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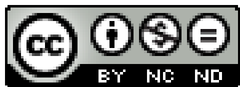
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10 From Social Crisis to Civil War (1968–1975)

If it were again a question of the liberal economy in which the strong oppresses and exploits the weak, if it were the case of the prosperity of the tiny capitalist minority and of bourgeois society, if the Lebanese Miracle should continue to express itself in terms of improvisation, approximation, lack of foresight, invisible revenues and non taxable returns, if it were finally the case of the Lebanon of the privileged few, we shall quickly see the positive security of the majority threatened by the gravest of dangers and face a catastrophe from which Lebanon will not stand up again.

(Grégoire Haddad, Greek Catholic bishop of Beirut, 1975)

The Intra Bank crash inaugurated a tendency that would manifest itself fully in the 1970s: the rise in interest rates in Europe and the United States and the strong pressures on the rulers and the rich of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia succeeded in attracting petrodollars to be deposited and invested in Western capitals. This development would henceforth make Lebanon into a place for recycling petrodollars toward Western networks. As a result, the economy was further subjected to the vagaries of foreign capital, while exaggerating its monopolistic structure and strengthening the domination of the commercial/financial complex.

MONOPOLISTIC *LAISSEZ-FAIRE*

By 1969, non-Arab foreign banks already controlled 40 per cent of bank deposits in Lebanon. Five years later, this percentage had doubled. By 1970, a third of the Lebanon's joint-stock companies (SARLs) and 20 per cent of limited liability companies (SALs) with mixed capital had become branches of foreign companies.[1]

It should be noted that this extroverted function of banks had an adverse impact on the country's economic development. Although banks operating in Lebanon possessed an impressive monetary mass that exceeded LL 6 billion, they contributed very meagrely to the development of the country's productive sectors. Their major operations involved speculation in foreign currency and

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bonds in Europe and the US (LL 2 billion in 1970), commercial short-term loans (60 per cent of total bank loans in 1971) and international long-term loans to the Régie Renault in France, the Indian government, and even the World Bank.

The commercial/financial oligarchy continued to dominate the economy. According to a survey carried out in 1973, 41 out of a total of 800 families controlled the majority of shares in 103 joint-stock companies in trade and services (a third of the total), accounting for 70 per cent of their turnover.[2] Five families among those controlled half of the country's import/export trade.[3] Five agents of European and American companies controlled 22 per cent of the market for the exports of these countries and 20 merchants controlled 85 per cent of the import of food products. Four of those families belonged to the 'Consortium'. Furthermore, commercial monopoly was legally enshrined in law decree no. 134 of August 1967, which limited commercial representation of foreign companies to an exclusive agent.

However, the salient characteristic of this period was the rising encroachment by the commercial/financial complex over industry and agriculture. In the banking sector, 57 family 'holdings' – representing 32 per cent of the total – controlled 72 per cent of the capital of the industrial SARLs; 75 per cent of the deposits in the Lebanese banks; 52 per cent of the capital of the SARLs in trade, agriculture and services; 64 per cent of the capital of the insurance companies; 71 per cent of the capital of transport companies; 92 per cent of the capital of financial joint-stock companies, and 37 per cent of the capital of real estate companies.[4]

A dependent industrial mediation

During the post-Intra years Lebanon witnessed rapid industrial growth. Industry's share of GDP rose from 14 per cent to 18 per cent and investments in that sector rose from LL 987 million in 1966 to LL 1.234 million in 1970. Closely related to foreign capital investments, this growth followed the logic of the recuperation of petrodollars by Western capital. Thus, multinationals came to directly control existing industries or established processing industries for their own products in Lebanon, producing mainly for Arab markets. Notably, the majority of these new industrial firms were financed by loans from Lebanese banks.

Such industrial growth depended heavily on the intensive employment of labour. The number of industrial workers nearly

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doubled in ten years, from 65,000 in 1965 to 120,000 when the 1975 war broke out.

Four major effects of this boom should be noted. First, as half of the domestic market had already been ceded to imported goods, foreign capital competed with local industry for the other half and for Arab markets (exports to Arab markets accounted for 80 per cent of total Lebanese exports, 40 per cent of which were destined for Saudi Arabia alone). Second, the external dependence of the industrial sector was aggravated by the rise in imports of raw materials and the payment of various royalties and licences. This led to a third result, namely that exports increased at a much slower rate than the increase in imports, and the deficit in the balance of trade shot up to LL 1.5 billion, four times the volume of exports. Fourth, industrial growth resulted in a double concentration: in the volume of industrial firms (50 per cent of the enterprises employed more than 187 workers) and in the share of industrial firms in production (20 enterprises produced half of total industrial production in 1973).[5]

The crisis of agriculture

For its part, agriculture was invaded by the commercial/financial complex, which controlled direct producers through credit; prices; the sale of insecticides, fertilisers, agricultural machinery and tools; the packing and refrigeration industries, and, finally, distribution. Here, concentration was no different from the other sectors. Twenty-five brokers who also owned the main refrigerated storehouses controlled two-thirds of the market for apples; 20 brokers controlled 81 per cent of the market for citrus fruit (three of whom controlled a third of the market), and two firms practically controlled all the imports of insecticides and fertilisers.[6]

By the 1970s, share-cropping had practically disappeared. Despite the development of relatively large capitalist farms using salaried workers, the better part of agricultural production was still coming from relatively small family-based units that nevertheless increasingly resorted to Syrian agricultural workers. Between those two poles developed two hybrid forms of production. One, prevalent in the Biqa`, was a capitalist form of share-cropping: according to a yearly contract between a number of small landowning farmers and a capitalist entrepreneur, the latter would provide credit, grain, pesticides, and the use of machinery and pumps in return for a share of the harvest. The other form tied thousands of farmers and peasants to agribusiness monopoles. This was the case of hundreds

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of families of beetroot farmers in the Biqa`, producing for the benefit of one sugar factory at `Anjar and the 45,000 tobacco producers in the predominantly Shi`i south (and also in the Maronite districts of Jbeil and Batrun) producing for the tobacco monopoly, the Régie.

However, commercial/financial control over agriculture followed the same logic as that of its control over industry. Since larger portions of the local market for agricultural products had already been taken over by importers (only 15 per cent of food consumption needs was being locally produced), agricultural production was driven to produce for external markets (two-thirds of exports were fruit and poultry products).[7]

Debts and exploitation by merchants, moneylenders, banks, and suppliers of machinery, fertilisers and pesticides forced small farmers to leave for the cities and overseas at an accelerated pace. Half of the Lebanese population made their living from agriculture at the end of the 1950s, but by 1975, only 20 per cent remained engaged in the sector. Agriculture lost some 100,000 active members in barely two decades.[8]

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Demographic and social mobility

Since its attachment to the world market, Lebanon has been characterised by a demographic flux in which rural migration and emigration carry out a permanent reconstruction of the country's social stratification. Emigration is the process by which Lebanese society hides its high rates of unemployment and rids itself of the human surplus. It developed at a rate of 8,566 per year for the years 1960–70 and rose to 10,000 for the years 1970–74. The share of émigré remittances of gross national product (GNP) experienced dramatic growth, rising from 5.38 per cent in 1951 to 30 per cent in 1974. While the local labour force was exported, non-Lebanese labour was brought in to replace those who left, or those who refuse to be reduced to wage labour. Before the war, Syrian workers already constituted the majority of agricultural workers and a high percentage of construction workers.

On the other hand, many of the returnee émigrés had been elevated to middle-class status or even joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie, bolstering in both cases the dominant sectors of the economy by investing principally in commerce, finance and real estate. Social promotion acquired by migration and work abroad

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spilled directly into politics, for it was principally through politics that the socially promoted hoped to obtain social distinction. Contemporary Lebanon became a country in which middle- and high-income *nouveaux riches* constituted a large part of the middle and upper classes. The dialectics of wealth/honour were implanted in the heart of social relations and regulated the relationship between the political and the social.

