


Lost in the Transitions of Lebanon's Second Republic: The Political Economy of (Un)governable Institutions, Practices and Crises

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Abstract

This article employs Giddens' theory of structuration to identify why the practices of power sharing among the political elite in the context of post-war settings can spawn inflection points that divert the political process off course and incubate avenues for other transitions. It aims to explain how elite power sharing fragmented governance in Lebanon's sectarian system, while incubating disagreements that necessitated further transitions. It highlights three transitions in post-war Lebanon: (A) the post-Taif process (1990–2005), (B) the post-2005 transition following the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon (2005–2019) and (C) the post-October 17 2019 transition. It finds that the reinforcement of elite practices of power sharing, patron-client networks and the apportionment of Lebanon's political economy across the aforementioned phases have depleted state resources, which resulted in the sovereign debt crisis of 2020. It shows that the lack of national resources will most likely make Lebanese elites more eager to play a larger role in the informal sector, thus surviving on the resources of individuals.

Keywords: sectarianism, informality, governance, Giddens, structuration, Taif Accords, Doha Accords, 17 October 2019 Uprising.

Introduction

This article aims to investigate the elite-inspired challenges to political transitions in the context of a sectarian society reeling from a devastating civil war. It seeks to explore how elite practices in post-war scenarios can produce massive institutional gridlocks that spawn pathways for new transitions through brokered deals, fragmented governance and incubated crises. It examines Lebanon's transition to the Second republic in the post-war period, particularly the failures of the political process brought about by the skewed implementation of the Taif national reconciliation document. It builds on the conventional approaches of structuralism, instrumentalism and everyday practices to reveal how Lebanese political elites sabotaged the Taif post-war political process by reflexively producing and reproducing the principles underlying the country's sectarian order. In so doing, it explores how the elite practices of power sharing, bargaining for shares of administrative posts and dispensing clientelist services created political inflection points that debunked the transition to the Second republic as envisaged in Taif. It aims to reveal how these inflection points contributed not only to the divergence of the political elite off the original Taif process, but also to governance fragmentations that sowed the seeds for informal political-economic practices and national crises. Therefore, it seeks to explore the following research question: Why does the emphasis on power sharing in sectarian models by political elites during post-war transitions help them open up avenues for new political pathways and transitions to different political scenarios?

The case of Lebanon reveals that the post-war behaviour of politicians was shaped by the critical turning point of the Taif Accords – the national reconciliation document negotiated in the Saudi resort-city of Taif in 1989 with the blessing of Syria and the United States. The Taif Accords introduced multiple amendments to the Lebanese constitution that shattered the pre-

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existing system of cheques and balances, transferred the Maronite Christian President's executive authority to the council of ministers led by a Sunni-Muslim Prime Minister and strengthened the constitutional prerogatives of the Shia-Muslim speaker of the house (Picard, 1996; Leenders, 2012, pp. 128-129). It promised the progressive goals of the abrogation of Lebanon's sectarian system (Taif 1989, II.G.A&B), the establishment of a senate (Taif 1989, II.A.7) and administrative decentralisation to activate decision-making roles of peripheral institutions such as municipal councils (Taif 1989, III.A.4&5), which remain unachieved matters to this day.¹

Here the proposals of the Taif Accords were quickly reversed by Lebanese politicians, whose post-war behaviour collided with the reformist spirit of the agreement. First, Christian disenfranchisement, epitomised in the expatriation of Maronite army commander Michel Aoun and the imprisonment of the Christian Lebanese Forces militia leader Samir Geagea, spelled Christian disenchantment with the post-war Taif process (Haddad, 2001; 2002). Second, politicians in Lebanon's Second Republic exploited constitutional prerogatives to carve out their spheres of influence inside state institutions, to own shares of the country's economy and mobilise society along sect-specific fault lines (Leenders, 2012; Salloukh et al., 2015; Salloukh, 2019; Helou & Mollica, 2022).² Therefore, the Taif Accords, which intended to serve as a document for national reconciliation, decentralised power and eventually, permit citizens to identify with state institutions on a non-sectarian basis, ended up fortifying sect-centric actors whose relentless use of communal vetoes, sect-specific discourse and domination of resources compromised the independence of Lebanese state institutions (Lijphart, 1984). This rendered the political transition to Lebanon's Second Republic fraught with risks for the governance of critical sectors.³

We argue that post-war Lebanon witnessed several critical turning points that shaped both configurations of the political elite and the demands made by those politicians. As such, Lebanese politicians formed alliances with counterparts and foreign powers, bargained for shares of administrative positions, sought every opportunity to reinforce power sharing and intensified the

1 Taif Accords, Section II Political Reforms: Article A. Chamber of Deputies:

7. With the election of the first Chamber of Deputies on a national, not sectarian, basis, a senate shall be formed and all the spiritual families shall be represented in it. The senate powers shall be confined to crucial issues.

