

# **The Lebanese**

# **Exception**

**Why Lebanon has been immune to the  
Arab Spring**

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**Bachelorthesis Arabic Language & Culture**

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**22-07-2012**

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## Introduction

While the Arab Spring raged through the Middle East and North Africa to many the question was not if, but when an Arab Spring would occur in Lebanon. However, it did not. Although the Arab Spring was greeted with enthusiasm, support and optimism in Lebanon, there was no such thing like a Lebanese Spring. Lebanon was and is not part of the Arab Spring.

In retrospective, one can only wonder why. It is the only country with a large youth movement that could openly protest before 2011. And even in 2011, large demonstrations against the government and Lebanon's sectarian system took place in which protesters demanded reform.<sup>1</sup> However, these protests dimmed by the end of the year and we can ask ourselves whether they were part of the Arab Spring, or part of a larger protest against sectarianism that was already going on years before the Arab Spring started.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Lebanon might have proven to be an inspiration to the Arab Spring protestors. Many argued that the 2005 Cedar Revolution, during which the so called 'March 14' coalition, a coalition of Sunni Muslims, right wing Christians and Druze, the former enemies during the Lebanese civil War (1975-1990), forced the Syrian army and secret service to retreat from Lebanon, was an source of inspiration to the Arab uprising.<sup>3</sup> The renowned Middle East columnist of *The Independent*, Robert Fisk, stated that Arab Spring could have originated in, and was inspired by, this uprising.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, although Lebanon could have been a source of inspiration for the protesters in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria, it was not part of the Arab Spring itself. The protests were too short lived, and there is no evidence offered yet that they were not merely a continuation of events that had started years before the Arab Spring happened.

The question now is why? Why did the Arab Spring not occur in Lebanon? If we look at the situation in Lebanon, compared to other Arab countries, there could be three causes that prevent the Arab Spring from happening in Lebanon. The first one is the fact that Lebanon is a democracy already, with full freedom of press and expression. The second one is the economic situation in Lebanon, which is far better than in the other surrounding Arab

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<sup>1</sup> 'Lebanese protest against sectarian political system', *Reuters*  
<http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE71Q08L20110227>

<sup>2</sup> 'Rally for secularism commences in Beirut', *NowLebanon.com*  
<http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=285787>

<sup>3</sup> Phalange Party leader Amin Gemayel: 'The Cedar Revolution changed the face of Lebanon, and the people of the region looked up to it... so they decided to take our path.' *NowLebanon.com*  
<http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=364919>

<sup>4</sup> Robert Fisk Gives Talk in Tunisia, Says Arab Spring Started in Lebanon, *Tunisia-live.net*  
<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/02/18/robert-fisk-gives-talk-in-tunisia-says-arab-spring-started-in-lebanon/>

countries, and the third, and most important reason, is the sectarian divide in Lebanon. Later on in this paper, all these reasons will be discussed more extensively.

The question I will ask in this paper will be what are the reasons why Lebanon has proven to be immune to the Arab Spring. It is my hypothesis that by far the most important reason is the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state. The fact that Lebanon is a country largely divided in four different major, and over 18 minor, sects prevents the Lebanese youth from uniting and rallying against the government. Therefore, Lebanon was not and will not be part of the broader Arab Spring movement. I will later on in this paper test this hypothesis, and verify whether my presuppositions were true or false.

It is important to do research about this topic because to Middle East scholars, as well as politicians, economists and the peoples of the Arab world, the Arab Spring is the most important event that took place in the Arab World in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will also prove to be the biggest challenge. Because of the fact that Lebanon is still a source of inspiration to many Arab protestors, it is important to do research on Lebanon and the Arab Spring. And there has not been a lot of research done about this topic. Only a small number of media and think tank publications have discussed this subject. A comparative study, in which the Lebanese case is compared to Arab Spring countries, will broaden our knowledge about protests and reform in the Middle East. And in a global age in which the Middle East becomes more and more a crucial partner, especially to Europeans, more knowledge of the Middle East will be an advantage.

In this thesis, I will work towards a theory of the Arab Spring. For this, I will look at the causes of the Arab Spring, study them, and examine what made the Arab Spring happen in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. This will be the first chapter. In the second chapter, I will look at the political, social and economic situation in Lebanon. In particular, I will study the history and origin of the Lebanese confessional system, and its implications for modern day Lebanon. For this I will use a number of interviews I conducted during my time as a trainee at the Royal Dutch Embassy in Beirut, with Lebanese politicians, clerics, scholars and journalists.

In the third chapter I will zoom in on the 2011 protests in Lebanon, describe the causes behind these protests and ask the question whether they were part of the Arab Spring, or of a movement that had started years before a spark in Tunisia lightened the largest protests in a century in the Arab world. For this I will mainly have to rely on media and think tank publications. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will analyze the three previous chapters, and look at the causes that are preventing an Arab Spring from happening in Lebanon.

## Chapter I: Towards a theory of the Arab Spring

The spontaneous uprising that took place in Tunisia in mid-December 2010 set off a chain reaction that would unseat dictators and reshape the political landscape of the region.

Although the uprising in Tunisia at first did not attract a lot of attention and many doubted the fact that it would bring any change to the Middle East, it eventually became the most important event in the Middle East and North Africa in decades. We cannot overestimate the influence of this uprising.

Because of its importance, over the last year or so dozens of monographs have been published about this topic. Many of these books were edited by think tanks and newspapers or written by journalists and independent scholars. Only a small number has been published by university researchers. What many of these descriptive studies lack, is a theoretical framework that places the Arab Spring in a context and looks at the factors that have caused and shaped it.

In this chapter I will use a select number of monographs, mainly published by think tanks, newspapers and independent journalists in an attempt to provide such a framework. I will not provide an overview of the events that reshaped the region, but I will try to work towards a theory of the Arab Spring. I will first look at who took part in this uprising, what were their motivations and goals and how did they rebel against their leaders. Then, most importantly, I will focus on the demographic, political, social and economic underlying causes of the Arab Spring.

*Guardian* reporter Paul Mason provides in *The Arab Spring: Rebellion, revolution and a new world order* a good sociological description of the young revolutionaries. He describes them as ‘graduates with no future’, a concept on which I will elaborate later on in this study. They make good use of social media, are immune hermetic ideologies. Women are part of the backbone of the movement, in which a key factor is ‘horizontalism’.<sup>5</sup> These groups organize themselves on social networks and nonviolent demonstrations are their main weapon, inspired by previous, similar events in Serbia, Georgia, Lebanon and Iran.<sup>6</sup>

Like other great social upheavals, this uprising was since long in the making. During the last decade, only a select number of scholars predicted that change would take place in the

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Mason, *The New Revolutionary. Experts in Messing up Hierarchies* in: Toby Manhire ed., *The Arab Spring. Rebellion, revolution and a new world order* (London 2012) 281.

<sup>6</sup> One of these main sources of inspiration was Gene Sharp’s 1993 book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*.

Middle East in the near future.<sup>7</sup> There is not one cause that can be named as the main cause of the Arab Spring. It was born out of number of intertwined causes.

The first, main, cause was the stagnation of Arab Economies. As many countries developed from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy, the Arab World lagged far behind.<sup>8</sup> The government sector was the largest employer. Most economies were centralized state capitalist economies. The hasty and ill-advised liberalization and privatization of state enterprises, together with competition from the world's emerging economies, forced Arab governments to reduce employment opportunities.<sup>9</sup> One of the results of this economic stagnation, was the stagnation of the educational system.