High cost of living

The increasingly outward-looking nature of the economy, the absence of any price controls to check merchants' lust for profits, and monopoly control directly impacted the standards of living of the majority of Lebanese. Between 1967 and 1975 the cost of living had doubled,[9] and during this time Beirut was classified as being more expensive than Washington, DC. In one year, 1972–73, the price of imported goods rose by 10–15 per cent despite the fact that the Lebanese pound had registered a net rise compared to the US dollar and sterling. The only possible explanation for this was the arbitrary decision-making by importers and middlemen, opined Marwan Iskandar, a liberal conservative economist. He went on to add that the market price of imported meat was eight to ten times more than its purchase price c.i.f. (cost, insurance, freight) Beirut and that the price of agricultural products in Saudi Arabia (imported from Lebanon) was 40 per cent lower than in Lebanon! The same could be said for the high prices of pharmaceutical products, medicine and hospitalisation, determined by monopoly control and by the extroverted orientation of medical services, to satisfy the needs of the rich in the Gulf.

Real estate speculation – the main form of investment by the commercial/financial oligarchy, the Gulf sheikhs and the émigrés – raised the price of land and imposed the construction of luxury apartment buildings. In the 'forest of stone' that Beirut had become, rent gobbled up no less than 40 per cent of family budgets, while low-cost social housing, promised for so long in ministerial declarations, never materialised. On the eve of the war, there were between 40,000 and 50,000 empty luxury apartments in Beirut alone, while successive waves of migrants from the rural areas crammed into shantytowns and squats, taking over entire suburbs.

Class, sectarian and regional inequalities

On the eve of the 1975 war Lebanon's social structure was one of small-scale privileges and distinctions produced by patronage

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and the sectarian system, along with large-scale class privileges and divisions.

The majority of the Lebanese had no more than 12–15 per cent of national income.[10] Bishop Grégoire Haddad wrote that 79 per cent of the Lebanese received less than the minimum income for what he considered a decent living, estimated by him at LL 10,480 per month.[11] Meanwhile, 72 per cent of the workers did not earn more than LL 561 per month,[12] and the official minimum wage barely changed between 1970 and 1975, increasing only from LL 205 to LL 310.

Despite the ambitious Shihab reforms, great disparities persisted between centre and periphery. While the annual per capita revenue in Beirut was estimated at $803, it was $151 in south Lebanon. Beirut and the surrounding Mount Lebanon contained 64 per cent of private primary and complementary educational institutions, 73 per cent of those in the secondary education and all universities. In the early 1970s, 65 per cent of all medical doctors lived and worked in Beirut, which accounted for 27 per cent of the population; 5.5 per cent were in the south for 18 per cent of the population; and only 3 per cent in the Biqa`, where 13 per cent of the Lebanese lived.[13]

Beirut's 'poverty belt'

Rapid urbanisation surrounded Beirut with a 'poverty belt' stretching from Karantina in the east to the Raml al-`Ali and Laylaki neighbourhoods in the west. Between these lay a number of villages that had been rapidly transformed into the poor and working-class suburbs of Jdeideh, Sin al-Fil, Mudawar, Burj Hammud, Nab`a and Dikwaneh, in the east bordering Nahr Beirut; and Ghubayri, `Ayn al-Rummaneh, Shiyah, Haret Hreik, Burj al-Barajineh and Murayjeh, stretching west to the airport. The 'belt' was punctuated by the Palestinian camps of Tall al-Za`tar in the East, and Mar Iliyas, Sabra, Shatila and Burj al-Barajineh, further to the west. Some 400,000 out of a total Beirut population of 1 million lived in these neighbourhoods which mushroomed within two decades, swelled by rural migrants who were victims of the collapse of share-cropping and the crisis of agriculture. But this rapid urbanisation was considerably accelerated by additional factors: the collapse of the economy of Jabal `Amil and the southern Biqa` after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the displacement caused by Israeli retaliation against the villages of the south for fedayeen operations.

Although it primarily served the industrial locations of Mukallis in the east and Shuwayfat in the west, the 'poverty belt' was also

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the location for a mass of sub-proletarians, whether members of a growing 'informal' artisan and manufacturing sector or simply masses of unemployed. The inhabitants were mixed. While Haret Hreik and Murayjeh, in the west, were still nearly exclusively Christian, the eastern suburb had become home to some 250,000 Shi`a in the traditionally Armenian neighbourhoods of Burj Hammud and Nab`a, and in Dikwaneh. The Shi`a exhibited the most dramatic shift from rural to city living. While most of the community was rural in the post-independence years, more than three-quarters of it had become urbanised by the 1970s.

While they were not the *favelas* of Rio de Janiero, their high density per square mile, squatting, very poor sanitary and health conditions, rare water supply and stolen electricity made these suburbs breeding grounds for the populist parties of the Left and the Right. The proximity of the Palestinian camps provided the Left with inspiration for change, and the Right with the necessary scapegoats.

Sectarian distinctions

In the 1970s, business was still basically under Christian control. At the end of the 1950s, Yusuf Sayigh, in his pioneering study of Lebanese entrepreneurs, found that the ratio of Christians to Muslims was 10:2 in industry, 11:2 in finance and 16:2 in services.[14] In a later study in 1973, Boutros Labaki proved that these ratios had been sizeably modified but remained quite uneven: 75.5 per cent Christians/24.5 per cent Muslims in commercial firms (family firms and SARLs) 67.5 per cent/32.4 per cent in industrial firms and 71 per cent/29 per cent in the banking sector.[15] Conversely, among the industrial working class, 75 per cent of the workers were Muslims, Shi`a in particular, against 25 per cent Christians, though the percentage of Christian wage earners would increase markedly when it came to the service sector. Kinship relations and regionalism played an important role in employment and in maintaining a balance of power inside firms that was favourable to employers.

The middle classes: unity and difference

The inflation of the middle classes was a significant characteristic of Lebanon's social structure in the prewar period due primarily to emigration, the development of education, the inflated bureaucracy and the sizeable increase in the members of the liberal professions. By 1973, it was estimated that the middle classes accounted for 67 per cent of the population.[16]

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Among the large lower-middle and middle classes, small privileges based on sect and region immediately translated into socio-economic advantages. Two major domains of sectarian inequality were the privileges in the bureaucracy and the education system. As already noted, the Lebanese *laissez-faire* system did not prevent the existence of an inflated administration of some 100,000 functionaries (including the military and security forces). The expansion of educational provision across the sects led to competition among the growing number of graduates for jobs in the bloated state administration. This prompted people to question the validity of sectarian quotas for posts and allowed the question of education in Lebanon to take on exaggerated importance, leading to political conflicts. Its function in the enlarged reproduction of the class structure operated by transforming the traditional petite bourgeoisie of farmers, tradesmen, artisans, village teachers, and so on, into a modern petite bourgeoisie of functionaries in the public sector, employees in the private sector, teachers in public education and the liberal professions. But the chaotic rush toward education widened the gap between the economic system and an education system that prepared 'students for everything and for nothing' and exported a big portion of its graduates to the foreign markets.[17]

Under the impact of the general crisis, the pressures on class and sectarian selection and elimination increased in different ways:

- discrimination in opportunities of access to higher education: only 8 per cent of primary school students reached the end of secondary schooling and 6.1 per cent of those sat for the baccalaureate (secondary school) exams and made it to university;
- the elimination grade (less than 5/20 for French) in intermediate and secondary exams favoured the sons of the rich and Christian families and students of private schools in general who received a relatively good French education or spoke French at home;
- regional selection manifested itself in the concentration of educational institutions in the dominantly Christian 'regional-sectarian zones';
- the flagrant gaps between public and private schooling.

These inequalities were reflected in unequal access to higher posts in state administration and the private sector and in differences in salaries. A bank employee who graduated from the American

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University of Beirut (AUB) would start with a monthly salary of LL 2,000, a graduate of the Jesuit Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) with LL 1,500, while a graduate of the Lebanese University (LU) would only get LL 600.[18]

Thus, while the development of public schooling at the LU integrated young men and women who were meeting for the first time – Christians of modest origins, mainly from the periphery in Jbeil, Batrun, `Akkar and the north with young Shi`as from the south and the Biqa` – the mass of students were divided on issues of public education versus private education and foreign language versus Arabic. The long struggle for the establishment of the LU, its development and the recognition of its diplomas is a strong example of this.

