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THE CRISIS OF CONFESSIONALISM: LEBANON BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

The Crisis of Confessionalism: Lebanon between Tradition and Modernity

This article contains the analysis of the Lebanese protests that started in October 2019 and attempts to explain their background. The main argument is that the Lebanese consociational system is undergoing a deep crisis. There is a growing disparity between the existing political system and ongoing social changes. The article argues that the reason for the socio-political tensions lies in the clash between two distinctive and competing discourses about the future shape of the Lebanese political system: the confessional discourse and the secular or reformist discourse.

Keywords: Lebanon, Lebanese Revolution, confessionalism, consociationalism, power-sharing.

The Lebanese protests which have been ongoing since 2019 are not just about the collapsing economy. The problems in Lebanon are of a more complicated nature, urgent and gloomier as they touch the state's foundations which rest on a power-sharing formula. Research into the ideological background of the Lebanese protests is required in order to see what lurks behind them and the questions it raises regarding the future of this unique Middle Eastern state. Underneath the current economic and political upheaval is a deep crisis within the Lebanese consociational system. It must be noted, however, that confessionalism is not just a set of tools that regulate politics, it is the backbone of Lebanon as we know it, a complex structure on which

rests its entire cultural, social and political construction. This paper proposes to interpret the observed events in the context of the growing disparity between the existing political settlement and ongoing social changes. It argues that the reason for the socio-political tension lies in the confrontation taking place between two distinctive and competing discourses about the future shape of the Lebanese political system – the confessional discourse and, opposing it, the secular or reformist discourse.

On 17 October 2019, the Lebanese people took to the streets, starting one of the biggest protests in the country's history, soon labelled by the global media as the Lebanese Revolution. The main trigger of the protests was the country's collapsing economy (above all, huge public debt, low economic growth and the high unemployment rate). The worst economic situation in years pushed the Lebanese people to occupy Beirut city centre demanding the toppling of the regime – the confessional system, considered the foundation of the (relatively) peaceful coexistence of this multireligious state. Popular discontent came as a reaction to the deepening degeneration of a system that was originally designed as a consociational democracy but nowadays is moving closer to an authoritarian regime (Jelonek 2004; Salamey 2014; Bahlawan 2019; Salloukh et al. 2019).

In principle, confessionalism implies that state power is shared among the representatives of all confessional communities in proportion to the communities' numbers. Furthermore, each community enjoys autonomous rule in matters such as civil issues, education, cultural affairs, etc., which enables the relatively peaceful coexistence of different confessions next to each other, without mutual interference in their communal affairs. Such political solutions represent so-called consociational democracy and are viewed as more suitable for deeply divided societies or segmented societies prone to ethno-religious conflicts.¹ Lebanese consociationalism (or confessionalism) is therefore a political system in which state power is shared along religious lines in proportion to the size of each community. On a theoretical level, confessionalism is considered a separate model, one of the four types of power-sharing systems, next to consociationalism, the Lewis model and centripetalism (Trzciński 2016).

¹ Societies that can be characterised by deep divisions according to ethnic or religious lines that contribute to the formation of segments within the society. Majoritarian democracy, according to Arend Lijphart, does not constitute the best solution for segmented societies (Lijphart 2008).

Certain aspects of the Lebanese power sharing have become the subject of fierce criticism both by researchers and experts in the matter, as well as ordinary Lebanese citizens (Salloukh 2019; Nagle and Clancy 2019). On the wave of the 2019 revolution, some of the loudest slogans chanted by protesters were those demanding the abolishment of the system and the removal of the entire confessionally based political class. This, however, poses a serious risk of chaos and destabilisation that could easily awaken the old confessional animosities and lead to the eruption of intercommunal violence.

This paper is based on research supported by field studies conducted by the author in Lebanon between the years 2012 and 2019. The main argument of the paper is that the 2019 popular protests in Lebanon were not only economically driven but should also be viewed as ideological. Economic factors served as the spark, themselves resulting from a deeper institutional crisis within the Lebanese consociational system – corrupt and not corresponding with social changes. In the face of economic collapse, the social circles critical of confessionalism undertook social mobilisation aimed at turning popular attention to the question of political reform in Lebanon and intensifying the debate about its direction. Specifically, the perspectives of abolishing the confessional rule or, at least, its reform leading to an improved version of the power-sharing formula.