Taif Accords, Section II: Political Reforms, Article G. Abolition of Political Sectarianism:

Abolishing political sectarianism is a fundamental national objective. To achieve it, it is required that efforts be made in accordance with a phased plan. The Chamber of Deputies election the basis of equal sharing by Christians and Muslims shall adopt the proper measures to achieve this objective and to form a national council which is headed by the president of the republic and which includes, in addition to the prime minister and the Chamber of Deputies speaker, political, intellectual, and social notables. The council's task will be to examine and propose the means capable of abolishing sectarianism, to present them to the Chamber of Deputies and the cabinet, and to observe implementation of the phased plan. The following shall be done in the interim period:

a. Abolish the sectarian representation base and rely on capability and specialization in public jobs, the judiciary, the military, security, public, and joint institutions, and in the independent agencies in accordance with the dictates of national accord, excluding the top-level jobs and equivalent jobs which shall be shared equally by Christians and Muslims without allocating any particular job to any sect.

b. Abolish the mention of sect and denomination on the identity card.

Taif Accords, Section III. Other Reforms, article A. Administrative Decentralism:

1. The State of Lebanon shall be a single and united state with a strong central authority.

2. The powers of the governors and district administrative officers shall be expanded and all state administrations shall be represented in the administrative provinces at the highest level possible so as to facilitate serving the citizens and meeting their needs locally.

3. The administrative division shall be recognized in a manner that emphasizes national fusion within the framework of preserving common coexistence and unity of the soil, people, and institutions.

4. Expanded administrative decentralization shall be adopted at the level of the smaller administrative units [district and smaller units] through the election of a council, headed by the district officer, in every district, to ensure local participation.

5. A comprehensive and unified development plan capable of developing the provinces economically and socially shall be adopted and the resources of the municipalities, unified municipalities, and municipal unions shall be reinforced with the necessary financial resources.

2 This article adopts the following definitions:

Sect-specific: the symbols, rituals, narratives, language, political discourse and strategies that seek to mobilize and/or address a group based on their sectarian identity;

Sect-centric: an actor or party that reflects a sectarian identity by representing partisans on the basis of communal interests;

Sectarian practices: the set of political, social and economic practices that sustain sectarianism as explained here.

3 Second Republic is the name granted to the constitutional order following the Taif Accords of 1989. Taif proposed several constitutional amendments to the Lebanese constitution following the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990, which introduced new cheques and balances to the country's post-war constitution.

sect-specific discourse to mobilise supporters. But every time Lebanon witnessed massive political reconfigurations – for example, the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005, the re-enfranchisement of Christian leadership, Hezbollah’s participation in external conflict and the sovereign debt crisis of 2020 – Lebanese politicians stepped up demands for state resources, appointments in the civil service and national security apparatuses, gerrymandering electoral constituencies and the reinterpretation of the constitution to expand their communal prerogatives in Lebanon’s political system. These demands structured politicians’ strategies and political practices that triggered new transitions to political arenas where sect-centric actors reinforced their communal demands by exploiting sect-specific discourses and strategies at the expense of Lebanese state institutions. Therefore, Lebanese sect-centric elites, through their reproduction of the social practices of power sharing and bargaining that undergird sectarianism, ended up reflexively carving out a more dominant position for their community in transitions than was previously the case. Such reflexive reproduction of the social practices underlying sectarianism managed to concentrate sect-centric actors’ efforts on the fair distribution of communal resources and shares of positions across the bureaucracy, *inter alia*, but failed to redress the fundamentals of sustainable governance which were overshadowed by the interests of the elites. Lost in the multiple elite-inspired transitions from one situation to the other, Lebanese citizens, themselves affiliated to sectarian groups, organised ‘beyond the state’ by developing coping mechanisms of their own, which, in turn, spawned a set of informal practices to compensate for the state’s failure in the governance of several critical sectors (Polese, Kovács, & Jancsics, 2018).