Nevertheless, the middle classes were unified, 'objectively' at least, by their shared submission to the other and more dangerous effects of the crisis. Whereas the correspondent of *Le Monde* in Beirut spoke of the 'slow death of the petite bourgeoisie', economist Iskandar expressed the frustrations of the middle classes and their desire for change:

> The middle classes, hard-bitten by the high cost of living, are more and more ready to exchange a false liberty – that they supposedly possess – for any system on condition that that system hits at monopoly and demolishes its ramparts. As far as the middle Lebanese were concerned, any system, inasmuch as it contains a part of what its name denotes, is better than the prevailing system of arbitrary privileges and complete blindness.[19]

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

On the eve of the 1975 war, all segments of the Lebanese population were in motion to contest the established order, resist the crisis and confront the policies of the commercial/financial oligarchy. They were expressing, in one way or another, a deep desire for political, economic and social change.

From the convents of the north to the plantations of the south

The agrarian crisis set in motion struggles that combined the desire for land with resistance to capitalisation. In 1970, tenant farmers of the Maronite convents of Tannurin and Mayfuq (the highlands of Batrun and Jbeil respectively) organised strikes and demonstrations for better shares of the crops and for the distribution of Church

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lands among them. In Mayfuq, the gendarmes intervened against the peasants. One year later, a violent conflict over land ownership broke out between the peasants of Hanin (southern Lebanon) and Kamil al-As`ad, speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Twenty-three villagers were accused of violence and arrested. Qantara, property of the `Usayran family, experienced a similar dispute in the same year.

But the most important agrarian movement was the revolt of the peasants of the `Akkar plain, starting in 1968 against a background of difficult conditions of share-cropping and a rush of capitalist entrepreneurs. To finance their new lifestyle in the cities, `Akkar's absentee landowners resorted to semi-feudal exploitation of their share-croppers (obligatory gifts, free domestic work by the village womenfolk in the *beyk*s' households, and so on), when they did not sell or rent their lands to capitalist entrepreneurs. These reduced the share-croppers to the status of salaried workers or expelled them from their land and cottages altogether. Caught in the crossfire, share-croppers and peasants resorted to an armed rebellion helped by the Sa`iqa, the Palestinian faction of the Syrian Ba`th recently created by the government of Salah Jadid. After the fall of Jadid in 1970, the parties of the Lebanese Left took over the leadership of the movement.

In the south, the Régie tobacco consortium had become the private reserve of the traditional *za`im*s, who packed it with their clients and controlled cultivation licences, which they distributed to their friends or rented to farmers. A private franchise-holding company since 1935, whose franchise was extended until 1973, the Régie also held the exclusive right to export Lebanese-produced tobacco, import cigarettes and produce local cigarettes.

The problems of tobacco cultivation had been dragging on for a decade, articulated around the following planters' demands:

- ending speculation in the cultivation licences by withdrawing them from those who were not engaged in agriculture;
- limiting the area cultivated to 25 dunums per person (70 per cent of the farmers cultivated 5 dunums, but there were licences that covered 400 dunums);
- increasing the purchase price of tobacco leaves;
- nationalising the Régie, which was a major demand of the tobacco planters, but which ran counter to a project by the Phalange minister Joseph Shadir to lease it to Phillip Morris, the big American cigarette conglomerate.

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After years in limbo, on 22 January 1973 a procession of thousands of tobacco planters occupied the offices of the Régie in Nabatiyeh demanding a 20 per cent increase in the purchase price of their products. The following day, the army shot at the demonstrators and killed two peasants. A few days later, 20,000 demonstrated in the streets of Beirut in solidarity with the tobacco planters.

The agrarian movement was now organising itself at a rapid rate. In April 1973, the Unified Syndicate of Tobacco Farmers was founded. A month earlier, the first congress of the National Union of Agricultural Workers was convened, representing 163 villages from all parts of the country. In May of the same year, the first congress of the peasants and farmers of the Biqa` launched a campaign against the rise in the price of fertilisers and insecticides (which accounted for 20–30 per cent of production costs), demanded a new tenancy code, attacked the middlemen's network and demanded the admission of peasants and farmers to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF).

Militant working-class unity

The struggles for NSSF coverage united workers and employees around a common programme, led by a unified trade union federation, the General Workers' Union of Lebanon (GWUL). Inside the GWUL the influence of the left-wing federation, the National Union of Workers' Trade Unions (NUWTU) and the reformist trade unionists was on the rise. Large segments of the lower-income groups in the cities and countryside, were mobilised around a programme that integrated the demands of agricultural workers and mobilised all those who suffered from the rise in the cost of living.[20]

The threat of a general strike planned for February 1970 forced the authorities to activate medical coverage through the NSSF, which was supposed to benefit some 250,000 employees. But a counter-offensive by employers succeeded in imposing equal representation in the administrative council of the NSSF, which meant practically controlling it. Further, under pressure from business circles, the government agreed to deposit NSSF funds in private banks at an interest rate of 3–4 per cent, much lower than the normal rate of 8–10 per cent. More serious was the extensive campaign of layoffs waged by employers against their old employees (salaried workers would automatically benefit from the NSSF after two years' employment) in order to reduce the number of employees for which they would have to pay social security fees. These layoffs raised the question of job stability at work and the right to engage in trade

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union activity and organisation, which required amending Article 50 of the Labour Code.

A new threat of a general strike by the GWUL planned for 25 May 1971 demanded the immediate halt of arbitrary layoffs, a salary increase of 11 per cent, a 25 per cent reduction in rents, the importation by the state of medicine and essential foodstuffs, and legislation for agricultural workers within six months. The strike was deferred after a wage increase of 5 per cent was decreed. When the GWUL finally acted on its strike threat on 28 August 1973, it also called for limiting commercial profits and encouraging cooperatives. This was the first time that the trade union movement touched upon the covert and sacrosanct power and privileges of the commercial/financial oligarchy. The government's answer had become predictable: it decreed a new wage increase of 5 per cent (at a time when the price indexes spoke of a rise in the cost of living of at least 12 per cent) and raised the minimum wage to LL 225 and family allowances to LL 70. A compromise on Article 50 of the Labour Code imposed restrictions on the firing of trade unionists. None of the other demands were met.

On another level, an uninterrupted series of strikes and shopfloor movements had rocked the industrial world since 1968. The rapid industrialisation and the exploitation of young manual workers of rural origin who were being rapidly and aggressively proletarised sharpened their class-consciousness and combativeness. Their demands covered all aspects of working-class life:

- implementation of labour legislation concerning working hours, the minimum wage, equal pay for men and women, family allowances, maternity and sickness leave, the right to trade union organisation and the recognition of shopfloor committees;
- opposition to arbitrary layoffs;
- the integration of agricultural workers in the NSSF, including its medical benefits branch;
- improvements in working conditions, workplace safety, indemnities for work accidents, repression and abuse the foremen and sexual harassment of female workers.

The rank-and-file workers' struggles culminated in a strike at the Ghandour biscuits and chocolate factory. Its 1,200 workers in Shiyah were the biggest non-unionised element of Lebanese industry. They struck in November 1972, demanding a wage increase, equal

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pay for men and women workers, the recognition of the shopfloor committee and their right to trade union organisation. During their demonstration of 11 November 1972 at the factory gates, the police fired at the demonstrators, killing Yusuf al-`Attar, a militant of the Organisation for Communist Action's (OCA's) Workers' Committees, and Fatima al-Khawaja, a member of the LCP, and wounding 14 others. The GWUL organised a one-day general strike to protest at the official violence and show solidarity with the Ghandour workers; a wave of indignation spread throughout the entire country, while the Salam government, unwilling even to investigate police firing on a peaceful demonstration, decided to require organisers of demonstrations to obtain an official permit. At the initiative of the progressive and leftist forces, a demonstration of some 20,000 led by Kamal Jumblatt ended in a large rally on the steps of Parliament where the socialist leader's speech was interrupted by shouts of '99 thieves and 17 ruffians' (for the 99 deputies and the 17 ministers). On 15 December, Ghandour declared a lockout and laid off all his workers. He reopened a week later and re-employed them all, except 100 workers whom he considered the ringleaders. Although the Left organised another demonstration against the arbitrary layoffs, on 26 December, the outcome of the Ghandour battle left only frustration and resentment. The trade union attaché at the US embassy noted that the demonstration and the general strike had been a 'moderate success' for the Left, which had managed to go on the offensive and win the 'propaganda war'. However, he concluded that neither the Left nor the trade unions had secured any concrete gains for workers.[21]