The second cause was the stagnation of the educational system. As the UN *Arab Development Report* stated, the Arab educational system remained stuck in a pre-modern era. The methods used in the Arab educational system were hindering the minds of the youth from thinking critically, producing knowledge and mastering technical fields.<sup>10</sup> The system did not prepare their students for the global economy in the information age, with as a result a lack of human capital. The failure of the educational system would contribute to the high unemployment rates in the Arab world. Many Arab youth had to educate themselves and searched for knowledge on the internet. Here, they came into contact with protestors all over the world. These contacts, and the inspiration they gained from looking at successful revolutions, like the one in Serbia, would immensely contribute to the Arab Spring.

The third cause was a region-wide property boom. Although this boom created thousands of jobs for Egyptians, Syrians, Moroccans, Lebanese and Jordanians in the Gulf, it led to heavily increased rents and housing prices in the second half of the 2000's, mainly in countries like Syria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.<sup>11</sup> Even though the wages rose and access to credit became easier, there was still a gap between expectation and reality. It was not only hard to get a well-paying job, it was even harder to get an affordable apartment or house.

The fourth cause were the rising prices of food and energy. In countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, food and drink prices rose more rapidly than other prices.<sup>12</sup> This was largely due to a worldwide increase in the price of natural resources. Arab economies relied

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<sup>7</sup> The most foremost scholars that predicted change were Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, who predicted in their work *A Convergence of Civilizations: The Transformation of Muslim Societies around the World* that the slowing down of birth rates, and the growing literacy rate predicted coming change.

<sup>8</sup> Pollack, *Understanding the Arab Awakening 2*.

<sup>9</sup> Marwan Bishara, *The Invisible Arab. The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolution* (New York 2012) 64.

<sup>10</sup> Pollack, *Understanding the Arab Awakening 2*.

<sup>11</sup> Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring. Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* (New Haven 2012) 33.

<sup>12</sup> Noueihed, Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring* 34.

heavily on cheap oil and gas. When this became more expensive, in the second half of the 2000's, life became much harder for many Arabs. The energy prices in a country like Egypt rose more rapidly than in the US and France.<sup>13</sup>

The fifth cause was the high inflation. For long, inflation was cushioned to some extent by government subsidies in many Arab countries. When inflation rose due to rising prices and easier access to loans for consumers, it became uncontrollable. Depreciation of currencies, like for instance the Tunisian dinar, against the euro, made inflation even worse.<sup>14</sup> These causes made it hard for people to lead their lives as they wanted. Two other causes, the global economic crisis and the structural lack of employment made it even harder.

The sixth cause was the influence of the global financial and economic crisis. The crisis heavily influenced the Middle Eastern economies. Especially in countries without large energy resources that relied heavily on tourism and trade with Europe, like for instance Tunisia and Egypt, the stock exchange and the tourist sector received serious blows.<sup>15</sup> Those who were mostly hit by this crisis, were the Arab youth.

The seventh cause were the regions demographics. The youth, between 15 and 30, comprised the largest proportion of the population in Arab countries. The significance of these demographics as one of the causes of the Arab Spring must not be underestimated. Demographics were not one of the problems of the Arab world themselves, but they exacerbated other problems.<sup>16</sup> There were not just a few frustrated youth, there were many of them. And one could argue that youth, generally speaking, are more given to revolutions than other groups. It is not uncommon for youth bulges to cause unrest.<sup>17</sup> Especially if a large number of the youth is unemployed.

The eight cause was employment, or better, the lack of employment. Among the youth unemployment was the main problem. The overall jobless rate in the Arab world varied from around 10 per cent to 20 per cent. But among those between 15 and 30, the jobless rate was around 50 per cent. And only a small number of those jobless youth believed their government was seriously tackling this problem.<sup>18</sup> Job creation did take place, but generally only for older people and expatriates. And many of those jobs were created by the government, not by the private sector. Many of those jobs were superfluous, which led to a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 34,35.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, 39,40.

<sup>16</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *The New Arab Revolt. What Happened, What it Means and What Comes Next* (New York 2011) 237.

<sup>17</sup> CFR, *The New Arab Revolt* 238.

<sup>18</sup> Noueihed, Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring* 36.

large class of government employees: low paid, inefficient and mostly sitting around and doing nothing.<sup>19</sup> As is the case in most countries, a university degree was not a guarantee for a job in Arab countries. The opposite was true. The more university degrees young Arabs held, the less likely they were to find employment. Between 2001 and 2007, unemployment rose sharply among the highly educated.<sup>20</sup> This was due to a lack of state investment in skill-based industry, but also a result of a failing educational system.

Among the middle class, underemployment was the largest problem. Many middle class citizens were well educated, and believed that because of their education and status they deserved well-paid jobs. However, they ended up having underpaid jobs.<sup>21</sup>

The high unemployment numbers made it harder for citizens of Arab countries to cope with the rising food and energy prizes, food prizes, the property boom and the rising inflation. But more importantly, the high unemployment numbers began to alter the structure of Arab family life. A whole generation could not afford to marry and have children. Among the previous generations, 63 per cent was married already in their mid-twenties. In 2010 only 50 per cent of those in their mid-twenties were married.<sup>22</sup> As a result, many disenfranchised young Arabs began to take risks and make themselves visible in public spaces. To them, employment, marriage, happiness and liberty were promised by the government, but the government could not keep its promises. Therefore, they needed to express themselves. However, they could not, because of the lack of democracy.

The ninth cause was the lack of democracy in the Arab World. Only a few countries, like Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian Authority had some kind of democratic system in which the people could elect their representatives. But none of these democracies was perfect, far from that. The Arab world was also referred to as the 'Arab exception', as it was one of the few regions in the world that lacked properly functioning democracies, and was dominated by countries ruled by monarchs and dictators.<sup>23</sup> They were the leaders of countries that dominated by a corrupt elite.

The tenth cause of the Arab Spring was the widespread corruption among the elite. The elite, which controlled the state as well as the economy in many Arab countries, abused state and economic institutions to control the accumulation and distribution of resources and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Bishara, *The Invisible Arab* 64.

<sup>21</sup> Pollack, *Understanding the Arab Awakening* 2.

<sup>22</sup> Bishara, *The Invisible Arab* 65.

<sup>23</sup> Noueihed, Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring* 15.



jobs to perpetuate their power and amass wealth.<sup>24</sup> They led to immense corruption and a top-down, patron-client system. In return for loyalty to the elite, they provided jobs and resources to the common people.<sup>25</sup> But they also enriched themselves and led lavish lifestyles. As a result, a vast gap emerged between the lavish lifestyles of the elite in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya and the common people. This triggered their anger. The in-laws of Tunisia's president Ben-Ali, the Trabelsi family, were the Marie-Antoinette's of Tunisia. Their corruption and arrogance caused widespread anger among Tunisians.

The Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in 2010 was caused by several developments: economic stagnation, educational stagnation, a property boom, rising food and energy prices, high inflation, the influence of the global financial and economic crisis, a youth bulge, high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, the lack of democracy and the corruption of the ruling elite. The result was an unraveling of the social contract. Before, Arab citizens accepted political exclusion in exchange for state provision of employment, education, housing, health care, food subsidies and other benefits.<sup>26</sup> When the Arab governments were no longer able to facilitate this, the social contract unraveled. The fact that the Arab countries were dictatorships led to protesters focusing all their anger on their leaders and the elite.