The research for this article is based on multiple projects carried out by this author in the past ten years. This research draws on multiple question-sets in semi-structured interviews with Members of Parliament, government ministers, party activists, members of professional unions, businessmen and monetary experts, among others, to understand how Lebanon’s sectarian system contributed to different facets of governance failure. It draws on a rich ethnography of informal interviews and participant observations to cover Lebanon’s financial meltdown after 2020. These approximately 75-minute interviews were digitally recorded, translated and transcribed by this author.

This article is divided to three sections. Section one, entitled *Theorising Post-War Sectarianism*, adopts Giddens’ theory of structuration to discuss the central role of Lebanon’s political elites in the reproduction of sectarianism. Section two, entitled *Governance Failures During Transitions*, explores how elite-inspired transitions contributed to practices that harmed the governance of several critical sectors in Lebanon, such as the electricity sector and monetary policy. Section three, entitled *Conclusion: Remarks on Transitions in Post-War Scenarios*, concludes with a discussion of the matters that need to be addressed for a successful transition to good governance in post-war contexts.

Theorising post-war sectarianism

The politics of divided societies with a plurality of ethnic, religious, sectarian and linguistic groups can often weigh heavily on the national level depending on every country’s experience in managing inter-group relations. While Switzerland’s cantonisation (Linder & Mueller, 2021) or Belgium’s regionalisation (Dupuy, Verhaegen, & Van Ingelgom, 2020) adopted an institutional approach to the management of plurality (Choudhry, 2009), ethnic warfare in the former Yugoslavia resulted in the state’s disintegration into new entities (Hudson & Bowman, 2012). On the other hand, Sectarianism in Lebanon and Iraq fragmented state institutions, apportioned positions in the bureaucracy and distributed vast parts of the national economy among members of various sectarian communities (Dingley & Mollica, 2015; Helou, 2015; 2021; 2022). Moreover, South Africa experimented with a quota system for the inclusion of both white and black citizens after the demise of the Apartheid regime’s system of institutional racial segregation (Spears, 2002), while the Good Friday agreement institutionalised the religious separation between Northern Irish religious groups (Dingley, 2005). In the context of deeply-divided societies, Lijphart (1984) shows that a system of communal vetoes and segmented autonomy supersedes the democratic mechanisms instilled in the state.

Salamey (2017; 2021b) reveals that such political settings permit the consolidation of communal rule, which he calls communitocracy, allowing the community's interests to prevail over state governance. Nagle (2020) contends that communal groups in deeply-divided societies can debunk consociationalism by emphasising only the principle of power sharing at the expense of functioning state institutions. With the dynamics imbedded in inter-group relations in plural societies as a backdrop, we seek to push the disciplinary boundaries of the field of deeply-divided societies to explore how such inter-communal relations can impinge on post-war transitions, particularly the political process launched after national reconciliation in Lebanon.

To appreciate the vicissitudes to governance matters in the context of Lebanese politics, we need to unpack the intimate ties between Lebanese state institutions and sectarianism. Despite its popularity in explaining interactions in deeply-divided societies, sectarianism remains a contested concept due to the multiple existing definitions of the phenomenon and the controversies that belie them. Salloukh et al. (2015, p. 3) define sectarianism as a system that: 'Produces and reproduces sectarian subjects and modes of political subjectification and mobilization through a dispersed ensemble of institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices.'

However, Fanar Haddad (2017; 2020) shows that different scholars adopt a mono-dimensional view of sectarianism by concentrating on certain aspects of sectarian identity; for example, symbols, behaviours, actions, attitudes and other phenomena. To overcome this conceptual deficit, Haddad (2020) recommends the examination of sectarian identity on four inter-linked levels: doctrinal, sub-national (inter-group dynamics), nation-state (role of sectarian identity in the interpretation of nationalism and national identity) and transnational levels.