Effectively, the trade union movement had fallen into a vicious circle: wage increases, paid for mainly by the industrialists and the government, were sapped by the merchants, who immediately raised prices. The meagre results of years of trade union activity drove popular protest to the street. When, on 5 February 1973, the GWUL announced another postponement of its general strike, a movement of wildcat strikes and violent demonstrations swept the country: in Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Bint Jbeil, the south, the Biqa` and Tripoli (where demonstrators set fire to the offices of the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions of the North). More important were the demonstrations in the Christian localities of Juniyeh, Jabal and Hammana, not to speak of the mixed regions of the Shouf, `Alay, Shuwayfat, Jiyeh, and so on. On the following day a wildcat strike, organised by the Workers' Committees of the OCA, closed the factories of the industrial zone of Mukallis–Tall al Za`tar (some

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10,000 workers) and a workers' demonstration blocked the Beirut–Bayt Miri road for two days. 'This wild strike cannot be reduced to its mere demands', commented René Aggiouri, editor of the French-language daily *Al-Safa*, 'as it calls into question the political leaders in Lebanese society and, more importantly, its trade union leaders.'[22]

Students against the 'merchant society'

'A revolt against our merchant society': these are the words used by Edward Saab, the astute correspondent of *Le Monde* in Beirut, to describe the student movement.[23] Much more than a protest movement, it was a radical questioning of Lebanese and Arab societies from a moral and cultural point of view, greatly influenced by the defeat of June 1967, the emergence of the Palestinian Resistance and the impact of May 1968 in France.

The movement started with a long strike by secondary students in March 1967 demanding lower fees, getting rid of the elimination grade in exams for foreign languages, and the unification of school textbooks. In Tyre, the gendarmes fired on a demonstration, killing a student, Edward Ghanima. June 1967 and the following months were marked by intense student activity concerning the Arab–Israeli war, which ultimately led to the official closure of the schools and universities and the occupation of the AUB campus by the police, and expulsion of striking students.

A 50-day strike by both the students and teachers of the Lebanese University (LU) began in April 1968. The latter were demanding a wage increase and tenure, the former sought the building of a unified university campus, an increase in scholarships and the provision of university restaurants. None of those demands were met, but the students managed at least to create a National Union of Lebanese University Students (NULUS). As a sign of the radicalisation of the student movement, the Left alliance (PSP, LCP and OCA) gained control over NULUS, which in March–April 1972 launched a massive strike to press for its demands. Private universities – AUB, USJ, and the Beirut Arab University (BAU) – joined the strike in solidarity.

The LU strike was renewed the following year and was interrupted by police intervention and the laying off of a number of teachers. Three times during that year, 1973, teachers and students from the private and public sectors went on strike to demand wage increases and mutual aid funds, to no avail.

In the cities and the countryside, technical schools saw considerable mobilisation in support of improving teaching conditions and a

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better diversification of specialisations and job opportunities. Their movement culminated in a general strike at the beginning of 1974, although practically no substantial results were achieved.

In the private university sector, AUB students, mainly belonging to the middle and upper classes, went on strike in 1971 to protest fee increases, occupied the premises and organised big demonstrations. The police and the Phalange militia intervened and students were expelled.

In 1972, Lebanon witnessed a major nationwide strike movement by the 16,000 public education school teachers demanding a wage increase, the right of trade union organisation and retirement after 25 years of service. The strike, which lasted for two months, was broken after the ministry suspended the payment of salaries. When the strike was renewed from January to July 1973, 324 teachers were laid off, condemned as 'agitators' by Prime Minister Sa'ib Salam. Protest and solidarity movements with the teachers covered the entire country while their sit-ins and hunger strikes became a rallying point for all social movements. Even the Maronite Church intervened to demand that the expelled teachers be reinstated, also to no avail.

Student demonstrations, at times 25,000-strong, became an everyday scene in Beirut and major cities. Police repression only produced new demonstrations, so much so that President Franjiyeh contemplated closing the LU for that academic year, fearing that 'university agitation might unleash a revolutionary situation'.[24] The last student demonstration occurred a few days before the beginning outbreak of the civil war.

POLITICAL SCLEROSIS

A flagrant contradiction between the gravity of the socio-economic crisis and the return of the traditional notables to power dominated political life in the 1970s. The 'centrist' ruling troika – Franjiyeh/As`ad/Salam – had given priority to its fight against the intervention of the army in political and civil life, and Franjiyeh inaugurated his mandate with the purge of the Shihabist intelligence officers. When the Shihabist commander-in-chief of the army, Jean Nujaym, was killed in a helicopter crash, he was quickly replaced with Iskandar Ghanim, a friend of the president. In addition, the patronage of the Shihabist security 'agencies' was quickly replaced by the northern clients of the president's son, Tony, the minister of communications

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(holding this post many times) who was accused of having made a fortune from telecommunication contracts.

A dissociated representative system

The structure of Parliament and the electoral system were particularly indicative of the contradiction between the political system and the country's new socio-economic realities. The chamber was dominated by true political dynasties: out of a total 425 deputies since 1920, 245 belonged to families of parliamentarians.[25] On the other hand, the influence of 'funders' was increasing. Parliament, that 'arrogant alliance between money and the feudal system', in the words of Georges Naccache, was being increasingly dominated by moneyed interests, and the landed notables themselves (the 'political feudalists') were rapidly transformed into capitalist businessmen, shareholders in joint-stock companies and holders of import quotas distributed by the state.

The rapid monetarisation of political mediation became a way to bridge the widening gap between these notables, increasingly incapable of providing effective services to their clients, and their public. In fact, massive migration toward the cities rendered the rural basis of the electoral system obsolete. A great part of the Lebanese public were obliged to vote in villages where their parents had been born, but in which they no longer had any interests or links, save perhaps memories of clan or family allegiances and disputes. Meanwhile, they were deprived of the right to vote in cities where they had been living for decades; where they worked, paid their taxes and fees, became individualised and grouped into socio-professional and class forms of representation – in short, where they had interests to be defended and represented. For example, no more than 20 per cent of the inhabitants of the suburbs of Beirut voted in their localities. On election day, they would make the trek to their respective villages, where the effects of socio-economic integration were erased and family, clan and sectarian allegiances came to the fore.

Adding to this, the traditional rentier hierarchy that underwrote politics refused to accept the changing reality. On the eve of the 1972 elections, during one of his many polemics on Jumblatt, Prime Minister Sa'ib Salam gave a perfect illustration of this logic. 'We welcome Kamal Jumblatt, in his capacity as the son of a well bred "house" and as an honourable chief of his [Druze] sect,' said Salam, 'but we categorically refuse to deal with him as one who invites destruction and sabotage, poses as the protector of the Left

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and of Communism and exploits popular problems [for his own interests].' If anything, the 1972 elections revealed the degree of impermeability to change that characterised the Lebanese political system and the many blockages that it imposed on the participation of new forces in society, especially cross-sectarian political parties. A few 'independent' candidates who ran on traditional lists managed to get elected. For the rest, the title of *Le Monde*'s article at the time says it all: 'A team that hardly represents public opinion.'[26]

Aborted 'revolution from above'

Sa'ib Salam, who formed the first cabinet under Franjiyeh, named it a 'youth government' and committed himself and his team to 'carry out a revolution from above' to undercut the possibility of 'one from below'. But his ministers, technocrats and professionals had to face the covert power of the commercial/financial oligarchy; they ended up resigning, one after the other. Iliyas Saba, economic adviser to the president and minister of the economy, issued ministerial decree no. 1943, which contained a set of fiscal reforms and protective measures for national industry, but had to back down after the Merchants' Association threatened to strike. Emile Bitar, minister of public health and member of a new reformist political formation, the Democratic Party, proposed government control over the price of medicine (fixing profit rates equal to those in France) and envisaged the NSSF importing a number of pharmaceuticals. That last suggestion meant discovering the cost price of medicine and, consequently, the profits of the importers. Vital medicines such as insulin disappeared from the market as the syndicates of drugstore owners and pharmacists threatened to strike, also backed by the Merchants' Association. Eventually, Franjiyeh, who had friends and funders among the agents of big pharmaceutical companies, withdrew support from his minister and Bitar resigned. Architect Henri Edde, minister of public works, resigned in solidarity. Two other ministers were prompted to resign on the education question: Ghassan Tuwayni, the editor of *Al-Nahar* and minister of education, and his successor Michel Edde, could not enlist the president's support for their projects of educational reforms. In 1973, industrialists finally obtained their long-time demand for a ministry of industry, whose portfolio was entrusted to Pierre Helou, a rich businessman and industrialist of international stature. A few weeks later, Helou held a press conference in which he accused the commercial monopolies of controlling the government and

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sabotaging his attempts to protect national industry and reinstate the workings of free competition.