Compared to the situation in Southern-European countries like Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the crisis in the Arab world was not that different. However, in Europe people had (democratic) outlets to express their anger. They could stage protests, publically criticize the government, and vote in elections. This led to a belief in the possibility to change the course of events. In the Arab world this belief was absent. And the absence of this belief in combination with economic hopelessness and political powerlessness created an explosion of public anger and dissatisfaction.

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<sup>24</sup> Magdi Amim et al., *After the Arab Spring. Economic Transitions in the Arab World* (New York 2012) 31.

<sup>25</sup> Amim et al., *After the Arab Spring* 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

care, food subsidies and other benefits.<sup>27</sup> When the Arab governments were no longer able to facilitate this, the social contract unraveled.

For the social contract to unravel, and the Arab Spring to take place, there should be a number of causes. A combination of the causes named above would be sufficient to cause a massive uprising in any country against the leaders. However, without these causes, it is unlikely the Arab Spring would have happened in this time, or at all. It is therefore imperative for any revolution that these causes are present. If not, the revolution will not succeed, or not even commence at all. In Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria, these causes were present. But where they in Lebanon?

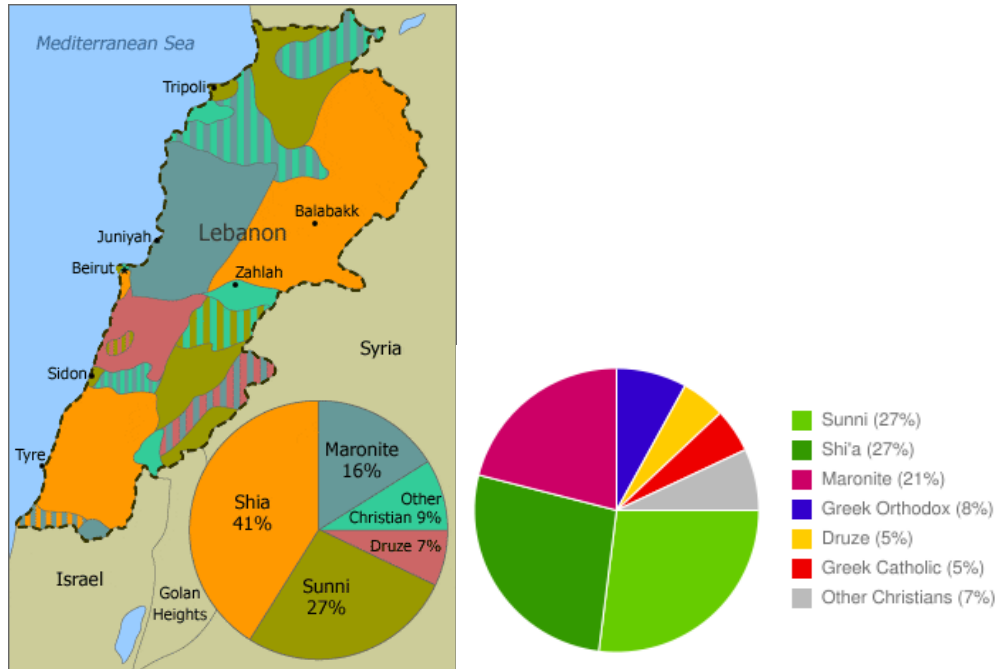
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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

## Chapter II: the Lebanese political, social and economic situation in historical perspective

To be able to understand why Lebanon has been immune to the Arab Spring one needs to have knowledge of the political, social and economic situation of Lebanon. This situation is rooted in the history of Lebanon, and therefore I will first address the development of the Lebanese sectarian system. I will not only use secondary literature in this chapter, but also interviews conducted with a number of Lebanese politicians and scholars.

If one wants to study the political situation in Lebanon one has to understand the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state and society. Lebanon is divided by/into a number of different sects. The most important are the Christians, the Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims and the Druze. Each of these sects has its own territory and interpretation of history.<sup>28</sup> The sects derive their identity from their history, with an emphasis on their historical struggle against the other.<sup>29</sup> All sects pursued absolute power in Lebanon, and they all failed to obtain this.<sup>30</sup> Together with a segregated educational system this leads to different vision in each sect about Lebanon, its past and its future.<sup>31</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions. The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London 2009) 216.

<sup>29</sup> Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions* 229.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 219.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, 217.

Figure I: The religious sects of Lebanon. <http://www.juancole.com/2010/12/map-of-lebanon-by-religious-sect.html> Figure II: Lebanon – International Religious Freedom Report 2010 U.S. Department of State. Retrieved 14 February 2010 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148830.htm>

The numbers of these sects are unclear. There hasn't been a census since the 1930's, with different interpretations about the size of the different sects as a result.

Combined with the interference of foreign powers in Lebanon, each supporting a different sect, this makes a toxic cocktail of potential violence and unrest. In this country, the different sects are not willing to unite. And even if they were willing to do this, foreign nations would do everything to prevent it as this would minimize their influence.<sup>32</sup> This sectarian divide is the main reason why there isn't one Lebanese people. Lebanon is a state with many nations. Due to this fact the contemporary Lebanese political system is unstable and divided by sectarian politics.

*According to American University of Beirut professor and March 8 Member of Parliament Farid Al-Khazen, the sectarian divide in Lebanon is not caused by religious differences. It is caused by differences between communities. It could have been an ethnic divide as well, if it wasn't for the fact that 95 per cent of the Lebanese population is Arabic. Religion doesn't play a major role in Lebanon. It is the vision of 'the author that it is politics that is dividing the country. Therefore, the religious communities, paradoxically, do not have a religious agenda. The divide in Lebanon in Lebanon is political, and trumps religion. In Al-Khazen's opinion, Lebanon is therefore the most secular country in the Arab world. Religion only plays a minor role in Lebanon. This shows in the way society is divided. In the past, the division was between the Christians and the Muslims. Nowadays, it is between the Sunni's and the Shi'a, and the Christians side with both. There will always be a religious dimension in Lebanese politics, but the political system is not religious.*<sup>33</sup>

The origins of the contemporary political system in Lebanon go back to the 1989 Ta'if accords, which formally ended the Lebanese civil War (1975-1990) and established a new version of the Lebanese sectarian political system. It was the birth of the second Lebanese republic and a new constitution. This second republic derived its right to exist from the fact

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<sup>32</sup> David Hirst, *Beware of Small States. Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (London 2010) 2.

<sup>33</sup> Interview Farid Al-Khazen with author. Beirut, 20-05-2010.

that it would eventually lead to a third republic, which would be free of political sectarianism.<sup>34</sup> In this third Republic, the upper house would be non-sectarian, so it could discuss sectarian matters. In the lower house, non-sectarian matters would be discussed. However, until now, this third republic has not been implemented.

Furthermore, according to the Ta'if accord, Christians and Muslims obtained an equal share of deputies in parliament, and power would be divided between the (Christian) President, the (Sunni) Prime Minister and the (Shia) House Speaker. Even though the Ta'if accord was meant to stabilize Lebanon after the civil war, it created a political system that would remain unstable. Both Christians and Muslims were unsatisfied by this compromise, especially the Christians. They were in power before the start of the civil war, but after Ta'if no longer.