The idea is not entirely new in Lebanese politics. So-called ‘deconfessionalisation’ even became one of the points of the Taif Agreement which ended the civil war in 1989, and signed in to the Lebanese Constitution.² No action, however, was ever implemented in order to ‘deconfessionalise’ the Lebanese system. The protesters brought the idea back to the table by making it one of their most important demands.

One may wonder, however, what is the potential alternative to the formula that for many years has been considered the foundation of peaceful coexistence in Lebanon? Is this vision of ‘deconfessionalisation’ backed by the formation of any kind of political opposition? Also, can we speak of a secular, reformist movement being formed in Lebanon, representing a coherent ideological programme, capable of replacing the existent political system with a better formula? And finally, from where can inspiration be sought for reforming confessionalism?

² See the text of the Lebanese Constitution with all its amendments: <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanes%20Constitution.pdf> [09.11.2020].

THE CRISIS

There is a large body of literature in the field of power-sharing theory dedicated to the study of conditions that determine the stability and efficiency of various power-sharing solutions (Lijphart 2008). The above stated crisis of Lebanese consociationalism is based on the grounds that certain aspects of the system's operation have been subjected to criticism, pointing at corruption and nepotism as the main reasons for the inefficient, failing state. The problem of a weak state is not a rare issue in consociational models (Schneckener 2002; Makdisi, Marktanner 2009; Salamey 2009; Mouawwad, Baumann 2017; Kendhammer 2015). It is partially related to one of the founding principles of consociationalism – segmental autonomy,³ which stipulates that certain competences should be left to the communal authorities. This often leads to a situation where state institutions are overshadowed and play a secondary role vis-à-vis the communal authorities. In extreme cases, it reduces the role of the central administration so much that it simply becomes an agency channelling public funds to communal institutions and confessional leaders, which in turn distribute these resources with scarcely any control from the state. It leads to the situation where the state does not exist independently, as a source of authority next to the communal institutions. Instead, it remains blurry, absent and is not seen as a significant player. The Lebanese people often evoke the question 'Where's the state?' (Arabic: Wayn ad-dawle?), expressing growing popular frustration with the general lack of accountability, raised during each and every crisis that hits Lebanon. The question quoted above reflects the commonly shared sentiment of an absent, inefficient state and also reveals the constant public quest and need for the state to act as an important actor. Repeated by the critics of confessionalism, it implies that it is the system's current arrangement that bears the responsibility for the weak state – failing to deliver even the most basic services for its citizens (Mouawwad, Baumann 2017; Salloukh et al. 2019). The 2019 economic collapse, labelled as the hardest since the end of the Lebanese civil war, was to be expected, taking into account mounting public debt and low economic growth, which resulted in rapidly growing inequalities and forced many Lebanese to emigrate.⁴

³ Next to coalition rule, aproportional representation, veto (Lijphart 2008).

⁴ For more, see Lebanon's Economic Update, April 2020: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/525341554825472233/mpo-lbn.pdf> [09.11.2020].