As early as January 1965, a draft law (no. 189) limiting profit rates had been withdrawn, also under threat of a merchants' strike. No such talk about this type of reform would be heard of again. The importers who were hoarding foodstuffs were known; the press had published lists of their names and the nature and quantity of goods they held in the port's warehouses. But nothing was done about it.

To counter all reform projects, officials made the absurd argument that the state lacked funds. However, it was well known that the state systematically refused to increase its budget revenues, the major part of which came from customs duties and taxes; but not any direct taxes. Two-thirds of the country's fiscal revenues came from indirect taxes on consumption and from income tax deducted directly 'at source' by employers from their employees' salaries. This was to the disadvantage of most ordinary workers, while the rich evaded taxes and continued to enjoy their 'invisible returns'. Progressive income tax simply did not exist. Bank profits were taxed according to an inclusive rate of 15–22 per cent. Moreover, one of the rare pieces of fiscal legislation of those years increased the income tax on the revenues of the middle-income groups (those who paid more than LL 1,000 in annual tax) by 50 per cent, without any concurrent increase for the higher-income categories! Furthermore, the 'fiscal paradise', as Lebanon became known, knew no tax on wealth or any form of inheritance rights, and many economic activities were not even taxed, such as interest on government bonds, real estate surplus value and the sale of bank licences (a lucrative activity as the government stopped issuing permits to open banks after the Intra crash).

Thus, the reformist pretensions of the first two years of Franjiyeh's mandate ended in a complete fiasco. 'The Lebanese bourgeoisie and political establishment, in both their Muslim and Christian sectors, were unwilling to surrender any privileges for the cause of reform', commented Kamal Salibi.[27]

This was at a time when the oil boom had started and any vigilant self-interested businessman could have predicted the benefits accruing to his class and to Lebanon in general, provided some concessions were made to reinforce social peace in the country. Perhaps a few harboured such thoughts, but almost all refused to do anything about it. As revolution was not made 'from above', it was to be made, in the most vicious and destructive manner,

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'from below'. In a country where the rights and obligations of people were nearly always solely defined by the individual's sectarian political community, social frustrations gradually slipped toward sectarian and regional division, aggravated by the political conflict between reform and security, the latter centred on the Palestinian armed presence.

The army: for internal control or national defence?

Salam's second cabinet of 1972, composed of politicians this time, demonstrated a marked propensity for repression. Unable and unwilling to impose concessions on the bourgeoisie or defend Lebanon's territory against Israeli incursions and air strikes, the state revealed its power through internal repression.

This government was in office during the shootings of the striking workers at the Ghandour factory and the tobacco planters of Nabatiyeh, the mass layoff of teachers and the repression of student demonstrations. The anti-Shihab notables, who had returned to power, took their revenge by putting the ex-officers of the Deuxième Bureau on trial; even though they had advocated the return of the military to their barracks, they were quick to send the army against workers, students and peasants, and resort to the worst methods of the defunct 'agencies': telephone tapping and violations of freedom of opinion and of the press, including the arrest of journalists (half a dozen had been incarcerated, among them the editor of *Al-Nahar*, Ghassan Tuwayni). Finally, it was also under Salam that a law on political parties was drafted that greatly curtailed freedom of thought and association. The opposition to this draft law was the occasion for the launching of the Rally of National and Democratic Parties and Personalities (later to be known as the Lebanese National Movement – LNM) during a mass meeting at Byblos Cinema in June 1973.

Many in Lebanon demanded the defence of the south and the building of fortifications in border villages, if not the defence of the borders themselves, and at the least, the retaliation by the army for Israeli incursions on Lebanese territory. A Libyan offer to provide the country with an air defence system was rejected. Official Lebanon was seeking US guarantees for its security that never came. The official philosophy was expressed by Pierre Jumayil's famous formula: 'Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness'. Lebanon was desperately trying to extricate itself from any responsibility for belonging to a region dominated by the Arab–Israeli conflict. As

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Jonathan Randall says, the army was there to defend the system, not the homeland:

> The Christians of Lebanon had never wanted a real national army, for – good merchant descendants of the Phoenicians that they claimed to be – they did not want to pay for it. They did not want to provoke Israel, and they did not want to encourage the growth of an armed force that might then stage a *coup d'état*, as so often had been the case in other Arab countries. But they were to pay the price.[28]

Be that as it may, some individuals were making good business out of the army and many an official figure was implicated in the scandals of the French Crotales anti-air missiles, the air-defence radar for the Baruk Mountain and the French Mirage jets.[29] In 1969, LL 200 million was disbursed by the state to modernise the army. After that, every arms purchase was accompanied by a financial scandal and it was also revealed that arms, bought in the name of national defence, were in fact destined for use in internal repression. General Fuad Lahhud, MP for the Matn and president of Parliament's defence committee, exclaimed when he discovered the list of arms required: 'We must define the task of the army. Has it been built to fight against the Left? … Has it been built to fight the fedayeen?' He revealed flagrant irregularities in the purchase of French AMX-12 tanks, light tanks unfit for national defence purposes. Middlemen had pocketed large commissions despite the fact that the transaction was between the French and Lebanese governments. Worse, older models were bought only because the commissions on them were higher (30 per cent compared to 7 per cent for the more recent models).

In April 1973, an Israeli special operations unit called the Sayeret Mat`kal, commanded by Lieutenant Ehud Barak, assassinated two leaders of Fatah, Abu Yusuf al-Najjar, Kamal `Udwan, and the poet Kamal Nasir, spokesperson for the PLO, in Verdun Street in Beirut. They were just a hundred metres from a major police barracks. Prime Minister Sa'ib Salam demanded the resignation of the commander-in-chief of the army. Enjoying political cover by the president, the army and its chief were declared 'untouchable' and it was the prime minister who had to go, as a quarter of a million people took to the streets to bid their last farewell to the assassinated PLO leaders and vent their anger at an army that was

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always present for internal repression and always absent when it came to national defence.

BEIRUT, CAPITAL OF ARAB CULTURE

From the 1950s to the early 1970s Beirut became the capital of Arab culture, witnessing what could be described as a second *Nahda*. Artists, writers, actors, publishers, journalists and translators flocked to the city, attracted by its relatively liberal political and social climate. By the 1960s, if you wanted a piece of news or an opinion to reach the widest number of Arab readers, you had to ensure it was published in a newspaper or weekly in Beirut. Poets gathered in the city's cafés, political dissidents and student activists talked late into the night in the bars clustered around the AUB, and singers and actors came from around the world to perform in Lebanon's festivals. Beirut, for a time, was at the heart of Arab cultural and political life.

This second *Nahda* owed much to its predecessor. The cultural infrastructure put in place during the first *Nahda* in the middle of the nineteenth century paved the way for a more pluralistic, open society. The inauguration of the LU had broken the monopoly of private foreign universities over higher education and opened access to the sons of the middle and lower-middle classes. Not only did the LU broaden the intelligentsia in terms of numbers, quality and specialisation, but it provided Lebanon with a new generation of intellectuals, journalists, poets, novelists and politicians. Combined with Beirut's position as an economic and cultural intermediary between Europe and the US, on one hand, and the Arab hinterland, on the other, the stage was set for a Lebanon-led Arab cultural renaissance.

Much of the action took place in the capital city itself, concentrated in the cosmopolitan Ras Beirut district and focused around the AUB. Nearby Hamra Street had the first modern office and apartment buildings, hotels and furnished flats catering for the foreign community and a trendy commercial street. Ras Beirut was also the centre of Beirut's café life. Faysal Restaurant, facing AUB, in addition to serving Lebanese home cooking, was famous for its political and intellectual circles. A few metres away, Uncle Sam or Sheikh and Cousin were better suited to consumers of American coffee and junk food. The most illustrious of the Hamra cafés was the Horse Shoe, favoured by journalists and refugee politicians from the neighbouring Arab countries. But cafés and restaurants were

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not confined to the Ras Beirut area. Downtown, cafés ranged from Hajj Daoud, surviving from Ottoman times and built on wooden pillars over the Mediterranean, to the bohemian La Palette, the hiding place of Beirut's artists and fine arts students near the Burj area. In between, the café of the Roxy Cinema served as the meeting place of the intellectuals of the independence period. Not content with the closing hours of the Hamra cafés, one could stroll to the seafront cafés of Raouche, which stayed open till daybreak, or simply plunge into the mysteries and pleasures of Beirut's nightlife in the Zeitouneh quarter on the seaside.