*In the opinion of Khassan Mukhaiber, human rights lawyer and March 8 parliamentarian, the main problem of Lebanon is the fact that the constitution is never implemented in the right way. The constitution is secular, and so is the state. The constitution provides rights to the sects as well as to the individual. The constitution states that in the future family law should become secular as well and that the state is in transition. This is still not implemented due to the contemporary political situation. In Mukhaibar's opinion, the situation is problematic and complicated. And even though he advocates change, change should not come in slow pace. Lebanon should change in the right way, and it should be well prepared.*<sup>35</sup>

The implementation of the Ta'if accord was the start of the contemporary Lebanese politics of sectarianism. The politics of sectarianism are based on consensus. Every decision made is based on consensus between the sects. This consensus-based decision making led to stagnation. None of the sects is willing to reform. And even if one of the Lebanese sects is willing to reform, decision-making is still based on consensus. Power-sharing is the only way through which Lebanese politicians can create a national consensus. Therefore, this system of communal representation is also called the 'Lebanese Model'.<sup>36</sup> In this model, sectarian parties which are based on religion rather than ideology share power.

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<sup>34</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London 2007) 244.

<sup>35</sup> Interview Khassan Mukhaiber with author. Beirut, 18-05-2010.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon* (London 2006) 170.

According to Lebanese American University professor Imad Salamey, two systems exist in Lebanon: the civil and the religious. Belonging to a sect is essential to play a political role in Lebanon. Therefore, the state is sectarian, which provides religious institutions with power. Still, politics is not trumped by religion, but the other way around. Political goals are more important than religious ones. Religious visions can change if the political situation changes.<sup>37</sup>

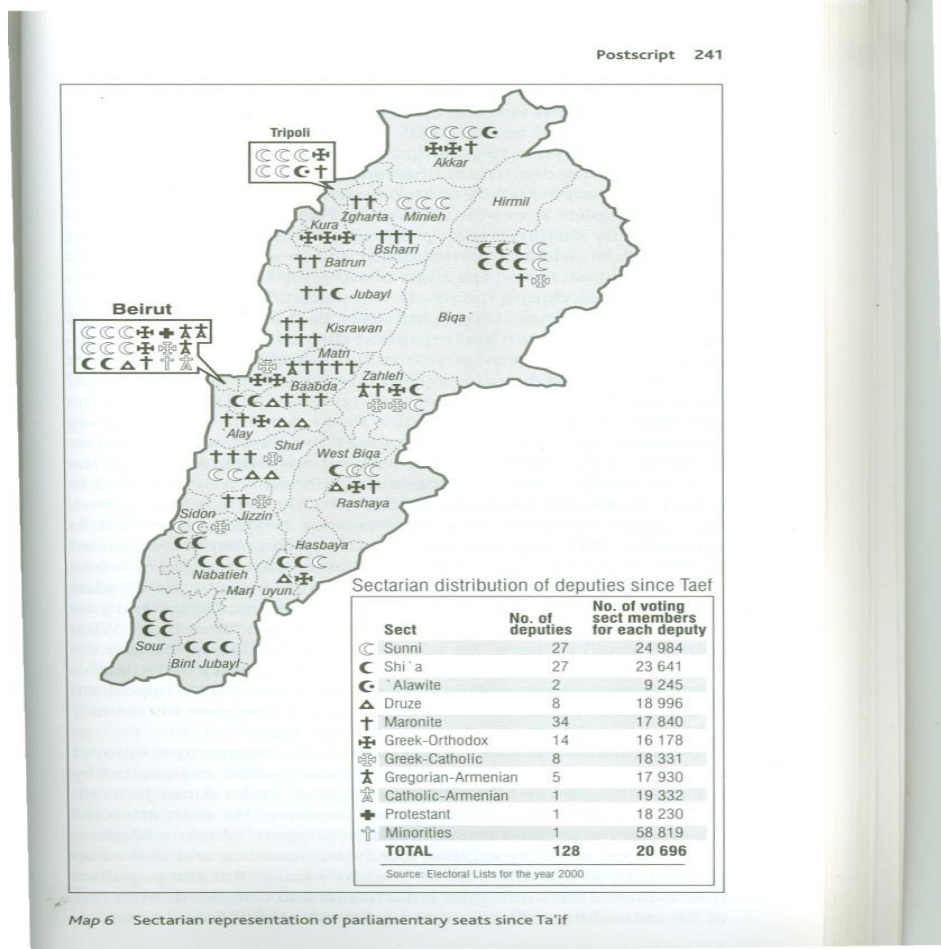


Figure III: the sectarian representation of Lebanon. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London 2007) 241.

Although many political parties claim to be secular, and ideology-based, they are in fact sectarian and only represent the sect.<sup>38</sup> In an election, Christians can only vote for Christian, and Muslims for Muslim deputies. This system encourages clientalism. In exchange for a vote, the *mukhtar* or another candidate-deputy grants favor to voters. This makes

<sup>37</sup> Interview Imad Salamey with author. Beirut, 13-04-2010.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmad Beydoun, *Confessionalism: Outline of an Announced Reform* in: Nawaf Salam ed., *Options for Lebanon* (London 2004)76.

Lebanon in theory a democracy, but in practice a corrupted state in which nepotism and sectarianism thrives.

*According to Hilal Khashan, professor of Political Science at the American University of Beirut, a vote for a Lebanese political party means squandering this vote. The right to vote doesn't mean Lebanon is a democracy. To be democracy, there should be democratically led political parties. This is not the case in Lebanon. The Lebanese political system is not democratic. It is divided by the sects. Therefore, voting is not participating in decision making, it is validating the current political system.<sup>39</sup>*

Because of the sectarian politics the state has become sectarian as well. A Sunni led ministry will solely appoint other Sunnis in senior positions. Therefore, the state is not able to speak out in sectarian matters. Sectarianism has made the state weak, and the sects are *de facto* in power in Lebanon. Furthermore, the legal system is partially sectarian as well. Family law is the domain of the religious courts. Therefore, a Muslim cannot marry a Christian, and vice versa. This is to make sure the sects will not crumble because of intermarriage.

*According to Muhammed Sammek, the secretary-general of the committee for dialogue between Christians and Muslims, the reason behind the fact that Lebanese family law is still religious was the fact that when the government tried to implement a secular family law, the clergy was not consulted, resulting in protests and a veto from the clergy. As an advisor to the late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, he watched this attempt from a close distance. Hariri was convinced that the law could have been implemented without consulting the clergy. This was not the case. Sammek admits that the religious institutions should have been consulted.<sup>40</sup>*

The sectarian system of Lebanon thus remains a source of unrest. Many, young, Lebanese are unsatisfied with the contemporary system and demand change. However, even if they want they are not able to unite because of the sectarian divide. The events that happened in 2005, the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and the following 'Cedar Revolution' only confirmed this. After the assassination, the Lebanese took over the streets

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<sup>39</sup> Interview Hilal Khashan with author. Beirut, 10-05-2010.

<sup>40</sup> Interview Muhammed Sammek with author. Beirut, 29-05-2010.

demanding that the Syrian army (the main suspect behind the assassination) would leave Lebanon.