The argument about the direct relationship between the worsening economic conditions and failing Lebanese consociationalism is supported by several factors; rampant corruption, weakness (if not paralysis) of state institutions that are dominated by confessional leaders and abused for their particular interest, repeated cases of fraud and the wasting of public funds perpetrated by politicians (Kingston 2001; Heydemann 2004; Kingston 2013; Cammett, Issar 2010; Salti, Chaaban 2010; Clark, Salloukh 2013; Makdisi, Marktanner 2019; Salloukh et al. 2019). To support and illustrate this argument with a few facts – between 2013 and 2017, the Lebanese parliament abused the fundamental feature of democratic systems, elections. Instead of calling elections, it repeatedly voted to extend its mandate and postponed these for four consecutive years. Aside from the problems with calling elections, another challenge surrounds the formation of a new cabinet. The process of painful negotiations usually takes several months before it is possible to reach any compromise satisfactory enough for the confessional leaders who safeguard their own interests first and foremost. Such delays, caused more often than not by the sluggishness of politicians, affect a multitude of issues crucial for the operation of the state, not to mention the adoption of state's annual budget (Salamey 2014). For these reasons, between 2006 and 2008 and also in the years 2014–2016, the Lebanese state operated with the post of the president vacant. It was impossible to reach an agreement regarding a candidate because the leaders, motivated by their ambitions and interests, exploited to the maximum the opportunities given to them by the confessional formula (Salloukh et al. 2019). The above-mentioned examples are only a few of the several institutional obstructions that are typical for the regular functioning of confessionalism in Lebanon. On the wave of the 2019 revolution, some of the loudest slogans chanted by protesters were those demanding the end of the confessional system and the removal of the entire confessionally based political class.

CONFESSSIONALISM AND SECULARISM – A CONFRONTATION?

Confessionalism is more than a set of institutional and political tools. Beyond the consociational institutions there is also the specific culture from which it emerged, a culture built around these arrangements and developed with it. The creation of the Lebanese

consociational model was a long historical process with its roots in the end of the 17th century. It evolved from the traditional forms of coexistence among the communities of Mount Lebanon (especially Maronite and Druze) and, later on, particular political settlements that were implemented to mitigate the intercommunal conflicts consecutively occurring in this region in the years 1840–1943 (Makdisi 2000; Baaklini 1976; Aboultaif 2019). Overall, it contributed to the foundations of the Lebanese state as we know it. Only by recognising the historicity of confessionalism, the processual character of its formation as well as its cultural dimension, can one fully understand the complexity of the current upheavals in Lebanon.

The present crisis within the Lebanese consociational system is accompanied by the emergence of an anti-confessional and secular discourse regarding the future political settlement in Lebanon. Looking at the overall debate surrounding the protests it can be noted that there seem to be two distinctive and competing discourses regarding the shape of the Lebanese political system and culture, the traditional confessional and, opposing it, the secular, also referred to as the reformist discourse.

The first discourse was built with and around the confessional system, its political culture and strengthened by the functioning and evolution of the system over the course of Lebanese history. It is mostly represented by the mainstream media networks linked with Lebanese politicians and their clientele.⁵ With its own well-developed class and political establishment, anchored in the traditional clan structure and supported by the alliance of political leaders with religious authorities, it strongly resists any forces that might undermine their position (Salloukh et al. 2019). In this totalistic view there is no Lebanon outside the confessional framework, the alternative is chaos, anarchy and war. Such a claim is not entirely unfounded; abandoning the confessional formula for vague concepts of deconfessionalisation does pose a serious risk of fragmentation. However, Lebanon's identity and culture still remains strongly defined by confessionalism. The confessional discourse rests on tradition and conservative values

⁵ Most of the Lebanese media and TV channels are confessional and linked with particular families or political parties – for instance, Al-Mustakbal (Future TV) is the TV station belonging to the Hariri family and, as such, is viewed as representing the Sunni voice. Al-Manar is the channel of the Hezbollah party. The National Broadcasting Network (NBN) belongs to the Shia Amal Party. OTV is the TV channel run by the Free Patriotic Movement – a Maronite party founded by the current president of Lebanon (since 2016), General Michel Aoun.

in political and social life. It relies on the importance of Lebanese tradition in which political leadership is the privilege of historically prominent families and religious authorities. In confessionalism, the religious factor is the core of the social and political organisation. Communal affiliations and networks are considered the basis of the social structure, while confessional identities take primacy over other sources of identification (Makdisi 2000; Weiss 2010; Ziadeh 2006).

