially, culturally, politically and economically the north from the rest of the country. It reduced the level of social cohesion locally, because it re-affirmed the distance between Sunnis and the Christians of north Lebanon. It also reduced the level of cohesion within the Sunni community, between middle-class and upper-class Sunnis, whose sociability was centred around the new neighbourhoods in Tripoli and who spent most of their free time to other regions, and the poor, who became entrenched in the crowded, popular neighbourhoods of Tripoli, which had not been reconstructed since the war. In addition security arguments would be used repeatedly against the city of Tripoli, contributing to hindering its economic reconstruction after the war, and investments, needed for economic prosperity. All these factors also in turn facilitated a increasing segregation and poverty in poor areas in Tripoli.

**Conclusion**

The paper has shown that the political space in Tripoli is structured by two parallel structural crises: first, the fragmentation and weakening of political leadership in the Macheq; second, the problem of authority in Islam. Tripoli is therefore a microcosm of the crisis of Sunnism in the Levant.

By identifying first the resources utilized to create a political public and second the obstacles, the paper has attempted to shed light on the limits of the ‘leadership through distance’ strategy. Indeed, Hamit Bozarslan shows that hegemony is not the only way to leadership; another is ‘leadership through political engineering’. Leadership does not necessarily need to be perceived as legitimate; it may achieve political control without passing through social control. Whereas Sunni political leadership in Tripoli the 50s, 60s and 70s often followed the
model of ‘leadership through proximity’, political leaders are today increasingly distant from their public. This is increasingly problematic in a context where Sunni political leaders no longer have a clear political cause and cannot provoke a clear vision of the future. Charity, ‘political money’, and transactionalism replace the conventional patron-client relations, where non-material component – the identification with the family of the za’im, or the za’im as a communal champion, also played an important part. The problem is that loyalty becomes extremely volatile, and that without ideology, it becomes impossible to create a fighting group. The legitimacy of the state becomes associated with its capacity as a producer (public sector) and as a distributor (social welfare). In addition, both conservative monarchies and populist republics have coopted religious leaders, yet Islam has also become a source of contestation in the two cases.

The Hariri family’s attempt to create a political leadership in North Lebanon perfectly illustrates this trend. The Future current, in order to unify to public, resorted to a very wide spread practice: using different rhetoric, depending on the public to be addressed.\textsuperscript{133} It also made the political leadership increasingly dependent on instrumentalizing religious slogans. This however, was a double-edged sword: it created ambivalent relationships with the radical Islamists, and therefore, creates security risks.

The case of North Lebanon is therefore exemplary to demonstrate, for the whole Greater Syrian space, the crisis of political leadership. Egypt at the end of the Mubarak-rule for instance, also witnessed ‘Leadership through distance strategies’. Vote-buying and transactionalism was frequent. In cases where the political leadership lacks legitimacy, the urban spaces become places of potential political risks. ‘Sensitive urban areas’ were the object of contempt and fear from the part of the middle classes and the political leadership. The lack of visibility of the official state institutions led to an autonomization of the urban. Social relations were different in poor areas, for instance, the traditional role of Muslim religious leaders was re-invented: they not only became key actors in community-based conflict resolution, but also were very present in social occasions, including weddings and mourning of the death. The presence of religious actors consolidated the difference between poor and middle class areas. To some extent and, the segregation of poor areas from the national political space were exacerbated thanks to information technology, which facilitated their plug-in with other similar areas in the Islamic Umma.

Hence, the Arab city became a fundamentally segregated arena, which no longer facilitated social interaction. To assure durability, the political power increasingly came to rely on ‘gated communities’. This was very evident in Egypt. In Tripoli, no real gated communities were created but increasing segregation separated different urban areas. In addition, private ‘club’ beaches with more liberal manners created in the outskirt of Tripoli had a similar function.\textsuperscript{134} It led to a growing schizophrenia in the manners and culture, and provided a great challenge to the political leadership.

Tripoli also illustrates the tensions between Islamism and Sunni confessionalism. It also sheds light upon the potential for weakening and fragmentation, inherent in the Sunni community with the rise of confessional Islamism.

\textsuperscript{134} These were essentially illegal constructions from the civil war, and had gained popularity when the Islamist movement IUM controlled Tripoli and imposed strict manners in the city. The beaches, in the Syrian-controlled areas, outside the control of IUM, became a hit with the middle classes.