The printed press played a central role in Beirut's cultural and political life, and the city's newspapers were distributed from the Atlantic to the Gulf. Press plurality and freedom was enhanced by a tradition of liberties rather than by entrenched democratic traditions, legislations or institutions. The freedom of the press could be violated at the whim of the president, the folly of the prime minister or the authoritarianism of the security apparatus, and censorship did exist. Journalists from both sides of the political spectrum were incarcerated for their views, from Georges Hawi (later secretary-general of the Lebanese Communist Party) to the conservative liberal Ghassan Tuwayni, editor of the right-wing *Al-Nahar*.

Before long, authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, as well as Israeli intelligence agencies, resorted to the gun to muzzle journalists and punish them for their opinions by death. The toll on Lebanese journalists was heavy, with the assassinations of Nassib al-Matni of *Al-Tallaghraf*; Kamil Mroua, editor of the conservative and anti-Nasser *Al-Hayat*; Ghassan Kanafani, the Palestinian novelist, journalist and militant; Farjallah al-Hilu, former leader of the LCP; and later Salim al-Lawzi, the editor of *Al-Hawadeth*; Riad Taha, president of the syndicate of journalists, and others. They were the precursors to journalists like Samir Kassir and Jibran Tuwayni, murdered in the postwar years, allegedly for their anti-Syrian views.

The liberty and plurality of the Beirut media was not only guaranteed by lofty ideals; Arab and international money greased the wheels of the printing presses, with conservative, wealthy Gulf rulers and military dictators alike seeking a forum for their propaganda and ideology in the cold war between the two Arab camps. With the death of its founder, *Al-Hayat* was soon replaced by *Al-Nahar* as the intellectual organ of opposition to Shihabism, Nasserism and Communism. Its competitor was the pro-Nasser *Al-Muharrir*, edited by Hisham Abou Dhar, and to a lesser extent *Al-Anwar* published by Dar al-Sayyad. Eventually they gave way to *Al-Safir*, founded

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by Talal Salman in 1974, edited by a new generation of nationalist and leftist journalists and closely linked to the dreams and struggles of Palestinian liberation. In addition to these leading dailies were the countless organs of the political parties,[30] the foreign-language papers[31] and myriad well-known weeklies.[32]

Cultural magazines exercised a sizeable influence that went beyond Lebanon, speaking to a new generation of Arab youth and intellectuals. Some of the most popular and influential publications included *Al-Adib*, founded by Albert Adib, *Al-Adaab* by the novelist and publisher Suheil Idriss, *Al-Tariq* of the LCP and *Dirassat `Arabiyyah* edited by Bashir Da'ouq. In literature, *Shi`r*, illustrated by Yusuf al-Khal, was more than a cultural magazine: it became the vanguard of modernism in Arabic poetry. A whole literary school in itself, it was and remains known for its translations of modern Western poetry, innovations and the introduction of the prose poem. *Shi`r*'s Thursday meetings at the Plaza Hotel in Hamra Street were attended by the architects of new modern Arab poetry – Khalil Hawi, Adonis, Muhammad al-Maghout, Shawqi abu-Shaqra, Unsi al-Hajj, Fu'ad Rifqa, and others. More luxurious but also more short-lived was *Hiwar*, edited by the Palestian poet Tawfiq Sayigh. The novelist Idriss's *Al-Adaab*, older and with a wider Arab circulation, managed to marry Arab nationalism to existentialism and defend engaged literature. Last but not least of the latecomers was Mahmoud Darwish's *Al-Karmel*.

Publishing houses, both famous ones such as Dar al-Adaab and Dar al-Talai`a and lesser-known ones, published works of fiction, political treatises, histories and textbooks for the Arab world, from Yemen to Algeria. It was in Beirut that the new generations of encyclopaedias and dictionaries were composed and published, as were the reprints of classic Arabic literary, philosophical, religious, scientific and cultural texts published by Dar Sader, Dar al-`Ilm Lilmalayeen and al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyyah. Closely related was Beirut's role in translation for the rest of the Arab World, in all fields and from the major foreign languages.

In literature, novelists Fu'ad Kin'an, Suheil Idriss, Yussuf Habshi al-Ashqar, Toufic Yousef Awwad, Emilie Nasrallah and Leila Baalbaki penned modern Arabic classics. Some were Lebanese; others, like the Syrian Ghada al-Samman and the Palestinian Ghassan Kanafani, came from the rest of the Arab world but found inspiration in Lebanon.

Over and above publishing, the most important cultural event of the period was undoubtedly the inauguration under President Kamil

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Sham`un in 1956 of the Ba`albak International Festival in the city's majestic Roman ruins. The event, described as the most prestigious cultural event in the Middle East, welcomed some 40,000 spectators in July and August of each year to watch some of the world's greatest artists. On the steps of the Roman temple, overlooked by its famous six columns, they could see Dame Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev in Swan Lake with the Royal Ballet; listen to Mstislav Rostropovich; watch Herbert von Karajan conducting; listen to Sviatoslav Richter in a piano concerto; and attend Shakespearean plays or modern ones by Eugene Ionesco, Georges Schehadé, Jean Cocteau or Aragon. Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and the incomparable Umm Kalthoum graced the Ba`albak nights, and the festival reinvigorated Lebanese folklore with the help of poets and composers such as `Assi and Mansour Rahbani and, of course, the famous singer Fayrouz. Wadi` al-Safi, Nasri Shamseddine, Zaki Nassif and the al-Anwar, and the Karakalla folklore and dance troupes played out the Lebanese renaissance.

One other aspect of Beirut's cultural *Nahda* was the flowering of the theatrical scene, ranging from classicism to experimentalism to realism, passing by the Brechtian theatre, the Russian theatre, and tburlesque. Directors and actors Mounir Abou Debs, Jalal Khouri, Yacoub Chedrawi, Raymond Jebara, Antoine Multaqa, Berge Fazlian and Roger Assaf, and playwright Issam Mahfouz, led the charge. The period also witnessed the rebirth of Lebanese cinema in the hands of a new generation of directors.

Finally, the primary difference of the cultural renaissance of the 1960s from the nineteenth-century *Nahda* was the decisive contribution of Arab intellectuals. So many flocked to Beirut to be published, to visit, to settle down, to flee oppression in their countries, or because Beirut was their 'last tent', as Mahmoud Darwish puts it. The city provided an atmosphere of freedom and creativity and the promise of an Arab modernity. As Edward Said wrote in *Under the Last Sky*: 'Beirut's genius resided in that it immediately met our needs, we Arabs, in an Arab world that had become repressive, grey and just silly to an unbearable degree. For years, you could shine in Beirut like the glow of a jewel; even vice in it … had a brilliance you would not find anywhere else.'

The Syrian poet `Ali Ahmad Sa`id – better known as Adonis – was among the earliest to arrive. Said to have converted to Christianity, he wrote his doctorate at USJ, supervised by a Jesuit priest, and taught at the LU. Muhammad al-Maghut, a Syrian Baudelaire, loitered in the city's streets and cheap bars and was a pioneer in

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prose poetry. In Beirut, Nizar Qabbani composed his more mature poems, singing the city-eternal-female, lampooning Arab regimes and rulers and bewailing the death of his wife, killed in an explosion at the Iraqi embassy. From Dayr al-Zor in the Syrian northeast came Yassin al-Hafez, who recalled how the Lebanese capital taught him to respect time and treat his wife is a civilised manner. Hafez produced some of the best pages on the 1967 *Naksa* (setback), the defeat of the Arabs in the Arab–Israeli war, delving deep into the very structure of rent-oriented and anachronistic Arab societies to call for a radical, structural, social and cultural upheaval. From nearby Damascus, Sadeq Jalal al-`Azm taught at the AUB, wrote a devastating autocritique of Arab politics, culture and myths that contributed to the 1967 debacle, and stirred a violent controversy with his *Critique of Religious Thought*, which was bitterly attacked by the Sunni religious establishment. `Abd al-Rahman Mounif, the Saudi oil engineer, settled quietly in Beirut after having resigned membership in the pan-Arab leadership in the Ba`ath party in order to devote himself to writing about his rich experiences and vent his anger in epic novels – most notably *Cities of Salt*.