The emergence of the rival secular discourse accompanies the development of political and social opposition to confessionalism, anchored within the protest movement. Utterly critical of confessionalism, it rejects the existing political formula and calls for the undertaking of urgent reforms to deal with state's incapacities. Among the core concepts envisioned as remedies for the Lebanese crisis is mainly fundamental change of the political and social system, revealing not only a clearly reformist orientation, but also a progressive one. Behind the slogans of abolishing political confessionalism lies the hidden presumption that it must be accompanied with parallel social reforms aimed at reducing the role of the confessional factor. Some of the issues advocated by the protest movement, such as the importance of affiliations other than religion, challenge the tribal and patriarchal power structures (considered crucial for supporting confessionalism), pinpoint a progressive orientation and a will to replace the traditional structure of society with a modern one. The confrontation taking place during the protests resembles a clash between the 'old', traditional Lebanon, overwhelmingly associated with the collapsing economy, a corrupt and outdated political formula, and the modern, liberal and progressive currents that shape the mindsets of the younger generations of Lebanese. They no longer see any future perspective within the existing confessional framework, both politically and ideologically. Unfortunately, at this stage the movement has yet to form a defined programme and its own political representation. The process of developing these also remains in question. At present, it operates merely as a protest movement consisting of individuals and also including several NGOs, loose political groupings, and civil coalitions or collectives.⁶ The protesters strictly avoid any affiliations with the existing Lebanese

⁶ To name only a few of the many NGOs and civil society organisations: Civil Society Movement, Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER), You Stink collective, Beirut Madinati (political organisation), MARCH (civil society movement).

parties, preferring to distance themselves from politics for fear of being associated with the corrupt establishment.⁷ In spite of its loose and informal structure, the movement clearly represents liberal, postmaterial values, especially the principle of individual autonomy and freedom (Inglehart 1981). One of the most important issues raised by the protesters is the separation of state and religion. Based on this, they demand a secular state and such reform of the political system that will bring it closer to the concepts inspired by the ideas of participatory democracy. According to the Civil Society Movement, one of the earliest NGOs advocating the abolishment of confessionalism, secularism is understood as ‘the autonomy of the world and all its aspects from religion...’, not necessarily ‘independence but positive neutrality that gives the citizens freedom of choice... according to their beliefs’.⁸ In their view, secularism does not imply atheism, it is more about liberating religion from social and political pressures.

This paper proposes to refer the current political crisis in Lebanon and the widespread popular demonstrations expressing criticism of the entire ideological configuration of confessionalism to the stipulated confrontation taking place between the above-described discourses. The two opposing visions differ substantially in terms of their views on personal status, the place of the individual within the confessional community and the state. The first assumes that identities should be primarily based on confessional affiliations, and the relationship with the state and the concept of nationality cannot exist except through the confessional communities. This is supported by the strong confessional political class and their clientele, and its struggles to maintain the existing status quo. The second discourse advocates that the questions of identity and citizenship should be liberated from religion, and that citizens’ participation in public life should not be determined by their confessional origin. It therefore calls for total removal of the mediated relationship between the state and its citizens, in which adherence to a confessional community becomes a precondition for citizenship. The proposed alternative lies in moving towards a secular state. By attempting to renegotiate the

⁷ It is difficult to point out the leaders of the protest as they often declare disappointment with formal structures, hierarchies and therefore avoid naming any leader. However, among the leading figures of the current and past protests are a few recurring names: Assad Thebian, Imad Bazzi, Karim Hawwa, Amir Fakhri, Nadim Jouni.

⁸ Quote from a brochure *What is Secularism?* By the Civil Society Movement, Beirut 1998. Sources provided by Bassel Abdallah, a representative of the organisation, interviewed on 15.08.2012.

existing relationship between the state and its citizens, the critics of confessionalism seem to imply the need for redefinition of the concept of Lebanese nationality (Ziadeh 2006).

The above-mentioned ideas are taken directly from the protesters' banners, such as 'No to sectarianism – All of them means all of them' or 'We need leaders not in love with money but in love with justice. Not in love with publicity but in love with humanity'.⁹ The movement is led by informal groupings and civil collectives with a burgeoning political agenda, but its body is formed by individuals, mostly young, who refuse to stand by as their country is pushed into the abyss, its resources wasted or stolen and their future destroyed.