However, it was not a united Lebanon that demanded the departure of the Syrians. Only the Sunni's, the Druze and a part of the Christian community supported the demonstrations. Only a few days later, a Hizbullah led demonstration, supported by many Christians, asked the Syrians to stay. These protests created the so called March 14 coalition, the Sunni's, right-wing Christians and Druze, and the March 8 coalition, the Shi'a and left wing Christians. After fighting between Sunni's and Shi'a took place in 2008, in which the Hizbullah demonstrated its military superiority, the Druze switched sides which eventually created a March 8 majority, with the contemporary government led by Hizbullah as a result.

If we look at the social and economic situation in Lebanon, we can see that overall Lebanon differs from other Arab countries. According to the *CIA World Factbook*, Lebanon's GDP is high compared to other Arab, non-oil driven, economies. It has known decades of high economic growth.<sup>41</sup> Its population is relatively well-educated, its scientific output is higher than other Arab countries'.<sup>42</sup> Lebanon's largest economic challenge is not its unemployment rate, but as a middle-income economy the challenge is to become a first-world economy, by increasing exports and improving the product sophistication to be able to compete globally.<sup>43</sup> According to the *Gallup World Poll*, Lebanon has a larger share of the population that is satisfied, compared to other Arab countries.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, the situation is far from perfect. Lebanon suffers just like other Arab countries from extreme corruption.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, it has a youth bulge and an extremely high unemployment rate among the youth.<sup>46</sup> This could be reason enough for the youth to take over the streets. This was the case in 2011, when the Lebanese started to protest the economic and political situation.

This chapters shows us the complexity of the Lebanese political system. It shows us that, although it seems that religion plays a major role in Lebanon, the sectarian divide in Lebanon is due to politics, and not to religion. It is not the religious institutions who mobilize

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<sup>41</sup> CIA World Fact Book. Economy: Lebanon <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>

<sup>42</sup> Amim et al., *After the Arab Spring* 67.

<sup>43</sup> Amim et al., *After the Arab Spring* 117,118.

<sup>44</sup> Amim et al., *After the Arab Spring* 51-53.

<sup>45</sup> CIA World Fact Book. Economy: Lebanon <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>

<sup>46</sup> 'Lebanon's youth unemployment rate following widespread regional trends' Daily Star, January 31 2011 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/Jan/31/Lebanons-youth-unemployment-rates-following-widespread-regional-trend.ashx#axzz20zZoX29g>



their followers to support the politicians, it is the politicians who use the religious institutions in order to control the sects. The contemporary sectarian system goes back to Ta'if. In this accord, power was divided between Christians and Muslims. The implementation of the Ta'if accord was the start of the contemporary Lebanese politics of sectarianism. The politics of sectarianism are based on consensus. Every decision made is based on consensus between the sects. This consensus-based decision making led to stagnation. Although many political parties claim to be secular, and ideology-based, they are in fact sectarian and only represent the sect. Because of the sectarian politics the state has become sectarian as well. The sectarian system of Lebanon thus remains a source of unrest. Many, young, Lebanese are unsatisfied with the contemporary system and demand change. Change has come with the Cedar Revolution 2005. However, years later the pro-Syrian faction is in power again.

Regarding the economic and social situation, we can state that Lebanon is far better off than its Arab neighbors. Lebanon's GDP is high compared to other Arab, non-oil driven, economies. It has known decades of high economic growth. Its population is relatively well-educated and is generally satisfied. However, the situation is far from perfect which resulted in the 2011 protests. In Chapter III, we will take a look at these protests.

### Chapter III: A Lebanese Spring? The 2011 demonstrations in Lebanon

During a talk held in Tunis in July 2012 Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent for *The Independent* and based in Beirut, claimed that the Arab Spring had its origins in Lebanon. The Arab Spring was, according to Fisk's theory, a continuation of the 2005 Cedar Revolution, also known as the *Intifadat al-Istiqlal*, the Independence Uprising, and the protests held in Iran 2009. Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren write that:

“In many ways, the Arab world's wave of popular action did not begin in 2011, but in 2005, when Lebanese activists used non-violent resistance tactics not to overthrow a dictator but to push the Syrian army out after twenty-nine years. Like the removal of Ben Ali, or Mubarak, it was a huge achievement for unarmed activists facing military might.”<sup>47</sup>

In his work *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism* the Iranian Columbia professor Hamid Dabashi states that this is a deeply flawed argument. According to Dabashi, the March 14 movement, opposed by the March 8 movement, was deeply rooted in sectarianism and as such precisely symptomatic of the divisive politics from which the Middle East has suffered for so long. In his opinion, the Arab Spring will assimilate the sectarian politics of Lebanon rather than the sectarian politics of Lebanon dragging the Arab Spring down to its level.<sup>48</sup>

Will this become reality? Middle East Scholar Marc Lynch claims in his book *The Arab Uprising. The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* that the Cedar Revolution was not an inspiration to the Arab Spring, but merely a demonstration of mass mobilization forcing large-scale political change, and thus a great example.<sup>49</sup> However, the movement did not make an appreciable move toward democracy, but operated within rather than against the sectarian system.<sup>50</sup> Inspiration for the Arab Spring or not, while the Arab Spring raged through the region in 2011, Lebanon witnessed demonstrations as well. The question now is whether these demonstrations were merely a continuation of the Cedar Revolution, and thus a continuation of sectarianism, or truly part of the Arab Spring. In this chapter I will study the 2011 demonstrations in Lebanon, and the question whether Lebanon was part of the Arab Spring or not, mainly by focusing on media and think tank publications.

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<sup>47</sup> Noueihed, Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring* 58.

<sup>48</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism* (London 2012) 27,28.

<sup>49</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Spring. The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York 2012) 63.

<sup>50</sup> Lynch, *The Arab Spring* 63.

Compared to countries like Tunisia and Egypt, Lebanon experienced virtually no mobilization, although there were good reasons for mass mobilization. The country faced a deep dissatisfaction of the population with the political class, and had extremely high levels of internet and media penetration. However, the Lebanese who were involved in political activism mainly focused on factors like the weapons of the Hizbullah and Syria.<sup>51</sup> These demonstrations were partisan rather than national.

Shortly after the beginning of the Arab Spring, first in Tunisia and later on in Egypt, all Lebanese parties were initially excited about the Spring, including the Hizbullah.<sup>52</sup> The following events in Bahrain and Syria, and the aftermath of the revolution in Egypt, changed this. The Christians started expressing concerns over unintended repercussions of the Arab Spring, and the pro-Syrian and Iranian parties chose to side with Al-Assad in the Syrian uprising.

Between February and December 2011, Lebanon witnessed its own demonstrations. Some of these demonstrations were inspired by the Arab Spring, these were mainly the demonstrations inspired by the events in Syria, like the clashes in Tripoli in June.<sup>53</sup> Others, like the demonstrations held in February, March and June in Beirut, were mainly inspired by the Cedar Revolution, and the so called 'Laique Pride', a march held for secularization in which protesters asked for the abolishment of the Lebanese sectarian system.<sup>54</sup> These marches were already held before the Arab Spring began.

The Laique Pride started in 2010. The goal of the demonstrators is to bring down the sectarian system, as it is in their opinion 'more of a dictatorial system than dictatorship systems themselves'.<sup>55</sup> The incompetence of their leaders, the alienation from sectarian parties and the inability of the traditional parties to mobilize youth were sources of inspiration to the protestors.<sup>56</sup> The organizers of the demonstration demanded in a statement a 'secular, civil, democratic, socially just and equal state' and called for an increase in the minimum wage and lower prices for basic goods.<sup>57</sup> Another demand that has been made by the protestors was the right for women to pass on their nationality. Under current law, women who marry foreign

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<sup>51</sup> Lynch, *The Arab Spring* 123.