While we endorse Haddad's (2020) four inter-linked dimensions in an analysis of sectarian identity, we recognise that the moulding of the foundations of sectarianism occurs with the reproduction of a set of social practices that shape and reshape structures and systems. The central role of agency, here sectarian groups and/or their representatives, is responsible for the production of these social practices, which include, among others, clientelistic networks of services, appointments in state positions, the brokerage of state contracts and bids, and the mobilisation of society through the use of sect-specific symbols and narratives (see Helou, 2020; forthcoming; Majed, 2020). These sub-national level practices consolidate group cohesion on the basis of sectarian identity, which incentivise the group and its members to forge relationships with the state, the nation, nationalism and transnational linkages (whether members of their own sectarian community in the diaspora or state allies) in a way that maximises their sectarian community's interests. This process enables sectarian communities a degree of segmented autonomy within the state and communal vetoes to reject formal decisions that defy the group's political interests (Lijphart, 1984; Makdisi, 2000). While this process accords sect-centric actors enormous latitude in determining political practices, its reversal can occur through the introduction of the concept of republicanism. Here republicanism emphasises the establishment of effective state institutions to incubate political, social and economic spaces, and regulations and laws for citizen participation that are not governed by sectarian identity (Helou, forthcoming). This notion of supplanting the practices that underpin sectarianism with state-centric institutions, practices and policies appears quite elusive in the deeply-divided society of Lebanon. Yet, the dialectics of sectarianism versus republicanism risk producing multi-directional political forces that not only fail to converge around consolidating state enforcement capacities, but also upend political transitions of critical sectors to state governance.

Based on Haddad's (2020) analysis, the sectarian identity of groups on the sub-national level informs their views on national matters, particularly their relationship to state institutions. Sect-centric actors and parties seek the representation of members of their group in positions across the bureaucracy, which renders power sharing a *sine qua non* of politics in consociational models (Nagle, 2020). Their strategies often centre on the fragmentation of state institutions, thereby ensuring that their sub-national characteristics cannot be upended by occupants of state office. On the other hand, republicanism involves state-driven top-down campaigns to result in a complete overhaul of sectarianism; for example, the proposed civil code for personal status laws debunking the authority of Lebanon's 18 sectarian-denominations in personal status matters. Here

the critical role of agency, particularly the sect-centric actors of political parties, help determine the strategies toward the state institutions; for example, adhering to formal agreements and/or political transitions in Lebanon's Second Republic or fulfilling the interests of their sectarian communities at the expense of the state's monopoly of control. Giddens' theory of structuration provides the theoretical space to explain the instrumentalisation of sectarian identities by politicians in terms of conscious acts tending to the manipulation of partisan supporters. It emphasises the role of knowledge and information on structural factors that shape the mind-set of those politicians. In this context, Giddens' theory of structuration builds on instrumental, structural and everyday analyses of sectarianism but also emphasises the effect of persistent social practices in the reproduction of Lebanon's sectarian system. The utility of structuration lies in its ability to present practices, structures and knowledge as intertwined and interdependent phenomena that speak to the roles of knowledge and structure in incentivising the sectarian behaviour of agents, but simultaneously emphasises the responsibility of agency's social practices in creating the environment in which they operate. Here the practices of sect-specific discourse, patron-client relations and power sharing agreements reinforced Lebanon's post-war political structures, which, in turn, incentivised the aforementioned sectarian practices and shaped and reshaped the way elites behaved.

The agency-structure relationship, a cornerstone of the reflexive nature of Giddens' theory of structuration, illuminates the multiple interactions imbedded in sectarianism by unravelling the forces at play in shaping both agency and structures. It does not discount the instrumental, structural and everyday accounts of sectarianism, but emphasises the interactive processes that shape actors and structures. In so doing, an application of Giddens' theory of structuration invites observers of Lebanese politics to explore the ramifications of the Lebanese elites' exploitation of neoliberal economics, patron-client networks of services, representation and electoral politics, *inter alia*, to consolidate their hold on power at the expense of functioning state institutions. Therefore, the constitutional amendments promised in the national reconciliation document of the Taif Accords are second to the practices of Lebanon's post-war elite in relation to their bearing on the Taif political process. It is these political practices that helped shape the Lebanese political structures, while incentivising politicians to reproduce the same practices that undergird this emerging system (see Rowayheb, 2011; 2014; Leenders, 2012; Cammet, 2014; Mollica, 2014; Salloukh et al., 2015; Helou, 2020; El-Husseini, 2021).