THE PROTESTERS

– A SILENT REVOLUTION THAT BECAME QUITE LOUD

The overall impression of the composition of recent Lebanese protests clearly points at the significant changes which are taking place in society in terms of identification and social roles. One of the clearest observations was the strong, active and often leading position of women in these protests, also expressed in one of the chanted slogans – 'Revolution is a woman'. In the late 1990s, the American University of Beirut published the results of research conducted on a group of a few hundred university students, revealing the general changes in their values and political attitudes, which was interpreted by the authors of the research as sign of the ongoing 'silent revolution in Lebanon' (Faour 1998: 136–137). Respondents revealed a stronger attachment towards the idea of Lebanese nationalism, favoured over Arabism, Syrian nationalism, communism or Islamism, which had previously been more popular. Most of the respondents were aware of the importance of confessionalism in the Lebanese political reality, but the confessional factor seemed to play a lesser role for students from urban areas and among those who declared themselves as atheists or not practising their faith (41% of the respondents) (Faour 1998: 136–137). Moreover, 82% of them agreed that the confessional system should be abolished due to its oppressive character, corruption and negative impact on the general situation in the country (Faour 1998: 128–130). The results also showed the overall domination of individualism over collectivism,

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/20/lebanons-mass-revolt-against-corruption-and-poverty-continues> [10.11.2020]

the preference of egalitarianism to hierarchy and authority, and the growing importance of values such as personal growth, participation, manifestation of one's individuality and personal accomplishment. Students also declared adherence to democratic ideals and expressed support for gender equality. Some respondents, especially females, openly declared their opposition to the existing social order imposed by patriarchy, which in turn suggested a change in the Lebanese model of femininity (Faour 1998: 143–153).

Linking this small piece of research conducted two decades ago with the images of Lebanese protesters and their slogans in 2019, the wider ideological context of these protests and their anti-systemic character becomes more evident. The latter demonstrations are not single events, a one-time critical reaction to some bad policies undertaken by the government, but should rather be seen as representing continuous contestation of the existing social order imposed by confessionalism. The collapsing economy, the corrupt political class and its removal are the foreground issues but the protesters have more on their agenda. What they demand, between the lines, is not to replace one cabinet with a new one, but rather fundamental reform of the political system to become more pluralist and egalitarian. Their contestation is directed at the political system but the ultimate aim is to expand the space of social life beyond the frames determined by confessionalism. The desired reformulation of social life should go hand in hand with greater inclusiveness of groups that, in confessionalism, are marginalised or pushed out of the system. The protesters position themselves as citizens demanding their rights, representing complex identities and refusing to be reduced to confessional subjects. Next to the demands of removing the government and implementing urgent economic reforms, other issues are raised, such as the secular state, civil rights, equal rights for women and individual autonomy. According to the protesters, all these problems are interrelated and the ultimate solution for them all lies in moving away from confessionalism.

The protests that started in October 2019 were not the first of this kind directed against the system and its elites.¹⁰ Single voices

¹⁰ Prior study conducted at the level of doctoral research in the years 2011–2017 and published in the form of a book *New Social Movements And The Lebanese Political System After 1990* (2019, in Polish) has permitted the conclusion that the contentious activity in Lebanon oriented at putting confessionalism to an end, led by different socio-political groupings and movements critical of the confessional system, is continuous although irregular, and takes the form of recurring waves of protests responding to subsequent

expressing the issue of moving away from confessionalism were raised even before the civil war in 1975. They pointed out that confessionalism carries the risk of maintaining the isolation of communities, perpetuates communal affiliations and precludes the formation of intracommunal identities and overarching loyalties.¹¹