<sup>52</sup> Hizbullah Secretary General *Qassem to March 14: Stop Betting on Regional Developments*, 15/2/2012. Naharnet: <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/30179>

<sup>53</sup> "Lebanon... Perils of the Syrian Quake Aftershocks", Al Jazeera Centre for Studies 7 July 2011.

<sup>54</sup> "Lebanese protest against sectarian political system" 27 February 2011 Reuters.com <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE71Q08L20110227>

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> No Spring in Lebanon, *Nowlebanon.com* June 9, 2011

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=280006>

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.

men are not able to pass on their nationality to their children.<sup>58</sup> The pride did not represent any of the major political parties or leaders in Lebanon.<sup>59</sup> Because of its small size, it is not seen as a threat to the ruling establishment.

The demonstrations held in Lebanon in 2011 directed against the sectarian system were thus not part of the Arab Spring. Only those demonstrations inspired by the events in Syria could be traced back to the Spring. Like most other demonstrations held in Lebanon, the support for these demonstrations was divided by sectarian lines. The March 14 alliance demonstrated in favor of the Syrian protesters, while the March 8 alliance supported the Syrian regime.<sup>60</sup>

Alia Brahim, research fellow at the London School of Economics, claims that, although many Lebanese support the Syrian uprising, Lebanon's treatment of the Syrian uprising is still driven by instincts for survival.<sup>61</sup> First there is the fear that the conflict in Syria will jump over to Lebanon, with the eruption of a civil war as a result. Second, there is fear for a large influx of refugees from Syria. With already a Palestinian refugee population of 400,000 people, ten per cent of the country, Lebanon hasn't the capacity to cope with more refugees. Third, the current Lebanese government is led by the Hizbullah, which still supports the Al-Assad government.<sup>62</sup> Again, the sympathies of the Lebanese towards the Arab Spring are determined by sectarianism and realpolitik. Not by ideology.

We can thus conclude that Lebanon is not part of the Arab Spring, and that the only demonstrations held in Lebanon are inspired by either the call for secularism, like the *Laique Pride*, or by the events in Syria. If we look at the question why Lebanon isn't part of the Arab Spring, a number of explanations have been offered. First, a lack of the feeling of 'collectivism'. Due to the civil war and sectarianism there doesn't exist a collective in the political landscape.<sup>63</sup> Protestors are not united, but divided. Second, there is no concentration of power in Lebanon.<sup>64</sup> In Lebanon, power is divided, not concentrated. The system is

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<sup>58</sup>Lebanon: Thousands rally against sectarian leaders, *Los Angeles Times* March 20 2011

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/03/lebanon-politics-women-middle-east-sectarian-.html>

<sup>59</sup>Patrick Gale, Josie Ensor, *Thousands to join Laique Pride march in name of secularism*. The Daily Star:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/Apr/23/Thousands-to-join-Laique-Pride-march-in-name-of-secularism.ashx#axzz1mgj1mLz9>.

<sup>60</sup>Lana Asfour, *Is Lebanon Immune to the Arab Spring?* New Statesman 06-01-2012

<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2012/01/syria-lebanon-lebanese>

<sup>61</sup>Alia Brahim: *Syria Street, Lebanon* Al Jazeera English 19-04-2012

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/04/2012416132131379581.html>

<sup>62</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup>Somdeep Sen, *Lebanon: The 'Lee-Side of the Arab Spring* Open Democracy 15-11-2011

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/somdeep-sen/lebanon-lee-side-of-arab-spring>

<sup>64</sup>Rodger Shanahan, *Arab Spring or Lebanese Summer?* The Interpreter 09-05-2011

<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2011/05/09/Arab-spring-or-Lebanese-summer.aspx>

extremely complex. A small number of parties and families controls all power in Lebanon. Due to this fact, reform is almost impossible. Third, there is no single autocratic figure against which to mobilize.<sup>65</sup> Unlike the autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, Lebanon does not have either a dictator or a monarch. Fourth, it is by far the most open and transparent country in the Arab World. It has the most open society, tolerance and a relatively unhindered press system.<sup>66</sup> Fifth, the growth of the Hizbullah's autocratic machine has further obstructed the possibility of a youth uprising in Lebanon. Hizbullah's power over Lebanon is growing rapidly, and recent anti-sectarian demonstrations have been dominated by traditional groups rather than an independent youth movement.<sup>67</sup> After 2005, the political forces that had once led the Cedar Revolution were marginalized by the return of the pro-Syrian government led by the Hizbullah.<sup>68</sup>

According to Marc Lynch, there are a number of reasons why Lebanon proved to be largely immune to the Arab Spring. First, the sectarian system mean that there was no obvious central focus for youth opposition, with no unifying figure like Mubarak or Ben Ali, who were opposed by almost everyone. Overthrowing the sectarian system proved to be more abstract than overthrowing a dictator.<sup>69</sup> Second, Lebanese self-absorption kept the Lebanese from identifying too closely with the Arab uprisings. The Lebanese tended to pay more attention to their own television stations than to Al-Jazeera. Many Lebanese saw themselves as already in a democracy, more Western than Arab and they believed they already had their moment of mass mobilization in the Cedar Revolution.<sup>70</sup>

Hilal Khashan believes that the nature of Lebanon's political system prevents the Lebanese from ridding themselves of the 'shackles of quiescence' and attaining their natural right to becoming citizens, and not just followers of confessional leaders.<sup>71</sup> The country has no cohesive regime to rebel against. The Arab upheavals are unworkable in the context of the country's sectarian divide.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>66</sup> Amid Arab Spring Fires, why isn't Lebanon in Flames? *Christian Science Monitor* May 31 2011 <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0531/Amid-Arab-Spring-fires-why-isn-t-Lebanon-in-flames>

<sup>67</sup> No Spring in Lebanon, *Nowlebanon.com* June 9, 2011 <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=280006>

<sup>68</sup> Lebanon in the Midsts of the "Arab Spring": Plus Ca Change *Observatory of Euro-Mediterranean Policies* 18-02-2012 <http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/actualitat/opinions/lebanon-in-the-midst-of-the-201carab-spring201d-plus-ca-change..>

<sup>69</sup> Lynch, *The Arab Spring* 123.

<sup>70</sup> Lynch, *The Arab Spring* 124.

<sup>71</sup> Hilal Khashan, 'The View from Syria and Lebanon. Middle East Upheavals' *Middle East Quarterly* Summer 2011, Vol. 18 Issue 3, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

Thus, we may conclude that most of the demonstrations that occurred in Lebanon in 2012 were not part of the Arab Spring. Only those held either to show support for the Syrian protestors or the Syrian regime could be traced back to the Spring. Most of the demonstrations held in Lebanon in 2012 were either a continuation of the Cedar Revolution, and thus part of sectarian and not of collective action against a government, or *Laique* prides, which started in the year before the Arab Spring began. Although the protestors of the *Laique* pride have some demands similar to their counterparts in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, like the demand for higher wages, more democracy and equal rights, the pride is a specific Lebanese phenomenon, directed against the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state and political spectrum and not against a regime or dictator.