All were in search of something: solidarity with the Palestinian resistance, a refuge from persecution, promises of modernity, the discovery of self, the affirmation of individuality, the possibility of citizenship and the dream of freedom. As Beirut descended into the abyss of war, most of them left a city that had become their 'last star'.

SLIPPAGES AND DIVISIONS

In the 1970s Lebanese society walked a delicate tightrope, balancing between the drive to rebuild its unity through structural reforms and its conflict-laden division by an obsession with 'security', which failed to guarantee any security. If the unity of the bourgeoisie managed to obstruct any reform, the frustrations and divisions of the middle classes, the petite bourgeoisie and the poorer classes prepared the slippage to armed conflict.

In fact, Jumblatt and his leftist and nationalist allies, on the one hand, and the Phalange and their allies, on the other, were disputing two contradictory versions of security. A supporter of a strong state based on an army backed by right-wing militias, opposed to any kind of reform, the Phalange party was only reprising its function as the defender of narrow sectarian privileges in the service of the big class interests. Jumblatt, now recognised in the Arab world

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as the leading Muslim figure in Lebanon, emboldened by Syrian and Egyptian support and fully conscious that the presence of the Palestinian commandos had broken the Maronite 'monopoly of violence', proposed a bargain: moderate socio-economic reforms and more equitable participation by Muslims in managing the state, in return for an amicable limitation of PLO military activities by rigorously applying the Cairo Accords. Jumblatt's rebellion, his calling into question the Lebanese socio-political regime in its entirety and his semi-suicidal adventure of 1975–76, were but the product of his exasperation after having failed to push through that choice.

Before coming to the events of 1975–76, two movements deserve mention as they represent the impact of the social movement inside the Christian communities and the level of frustration on the Muslim side.

Renewal and contestation in the religious institutions

At Christmas 1968, the Jeunesse Estudiantine Chrétienne (the Christian Student Youth – JEC) issued a manifesto that denounced the 'material wealth and political might of our Church … which participates in the feudal and capitalist exploitation system in Lebanon and justifies it'. They called for a Church and Christians who consider themselves 'an integral part of the Arab world and share in its problems, struggles and aspirations for liberation and the building of a developed society that belongs to all its members'. The manifesto concluded with a declaration of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people and called upon fellow believers to commit themselves to a 'radical transformation of Lebanese society'.[33]

A multitude of organisations actively sought a radical renewal of the Maronite Church. Prominent among them were students at the Clerical College of Ghazir, the members of the seminary of Christ-the-King and the parish priests of the poor Christian suburbs of Jdeideh and Dikwaneh. In addition, worker-priests, influenced by the liberation theology of Latin America, had made their appearance in the Matn and the suburbs of Beirut, where they engaged in social work and literacy classes. The Rally of Committed Christians, established in 1974, a movement close to the Communists and the Lebanese National Movement, called for an open democratic and secular form of Arabism. The Young Orthodox Movement, led by Bishop George Khudr, represented the renaissance of Eastern Christianity, open to dialogue with Islam. In early 1974, a movement for 'ecumenical renewal with

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an independent perspective' took shape around Grégoire Haddad, Greek Catholic bishop of Beirut. In his magazine *Afaq* (Horizons), Haddad critiqued the 'exploitative social system' in Lebanon, called for a serious commitment to 'the cause of Arab Man' and demanded 'change that will permit our society to become more equitable, more civilized and richer in human values'. Haddad's popularity saved him from excommunication, but he was relieved of his bishopry. He had called for the abolition of religious marriage, which encouraged sectarianism and worked for the adoption of secularism. In the first weeks of the war, Haddad wrote that social inequality constituted the main cause of the crisis that led to the war. The solution lay in social justice, ensuring work, food, housing and health care for all. Rather than evade the security issue, Haddad reversed its terms. Change did not threaten security; maintaining the *status quo* did.[34]

Amal: the 'third way'

In the early 1960s, a young Iranian imam arrived in Lebanon with substantial funds to launch social projects for the Shi`a community. His stay may have been relatively brief, but Musa al-Sadr was to have a deep and lasting impact on the Lebanese Shi`a. He settled in Tyre, where he attempted to fill the religious vacuum created by the death of the leading *mujtahid* Sayid `Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din, and the political vacuum created by the death of Muhammad al Zayyat, the popular leader of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) against the al-Khalil clan of local *za`im*s. Sadr, who advocated an enlightened and open religious discourse, tried to build a third force between the traditional leadership of the As`ads and the parties of the Left, especially the LCP, the OCA and the Ba`th, which were highly influential among the southern public, especially the youth. In his first endeavour, he managed to enlist the support of Sabri Hamadeh, Shi`i *za`im* of Ba`albak–Hirmil. As early as 1966, the reports of the US embassy in Beirut described Sadr as a bulwark against the influence of `Abd al-Nasir on the Shi`i masses.[35] In 1974, Sadr confessed to US ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley that his main concern was to counter Communist influence among Shi`i youth.[36]

Snubbed by the Shi`i clergy, who were traditionally hostile to the government and *za`im*s and loyal to the religious authority in Najaf, Sadr attracted the attention of Charles Helou, the Shihabist 'services' and Michel Asmar's Cénacle Libanais, a think tank of Maronite-style Lebanese nationalism. All were in search of a new Muslim ally

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against the Sunni leadership and the Sunni 'street', considered too committed to `Abd al-Nasir and the Palestinian fedayeen.

Upon Sadr's initiative, the Shi`a completed their transformation into a structured and official sect. Law no. 72/76 of 19 December 1967 recognised the right of the representatives of the Shi`i community to act and express themselves 'in conformity with the fatwas emanating from the supreme authority of the community in the world' (Article 1) and granted a Higher Islamic Shi`i Council (HISC) the prerogative of 'defending the rights' of the community and 'improving its social and economic conditions' (Article 5). The reference to a religious authority outside Lebanon was not new regarding the rights of Lebanese sects, but granting the HISC the role of defending the political, economic and social rights constituted a precedent. Two years later, in 1969, the HISC was created and Sadr nominated as its president. In May 1970, after an official day of solidarity with the south, the government recognised the new Shi`i body and disbursed $10 million in aid for the south.

During the rise of the social movements, Sadr's populist discourse mainly emphasised the sectarian and regionalist aspects. His ambiguous message on the rights of the deprived (*al-mahrumin*) interpellated a multiplicity of social sectors: rich Shi`i émigrés from Africa, looking for a place in the political Lebanese system and a new social status befitting their newly acquired wealth; a wide sector of Shi`i intellectuals and government functionaries in search of employment or promotion, at a disadvantage compared to their Maronite and Sunni counterparts; and those southerners who had traditionally sat on the fence between the traditional leaders and the Left, many of whom had been organised by the 'agencies' in what was called the Partisans of the Army (*Ansar al-Jaysh*). Fouad Ajami, an American Shi`i intellectual of Lebanese origins, did not fail to notice and laud Sadr's 'concrete sectarian project for Lebanon' that 'crushes class differences'.[37]

Sadr emphasised the need to develop the south as a deprived region 'before a revolution breaks out'. In order to do this, he demanded a share of the national budget, the expansion of the Litani project to irrigate southern land, and the construction of hospitals and schools. Perhaps more controversially, he found no contradiction between the armed Palestinian presence and Lebanese sovereignty. In response to demands for the cessation of Palestinian military operations, he said that safeguarding the borders of Israel was not Lebanon's responsibility. Later, he proposed an Arab force for the defence of the south and an Arab fund for its development.

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Yasser `Arafat's Fatah movement, looking for allies outside the confines of the Left, played an important role in the creation of the Sadr's Movement of the Deprived and its development.

A large part of Sadr's struggle on the eve of the war was devoted to imposing himself as principal spokesman for the South and the Shi`i community and confirming his presidency of the HISC. Contested by Kamil al-As`ad – who, in July 1972, founded his Democratic Socialist Party to also 'counter Communist and Ba`thist influence in south Lebanon' – Sadr managed to rally a number of Shi`i deputies, including Husayn al-Husayni, future president of Amal and speaker of Parliament. Sadr imposed the formation of a ministerial committee to discuss Shi`i demands, and in a meeting with Franjiyeh, 13 of the 19 Shi`i deputies threatened to resign if their community's full rights were not recognised.