The formation of groups openly challenging confessionalism started right after the civil war, in the 1990s, but their activity was limited, taking into account the Syrian occupation of Lebanon which lasted until 2005. Lacking an organisational base and financial support, these groups remained marginal and of minor significance to the Lebanese politics of the time, operating rather as micro-movements dedicated to specific civil rights issues, women's rights and environmental issues. The withdrawal of the Syrian army in 2005, however, became a major game-changer for these movements, as moderate political liberalisation and the growth of the non-governmental sector opened some new opportunities for their activity. This was pointed out by Karam Karam, the Lebanese sociologist and political scientist, whose book on the Lebanese civil right movements published in 2006 stands out as a distinctive monograph on this topic (Karam 2006). The Lebanese political class has quickly recognised the threat posed by the growing civil society sector and has undertaken several steps aimed at subjecting and incorporating the NGO sector into the confessional system. This phenomenon was investigated by many Lebanese and foreign scholars, and has largely undermined the reputation of the Lebanese civil society sector as a force capable of leading social and political change (Kingston 2013; Clark and Salloukh 2010; Salloukh 2009; Salloukh et al. 2019). Marginalised and lacking opportunities for wider activity, these groups focused on local, grassroot initiatives and raising popular awareness about issues such as transparency, accountability, civil rights and the flaws of confessionalism. During the Arab Spring in 2011, many of them were involved in organising several anti-regime demonstrations in Beirut under the slogan 'Abolish the confessional system', with some

institutional crises. The movement contesting confessionalism is based on the activity of diverse groups from the nongovernmental, civil society sector, and includes NGOs as well as smaller student clubs, formal and informal civil coalitions, committees and collectives. This conclusion was also supported by further observations conducted during field research in 2019.

¹¹ Lebanese intellectual and Greek Catholic bishop Gregoire Haddad (1924–2015), called the 'Red Bishop', an outspoken critic of confessionalism and founder of the Civil Society Movement advocating the separation of state and religion in Lebanon. Source: Author's interview with Bassel Abdallah, leader of the Civil Society Movement on 15.08.2012.

managing to gather together a few thousand people. Since 2013, regular protests have been organised against the subsequent unconstitutional extensions of the parliament's term and the postponement of elections threatening Lebanese democracy. Unprecedentedly dynamic and strong protests erupted in summer 2015, due to the refuse crisis which revealed the huge fiasco regarding the management of waste by the state administration in Lebanon. The refuse crisis was again used to mobilise the Lebanese around the issue of the removal of confessionalism, attempting to make the issue of waste management political and turn public attention to the question of reforming or replacing the failing confessional system (Bahlawan 2019). A slogan coined at the time, 'You stink!' (in Arabic: Tol'et rehetkun, also the name of an anti-confessional political collective), was used during the recent protests, which also confirms the continuity of the protest actions.

Scholarly literature on Lebanon recognises the significance of recurring social protests directed against the confessional system (Karam 2006, 2009). Attention, however, is not focused enough on investigating these protests as a coherent phenomenon, driven by certain social changes in Lebanon, with a specified worldview and a formed ideological background. Adopting this approach would, in turn, permit a better analysis of the protests in terms of their future perspective and the impact they intend to have on the political system. Little attention is also paid to the reformist discourse and the rising debate regarding the future of the Lebanese political system. There is an urgent need for research into the formation of the critical, reformist, anti-confessional movement and its discourse. Even though the last decade has shown there is growing interest in Lebanese studies and has produced several important works revealing the underlying mechanisms of confessionalism or sectarianism (Makdisi 2000; Weiss 2010; Ziadeh 2006; Kingston 2013; Salamey 2014; Nucho 2016; Salloukh et al. 2019), more scholarly attention is required to study the counter discourse, which has gradually evolved since 2005 and seeks recognition.

REFORMING CONFESSIONALISM? A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

By acknowledging that confessionalism is a complex phenomenon encompassing the entirety of social and political life, anchored in the history and identity of Lebanon as a state, it is much clearer how

problematic the question is of the 'reform of the political system' in this case. It is more a call for reforming the foundations of Lebanese society and culture which is inevitably implied by the slogan of deconfessionalisation. The latter seems a difficult task which causes legitimate doubts about the feasibility of such a project, as it raises threats of chaos and destabilisation in a country haunted by the trauma of civil wars.

An important source of inspiration for the discussion regarding the potential and scope for reforming the Lebanese model is provided by power-sharing theory. Aside from being just a set of institutional, mechanical tools, recommended by scholars to be implemented in order to reduce communal conflicts, power sharing is also a concept under constant development, discussing first and foremost the idea of coexistence and building consensual culture in deeply divided, plural societies, providing inspiration and grounds for further specific institutional design and tools which can be implemented to mitigate intercommunal conflicts.