The reasons why the Arab Spring hasn't come to Lebanon are various. Lebanon is not a dictatorship, and the sectarian system is complex. The Lebanese people are divided, and not united, between the March 14 and the March 8 alliance. There is no feeling of collectivism and no such thing as a Lebanese nationalism. The rising influence and power of the Hizbullah has further obstructed a youth uprising. Furthermore, there is freedom of press and expression in the country. Lebanese self-absorption also contributed, as most Lebanese are more focused on Lebanon or the West than on the Arab world. Yet, the most important reason for the fact that there is no Spring in Lebanon may lie in the very fact that the causes for the Arab Spring are not yet present in Lebanon. Lebanon is exceptional in the Arab World.

## Chapter IV: The Lebanese Exception

Lebanon has always been an exception in the Arab World. Ever since the founding of the Lebanese state, it has proved to be different from its neighboring countries. A sectarian democracy, relatively immune to Arab nationalism, it has been an oasis of freedom, capitalism and tolerance until the civil war destroyed the country. After the war, Lebanon continued to be an exception, although the country has not been immune to the rise of Islamism, and the Sunni-Shi'a divide. Yet, it has been immune to the Arab Spring.

If we look at the causes of the Arab Spring, as named in Chapter I, we can recall ten main causes: economic stagnation, educational stagnation, a property boom, rising food and energy prizes, high inflation, the influence of the global financial and economic crisis, a youth bulge, high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, the corruption of the ruling elite and the lack of democracy.

If we apply these ten causes to Lebanon and look at the facts on the ground as described in Chapter II we can see that most of these causes are not present in Lebanon. First, economic stagnation. Although the Lebanese economy grew barely over the last few years, the country has known an economic boom ever since the end of the civil war. Beirut is still one of the financial centers of the Middle East and the large diaspora is a guarantee from foreign money flowing into the country. There is still much poverty and high unemployment among segments of the Lebanese population, but the situation of the most impoverished sect, the Shi'a, has hugely improved over the last ten years due to the rise of the Hizbullah. Thus, economically Lebanon is incomparable to the Arab Spring countries

Second, educational stagnation. The Lebanese are among the highest educated peoples of the Arab World. Even though it is still hard for many graduates to find a decent job, the situation is still better than in countries like Tunisia and Egypt.

Third, the property boom. The growth of the Lebanese economy during the past two decades can be contributed to a the property boom in Beirut. A negative side effect of this boom is that, just like in many other Arab countries, it has become difficult for many Lebanese to find decent housing.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Beirut real estate boom is no bubble", *Nowlebanon.com* March 23 2010  
<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=155731>

Fourth, the rising food prices. Lebanon has, just like almost every other country in the world, not been immune to the rising food prices.<sup>74</sup> However, as the economic situation of the country is relatively better than the situation in other Arab countries, the Lebanese have suffered less from the high prices for food. Unlike Egypt, the government does not supply food to the most poor. Sectarian organizations and parties like the Hizballah are the main providers for food for the poor.

Fifth, Lebanon has already suffered from immense inflation decades ago, during the civil war. As a result, the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound is fixed to the US dollar. This has provided Lebanon with some stability regarding inflation.<sup>75</sup>

Sixth, the global financial and economic crisis. Due to its conservative financial policies, the Lebanese financial sector has not only been immune to the global and financial crisis, it has even benefited from it.<sup>76</sup> Because of the fact that the financial sector is one the most important sectors of the country, the Lebanese economy has benefited from the financial crisis as well.

Seventh, the youth bulge. In this, Lebanon is no exception. Just like the other countries of the Arab World, the growth of the Lebanese population has increased dramatically over the last few years. Still, the situation of the Lebanese youth is better than the situation of their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, and many have the opportunity to emigrate and join the large and prosperous Lebanese diaspora's.

Eight, high unemployment rates. The main problem of the Lebanese economy is not its unemployment rates, but its transformation from a middle-income economy to a first-world economy. The Lebanese economy is incomparable with the economy of many other Arab countries. Its unemployment rates are still relatively high, but low compared to the rates of countries like Egypt and Tunisia.

Ninth, the corruption among the elite. The corruption of the Lebanese elite remains a problem. The state and economy are controlled by a small number of parties and families who incredibly enriched themselves over the last couple of decades. Many of these families were already in power during the civil war. The reason why only a small number of Lebanese has

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<sup>74</sup> "Hajj Hasan: Main beneficiaries of rising food prices are merchants" *The Daily Star* October 15, 2011 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2011/Oct-15/151335-hajj-hasan-main-beneficiaries-of-rising-food-prices-are-merchants.ashx#axzz21NXDNbXR>

<sup>75</sup> "Measuring Lebanon's inflation" *The Daily Star* May 10 2011 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2011/May-10/Measuring-Lebanons-inflation.ashx#axzz21NXDNbXR>

<sup>76</sup> "Lebanon 'immune' to financial crisis" *BBC News Beirut* 05-12-2008 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7764657.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7764657.stm)



protested this widespread corruption is sectarianism. Many Lebanese only protest the corruption of their leaders opponents, and spare their the leaders of their sects.

Last, the lack of democracy. Compared to its autocratic neighbors, Lebanon is a heaven of democracy and freedom. The Lebanese have the right to vote ever since the founding of the Lebanese state. The country has freedom of speech, press and demonstration. One of the main reasons for the Arab Spring to erupt was because Tunisians, Egyptians, Yemenis, Libyans and Syrians were unable to protest the economic and social situation. The Lebanese have this option. Just like countries in Southern Europe Lebanon is a country in which the people are able to elect a new government. However, the economy has not been a reason for voters to elect a new government. This is not because of the economic situation, but because of sectarianism. Even though Lebanese regularly complain about their economic and financial situation, they base their vote on confession, and not on ideology.

Thus, the reasons why the Arab Spring has not come to Lebanon do not only lie in the facts named in Chapter III, like the complex Lebanese political system, the lack of collectivism, the power of the Hizbullah, the various freedoms the Lebanese people enjoy and the Lebanese self-absorption, but also in country's overall, economic, financial, social and political situation. The fact that Lebanon, with its relatively good economic situation, its imperfect democracy and its sectarian nature is unique in the Arab World has made it immune to the Arab Spring.

Though, the Arab Spring has impacted Lebanon in various ways. Firstly, since the revolt in Tunisia began, Lebanon has been deeply involved in the regional debate over future values, aspirations and models for the "new" Middle East.<sup>77</sup> Many Lebanese regard themselves as a democratic example to the rest of the region.<sup>78</sup> Secondly, Lebanon's political equilibrium is and will be related to Syria's.<sup>79</sup> The uprising in Syria will have a lasting effect on the Lebanese political spectrum. Finally, the Lebanese economy has suffered from the crisis in Syria. Roughly one third of the Lebanon's trade is either conducted with or transported through Syria.<sup>80</sup> This means that, even though the country has been immune to the Arab Spring itself, it has not been immune to the effects of the Arab Spring.