During this period, Sadr distinguished himself by his populist meetings and tours of the South after Israeli bombing. In March 1973, during a mass meeting of some 50,000 persons in Ba`albak, he unveiled his famous motto 'arms are the ornaments of men'. Sidon and Tripoli, cities with a Sunni majority, welcomed him enthusiastically, and 190 personalities from all sects signed a petition in support of his Movement of the Deprived. In 1974, Sadr threatened civil disobedience if his demands were not met. In a mass meeting in Bidnayil (Ba`albak–Hirmil) he exclaimed: 'We are *Matawila* [a pejorative term for the Shi`a] no more, we are rejectionists, avengers, a people in revolt against injustice', and he threatened to launch his followers in an assault against the palaces of the rich and the mighty if their demands were not met.

'Here is another one lost to the cause of revolution', exclaimed the correspondent for *The Economist* in March 1974. This was not quite the case. Even as Sadr's discourse was being radicalised, he became more reconciled with the system and moved closer to Franjiyeh. The president, on bad terms with Salam and isolated in the Sunni 'street', was looking for a Shi`i ally to face the Sunni leaders and the Left. The occasion was quickly seized. In the by-elections of Nabatiyeh in December 1974, Sadr's candidate, a rich and obscure émigré from Africa, defeated Kamil al-As`ad's candidate for the parliamentary seat. On the steps of the Presidential Palace, a few days later, Sadr declared that he had decided to 'open a new page with the state'.

While the Left and Nationalist parties were trying to link the southern question to demands that covered the entire national space, Sadr's exclusivist position appeared problematic, at best. The two currents tested their weight in the elections for the Executive Bureau

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of the HISC. The result was a draw: the Left managed to secure half of the body's seats.

Displaced frustrations

Sadr had managed to put his finger on a burning question when he coined his slogan about the alliance between 'those deprived in their homeland and those deprived of their homeland'. Young people humiliated by the defeat of June 1967, which continued to be played out in the daily war that Israel was waging in southern Lebanon, inspired by the example of Che Guevara and contesting the 'merchant society',, identified increasingly with the Palestinian resistance. The accumulated failures and frustrations of the social movements pushed some of the public in the same direction. A poem by `Abbas Baydun, the most promising of the new generation of Lebanese poets, is a good illustration of that spirit. His words, put into music by Marcel Khalifa, are addressed to `Ali, symbol of the 'people of the south / the barefooted of the cities':

You have resisted
to liberate your blood
from the garages of grease
and your mouth from the sugar warehouses
and your bones form the seats of the *beyk*s and the charlatans.
But, `Ali, where will you find a land
For a proud head and two free hands?

Here the liberating influence of the fedayeen model operates indirectly by a slippage from the national to the social, not devoid of violence:

Every morning, a gun falls on the mountain
and we are but silent witnesses.
But a day will come
when we will direct our ploughshares
To their obese
and debauched hearts.

The evolution of the following events was a succession of attempts at armed liquidation of the fedayeen, alternating with concessions that always came too late.

Amin al-Hafiz, an economist and deputy for Tripoli in Karami's parliamentary bloc, known for his good relations with the PLO, was

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called upon to form a new government in April 1973. Presenting his cabinet as a revised version of the 'youth' cabinet, his short-lived tenure was dominated by an army offensive, ordered by the president, against the Palestinian camps in Sidon and Beirut. On 3 May, the air force joined in and bombarded Burj al-Barajina refugee camp. Violent battles raged for two weeks between the army, backed by the Phalange, and the PLO, supported by the organisations of the Left. Syria's decision to close its borders with Lebanon, coupled with a threat to close its airspace, imposed a cease-fire and the conclusion of a new accord between the Lebanese government and the PLO, known as the Melkart Accord. A month later, on 14 June, Hafiz resigned.

Taqi al-Din al-Sulh, who succeeded him, was chosen primarily because of his Iraqi sympathies, in order to counter Syrian influence and rally the support of Muslim notables. The suggestion that Jumblatt take the ministry of the interior was met with a veto by Sham`un, Jumayil and Franjiyeh. In August 1973, the government announced 140 appointments to administrative posts and the 'abolition of sectarianism in the public function': Grade One posts of directors-general would no longer be the reserved of a specific sect and the lower posts would be distributed on a parity basis between Christians and Muslims (compared to the earlier tradition of six Christians to five Muslims). Edde and Sham`un opposed the new measures in the name of Christian rights, while Jumayil accepted them 'grudgingly' as concessions to the 'so-called disfavoured sects at the expense of the Maronites'.[38] In fact the appointments were mainly designed to substitute Shihabist functionaries by partisans of the returning notables, Franjiyeh, Sulh, As`ad, Skaff and Hamadeh, and they had practically no impact on public opinion.

During the Sulh mandate, it had become known that the Phalange and Sham`un's National Liberal Party (NLP) were training and arming their followers, leading Jumblatt to accuse them of seeking to 'liquidate' the Palestinian resistance. In July 1973, the first confrontation between armed Palestinians and the army, the Phalange and the partisans of Raymond Edde broke out in Dikwaneh (the southeast suburb of Beirut, adjacent to the Palestinian camp at Tall al-Za`tar).

But the far more important development was the outbreak of the October 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Lebanon did not participate in the conflict but the Biqa` was transformed into a corridor used by the Israeli air force to raid Damascus and the Syrian cities of the interior, bypassing the strongly fortified southern approaches

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to the Syrian capital defended by a sophisticated network of Soviet missiles.[39] The war provided the occasion for the beginning of a new friendship between the Lebanese and Syrian presidents. On 7 January 1974, the Franjiyeh–`Asad summit was a major event: a Syrian president was visiting Lebanon for the first time in 18 years. On the agenda were shared water resources, the problem of Syrian workers in Lebanon, transport, transit and commercial exchange. The visit was crowned by the signature of a joint defence treaty granting Syria early-warning facilities on Lebanese territory against air strikes, in return for which Damascus committed itself to defend Lebanon against Israeli aggression upon the request of the Lebanese government.

In September 1974, following confrontations in Tarshish (the Matn) between armed Phalange members and the Jumblatt's PSP, Taqi al-Din al-Sulh submitted his resignation, accusing Franjiyeh of covering up a shipment of arms that arrived at Juniyeh for the Christian militias and was unloaded with the complicity of the army.

When Rashid al-Sulh succeeded his cousin Taqi al-Din, his government was supposed to please, or at least appease Jumblatt. But the division concerning Palestinian presence and the question of the defence of the south was widening. The year 1975 started with a general strike in the south and demonstrations in Beirut, precisely on that matter. A few weeks later, Jumayil declared that the Lebanese were split on the Palestinian presence and the military activities of the PLO, claiming the existence of 'two governments and two armies'. He called upon the president to organise a referendum on the presence of the fedayeen on Lebanese territory.

On 26 February 1975, a demonstration by fishermen in Sidon protesting against Protein, a fishing company in which Kamil Sham`un was a major shareholder, was fired upon by the army, leaving a number of dead and wounded. Among the casualties was Nasserite deputy Ma`ruf Sa`d, who was at the head of the demonstration, and died a few days later in hospital. The army was still 'untouchable' and Franjiyeh blocked an investigation into the shooting. Violent confrontations broke out between the army and the PLO fedayeen, and Nasserite and leftist organisations, at the beginning of March in Sidon. In response, the Phalange organised a counter-demonstration of solidarity with the army in East Beirut. It was only on 12 March that the cabinet acceded to some demands by the people of Sidon and the National Movement: two army officers were transferred and the governor of Sidon put on administrative leave for one month. Pierre Jumayil objected to

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the rotation of the officers; 'they could no longer remain silent in the face of defiance and provocation', he said. A month later, the same cabinet announced the cancellation of the Protein project and decided to compensate the fishermen. But it was too late, as usual. On the following day, 13 April 1975, shots were fired from a car at a congregation of Phalange partisans in front of a church in `Ayn al-Rummaneh, wounding a number of people. Phalangist militiamen reacted a few hours later by machine-gunning a bus heading for the Tall al-Za`tar refugee camp, killing 21 Palestinians. Fighting broke out throughout the southeastern suburb of Beirut between the Phalange and the Palestinian resistance and their Lebanese allies.

A war that was to last for 15 years had just begun.

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