Beneath the complex crisis of Lebanese confessionalism lies a multitude of interrelated issues. First of all, it took a completely different turn compared to previous crises, in which competing for power and intercommunal antagonisms caused bloody military confrontations between communities, the most tragic of which became the 1975–1990 civil war (Salam 1973, 1998). The sources of the present crisis essentially do not rest in the intercommunal division of power. It is the very formula that is rejected, compromised by serving as a fig leaf for nondemocratic rule. Discussion about reforming the system and searching for new solutions now remains fundamental for the future of Lebanon. It will determine not only the shape of Lebanese politics but will also touch the sphere of culture and identity. The so called 'deconfessionalisation' of Lebanon is a radical solution which at present does not seem feasible for at least two reasons. First, it would require the emergence of a new source of authority for it to proceed. The political representation of the protest movement, however, is far from being at that level of organisation. Secondly, confessionalism is strong and deeply rooted in Lebanese socio-political structures, social tissue and mentality. Communal adherence remains an important factor in self-identification, a piece of local culture developed in a long historical process (Ziadeh 2006).

The perspectives on reforming the Lebanese consociationalism are directly linked with the opportunities that power-sharing systems

generally have. Also, the question of the adaptability of the Lebanese case touches upon a wider problem related to the future of power-sharing theory. This puts a very strong emphasis on the role of elites and elite compromise as the main factor for achieving the stable, peaceful existence of deeply divided societies. However, the future perspective of power-sharing systems goes beyond focusing on a limited compromise worked out by and among elites, as more and more it depends on the possibilities of extending this compromise to larger social circles that openly evoke their discontent with the present state of affairs. The redefinition of these formulas, following the principles of greater representativeness and inclusiveness, increasing circulation of the elites, as well as openness to new groups, representing new social and political actors, seems imperative and might greatly contribute to the development of a consensual culture. This in turn could result in building stronger grounds for the sustainable growth of plural societies. Such a view is, in a way, in line with a brief proposal for reforming the Lebanese system that was pointed out by Imad Salamey, who discussed integrative consociationalism as a possible alternative for Lebanon in one of his papers (Salamey 2009).

The first direction of political change would certainly require some sort of opening of the system towards greater inclusion, enabling wider popular representation and participation in electing the leadership as well as in the decision-making process. As for the institutional design, power-sharing theory offers an inspiring perspective for exploring potential solutions for reforming confessionalism, built on a multitude of case studies examining various forms of power-sharing models.

Scholarly literature recognises two basic types of power sharing; consociationalism and centripetalism (Trzciński 2020: 36–38). The consociational model relies on four principles: proportional political representation of each community according to their numbers; cultural autonomy, which gives the communal authorities the right to manage their cultural and civil affairs; the rule of a majority coalition, which requires that each government includes the widest possible confessional representation; and the right to a veto, which enables communities to block decisions that are considered against their interests (Lijphart 2008). An alternative model, centripetalism, also referred to as integrative power sharing, proposes institutional solutions that encourage intercommunal cooperation. It includes a territorial structure in which segments are split between a few administrative units in order to prevent the domination of one

segment in a region. In centripetalism, political parties must be multi-ethnic and cross-regional. Another instrument is vote pooling which encourages politicians to get support from other communities in order to be elected. In the case of presidential elections, candidates must obtain a certain number of votes in most territorial districts. The main idea distinguishing the two models is that consociational institutions focus more on protecting boundaries and the autonomy of communities while centripetal instruments create conditions in which the communities have to integrate (Trzciński 2020: 20).