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<sup>77</sup> Lebanon in the Midsts of the "Arab Spring": Plus Ca Change *Observatory of Euro-Mediterranean Policies* 18-02-2012 <http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/actualitat/opinions/lebanon-in-the-midst-of-the-201carab-spring201d-plus-ca-change..>

<sup>78</sup> Khashan, *The View from Syria and Lebanon*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Lebanon in the Midsts of the "Arab Spring": Plus Ca Change *Observatory of Euro-Mediterranean Policies* 18-02-2012 <http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/actualitat/opinions/lebanon-in-the-midst-of-the-201carab-spring201d-plus-ca-change..>

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

It may well be that Lebanon is not ready yet for the Arab Spring. Hamid Dabashi quotes in his work *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism* Princeton Historian Bernard Lewis on the Arab Spring:

“The Arab masses certainly want change. And they want improvements. But when you say do they want democracy, that’s a political concept that has no history, no record whatever in the Arab, Islamic world. We, in the Western world particularly, tend to think of democracy in our own terms. ... to mean periodic elections in our style. But I think it’s a great mistake to try and think of the Middle East in those terms and that can only lead to disastrous results, as you’ve already seen in various places. They are simply not ready for free and fair election.”<sup>81</sup>

According to Dabashi, Lewis’ Orientalism and racism are present in this quote. However, even though Dabashi is right, I believe Lewis does make a point. Because the Lebanese example shows that, if the overall political, social and intellectual climate is not right, democracy would not be necessarily an improvement. Democracy has not changed Lebanon. It still remains a sectarian state, in which the old patron-client system has merged with democracy. In Lebanon, people do not vote according to ideology or the economic situation, but according to their confession. And this has remained the same for over almost seven decades.

To become a true movement for freedom and democracy, the Arab Spring has to go through the phase of sectarianism. It has to remain a movement of people united by ideals and economic conditions. Stanford historian Joel Beinin writes about the Arab Spring protestors:

“Once they breached the barrier of fear, Tunisians and Egyptians experienced situations where the intensity of involvement, the grandeur of the cause (nothing less than democracy, the People’s revolution, equality for all, acting for the public good...) canceled the costs of collective action. The struggle became its own end; efforts and costs were perceived as benefits; the mobilization produced its own gratifications”<sup>82</sup>

In order to remain a movement acting for public good the Arab Spring protestors should take notice of the Lebanese situation. And in order to become like the Arab Spring protestors, the

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<sup>81</sup> Bernard Lewis quoted in: Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism* (London 2012) 28.

<sup>82</sup> Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel, ed., *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Palo Alto 2011) 251.

Lebanese should break free from the chains of sectarianism, secularize and deconfessionalize and start a movement for collective goods instead of sectarian gains.

## Conclusion

If we look at the question what are the reasons why Lebanon has proven to be immune to the Arab Spring, we can see that in the previous chapters various answers are offered. It was my hypothesis that by far the most important reason is the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state. This assumption was right, but there were several more reasons that prevented the Arab Spring from coming to Lebanon.

In Chapter I, I discussed the causes behind the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in 2010 was caused by several developments: economic stagnation, educational stagnation, a property boom, rising food and energy prizes, high inflation, the influence of the global financial and economic crisis, a youth bulge, high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, the lack of democracy and the corruption of the ruling elite. The result was an unraveling social contract. Before, Arab citizens accepted political exclusion in exchange for state provision of employment, education, housing, health care, food subsidies and other benefits. When the Arab governments were no longer able to facilitate this, the social contract unraveled.

In Chapter II, I discussed the political, social and economic landscape of Lebanon. This chapters shows us the complexity of the Lebanese political system. It shows us that, although its seems that religion plays a major role in Lebanon, the sectarian divide in Lebanon is due to politics, and not to religion. It is not the religious institutions who mobilize their followers to support the politicians, it is the politicians who use the religious institutions in order to control the sects. The contemporary sectarian system goes back to Ta'if. In this accord, power was divided between Christians and Muslims. The implementation of the Ta'if accord was the start of the contemporary Lebanese politics of sectarianism. The politics of sectarianism are based on consensus. Every decision made is based on consensus between the sects. This consensus-based decision making led to stagnation. Although many political parties claim to be secular, and ideology-based, they are in fact sectarian and only represent the sect. Because of the sectarian politics the state has become sectarian as well. The sectarian system of Lebanon thus remains a source of unrest. Many, young, Lebanese are unsatisfied with the contemporary system and demand change. Change has come with the Cedar Revolution 2005. However, years later the pro-Syrian faction is in power again.

Regarding the economic and social situation, we can state that Lebanon is far better off than its Arab neighbors. Lebanon's GDP is high compared to other Arab, non-oil driven,

economies. It has known decades of high economic growth. Its population is relatively well-educated and is generally satisfied.

In Chapter III, I looked at the 2011 demonstrations that took place in Lebanon and asked myself the question whether they were part of the Arab Spring. I concluded that most of the demonstrations that occurred in Lebanon in 2012 were not part of the Arab Spring. Only those held either to show support for the Syrian protestors or the Syrian regime could be traced back to the Spring. Most of the demonstrations held in Lebanon in 2012 were either a continuation of the Cedar Revolution, and thus part of sectarian and not of collective action against a government, or *Laique* prides, which started in the year before the Arab Spring began. Although the protestors of the *Laique* pride have some demands similar to their counterparts in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, like the demand for higher wages, more democracy and equal rights, the pride is a specific Lebanese phenomenon, directed against the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state and political spectrum and not against a regime or dictator.

The reasons why the Arab Spring hasn't come to Lebanon are various. Lebanon is not a dictatorship, and the sectarian system is complex. The Lebanese people are divided, and not united, between the March 14 and the March 8 alliance. There is no feeling of collectivism and no such thing as a Lebanese nationalism. The rising influence and power of the Hizbullah has further obstructed a youth uprising. Furthermore, there is freedom of press and expression in the country. Lebanese self-absorption also contributed, as most Lebanese are more focused on Lebanon or the West than on the Arab world. Yet, the most important reason for the fact that there is no Spring in Lebanon may lie in the very fact that the causes for the Arab Spring are not yet present in Lebanon. Lebanon is exceptional in the Arab World.

In Chapter IV I looked at why the Arab Spring hasn't come to Lebanon. The reasons why the Arab Spring has not come to Lebanon do not only lie in the facts named in Chapter III, like the complex Lebanese political system, the lack of collectivism, the power of the Hizbullah, the various freedoms the Lebanese people enjoy and the Lebanese self-absorption, but also in country's overall, economic, financial, social and political situation. Most of the causes named in Chapter II are not yet present in Lebanon. And if they are present, their presence is outweighed by the fact that the Lebanese are able to protest their government, and elect a new one. The reason why the Lebanese almost never use this democratic right lies in the sectarian nature of the Lebanese state.

Thus, sectarianism was of great importance, but the complexity of the system, the fact that Lebanon is still a democracy, the overall economic situation and Lebanese self-absorption

were important reasons why Lebanon has been immune to the Arab Spring. The question is now whether Lebanon, if the Spring will continue, will remain immune to the Spring. Of course, an answer to this question cannot be provided but the Lebanese situation, and especially sectarianism, will make it difficult for the Arab Spring to reach Lebanon.

And sectarianism might well prove to be the next challenge to the Arab Spring. The uprisings in Bahrain and Syria have been deeply rooted in sectarianism. It may as well be that the Arab Spring, instead of a movement for freedom and democracy, may turn into a sectarian strife between the various sects of the Middle East. Hopefully, the Arab Spring will not only be a source of inspiration to the people of Lebanon, but Lebanese history will also be a source of inspiration to the people of Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and especially Syria.

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