Both centripetalism and consociationalism are empirical theories which grew out of several case studies, conducted by Donald J. Horowitz and Benjamin Reilly in Nigeria and Indonesia and Arend Lijphart in Holland, Switzerland, Belgium and Lebanon (Reilly 2007; Horowitz 2013; Lijphart 2008). The last country is seen as an interesting case for tailoring and testing a political formula for a society which is a unique religious mosaic (Lijphart 2008). The Lebanese political system has no ideal model according to which it would be implemented; it was shaped in a historical process dating back to the 17th century. The process is characterised by trial and error, implemented on the living tissue of the society which for centuries has inhabited the territories presently known as Lebanon (Makdisi 2000). A sort of principle defining the system in terms of a normative aspect should be permanent negotiability and adaptability. Not a closed system nor an accomplished formula, but rather a state of constant evolution, development and adjustment in reaction to social changes.

Such dynamics are inscribed in power-sharing theory. It is important that it is focused on developing institutional solutions that serve best when matching local contexts and needs. It is not uncommon that, in practice, certain countries, for example, Nigeria and Indonesia, include in their power-sharing systems both consociational as well as centripetal instruments, even though in theory the two operate as distinctive and highly competitive models (Trzciński 2018, 2020). Recognising the greater utility of such an approach, power-sharing theorists began exploring the 'third way' and the possibility of linking consociational elements with centripetal (with their configuration depending on the local circumstances). Ultimately labelled as a hybrid model of power sharing, it offers a set of practical solutions which enable greater adjustments of the system to various local context (Trzciński 2020: 148). The hybrid model

becomes a particularly interesting concept for inspiring the direction of Lebanese institutional reforms.

The Lebanese model of power sharing is undoubtedly consociational, organised first and foremost around the principle of protecting the autonomy of the confessional communities and securing their fair share in the power system. However, the geographical distribution of the Lebanese confessional communities is so mixed that hardly allows the communities to isolate. Next to the regions in which the majority of one segment is unquestionable, there are many districts in which communal candidates cannot be elected without securing the votes of other communities. Therefore, Lebanese politicians must also compete for outside supporters and develop interconfessional alliances, which certainly promotes moderate actors against more radical ones with sectarian attitudes. It is not a centripetal instrument yet, by any means, but it confirms there are grounds for developing more integrative solutions in the future.

Centripetal instruments aimed at creating institutional incentives for greater interdependencies between communities seem an opportunity worth exploring in the Lebanese case. Implementing these instruments into the Lebanese consociational model, moving it towards a more hybrid model of power sharing, could counter certain deficiencies of the consociational formula that have contributed to its present failure. One of the problems is related with the question of communal leadership and representation, which in confessionalism tends to be monopolised in the hands of one politician or family. In consequence, communities are often subjected to the whims of their leaders (Cammett, Issar, 2010; Clark, Salloukh 2013; Salloukh 2019).

If, as the protesters declare, among other claims, the confessional formula in its present form traps communal representation in a tight scheme, often leading to a situation where communities become hostage to their leaders, then perhaps exploring a more integrative, interconfessional instrument of electing the leadership offers a solution to the crisis. Breaking these dependencies could support mitigating the hegemony of the confessional factor in politics without the necessity of eradicating it entirely. As a result, the advocated 'deconfessionalisation' of Lebanon would not have to necessarily strictly imply the removal of the confessional element but a redesign of institutions that would weaken its harmful impact. It should nevertheless remain a long process, including several mid-steps on its way, which in turn could lead to the emergence of a new Lebanon.

The significance of the Lebanese case is not marginal for power-sharing theory. Next to the Lewis model, it is often pointed out as one of the earliest examples of designing a power-sharing formula that later contributed to the creation of power-sharing theory and the consociational model (Trzeciński 2016). The discussion around the crises, as well as the evolution and potential alternatives for confessionalism, contributes to power-sharing theory in general.

As the events of 2021 unfold, Lebanon faces rising pressures further undermining its stability, with an absolute crisis reaching an unprecedented level. The question of political representation and leadership, discussed above, presents itself as the tip of the iceberg, only one of the many concerns raised by the protesters. As stated, the current crisis results from decades of negligence and malpractice, and brings to the table a multitude of issues that must be addressed. Lebanon is in dire need of complex reforms in many aspects. The discussion regarding the institutional design of the system stands out as the fundamental one, as it also touches the silent and less observable changes in society.

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