Instrumentalist accounts of sectarianism point to the role of Lebanese elites in strengthening their sectarian mobilisation and subjectification of partisans. Melani Cammett (2014) reveals that political parties across Lebanon's political spectrum, including the Sunni-Muslim Future Movement, the Shia-Muslim Hezbollah party and the AMAL movement, and the Christian parties of the Free Patriotic Movement, Lebanese Forces and Kataeb, intercede on behalf of their partisans with the ministry of Public Health to facilitate coverage of health-care bills. Most of these parties develop long-term contracts with private health-care providers to ensure health services for their partisans in a bid to secure the political loyalty of those beneficiaries. Others discuss the contribution of Lebanese politicians in gerrymandering electoral districts, concocting districts with severe imbalances in the deputy-to-voter ratio and engaging in corrupt electoral practices such as vote buying for the sustenance of sectarian representation and identities in Lebanon (El-Khazen, 1998; Salloukh et al., 2015; Helou, 2020). These electoral practices have contravened the basic tenets of equal citizenship by normalising the existence of imbalances in deputy-to-voter ratios across Lebanon's multiple electoral districts, and thus solidifying the sectarian representation of voters. As such, all reforms to the electoral laws since 1992 have shied away from redressing these distortions, but concentrated mainly on avenues to better represent members of sectarian communities. Another way Lebanese politicians have debunked state institutions is through their construction of parallel mechanisms for the resolution of multiple dossiers. Here Carmen Geha (2019b) discusses how the interaction between state and non-state institutions, such as the national dialogue hosting Lebanon's most influential political leaders, became a critical focal point for the negotiation of policies on security, elections and refugees between 2012 and 2018 in Lebanon. In so doing, she reveals the critical role of inter-elite agreements to the governance of several dossiers in Lebanon, thereby emphasising the role of politicians in the generation of resolutions or gridlocks in governance matters. Moreover, Najib Hourani (2010; 2015) explores the way the immersion of

Lebanon's entrenched political elites and ex-militia members in complex neoliberal networks of capital helped them shore up a following both during the civil war and in post-war Lebanon. Such works reveal that state-society relations are intimately connected to, if not synonymous with, patron-client relations, as the elites' spheres of influence in state bureaucracies compromise the independence of those institutions (Leenders, 2012).

Some political scientists and international relations scholars discuss the importance of sectarian structures characteristic of geopolitical polarities (Salloukh, 2013; Darwich & Fakhoury, 2016), regime types (Valbjorn & Hinnebusch, 2019) and power sharing models (McGarry & O'Leary, 2007) to the behaviour of political elites and citizens. These structural factors proffer palpable incentives for the generation of social practices that support the sectarian political economy, which is undergirded by a complex web of patron-client services that lure actors into the network. Perhaps the most significant contribution of structural accounts of sectarianism is that they divulge the costs to non-participation in the ranks of this sectarian system. Here the choice of remaining outside the confines of this sectarian system raises the costs to politicians who risk losing support if they do not emulate the clientelist-service networks of their counterparts (see Hottinger, 1961; Hudson, 1968; Johnson, 1986; Khalaf, 2003; Cammet, 2014; Helou, 2015; Salloukh et al., 2015).

With instrumental and structural accounts of sectarianism as a backdrop, Helou (2022) reveals that Lebanese citizens can respond to existing conditions or fluctuations in political structures through the adoption of a set of everyday practices. His analysis of the sovereign debt crisis of 2020 divulged the role of Lebanese citizens in fostering a set of everyday practices to navigate ominous risks posed by a fluid market with floating exchange rates, the conversion of frozen dollar accounts to more mobile assets, and Lebanese central bank currency regulation challenges. Helou (2021) then shows that such market volatilities created incentives for a political elite rebound by means of participation in transactions on this fluid market. However, Helou and Mollica (2022) analyse the everyday practices and coping mechanisms of the Christian-Maronite community of Lebanon in response to the collective communal fear of other ethno-religious groups in the country and show that everyday practices can often reinforce sectarian responses both locally (inside villages and towns) and nationally (through the behaviour of elites).

Therefore, the works analysed in this section remain a testament to the regenerative nature of sectarianism through the practices of patron-client relations, elite fragmentation of state institutions and sect-specific discourse. However, Giddens' theory of structuralism captures the interactive and dynamic nature of sectarianism by defining the roles of structures, systems and agency. According to Giddens, structure takes shape when the rules and resources are organised as properties of social systems, whereas systems are defined as reproduced relations between actors organised as social practices (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). To examine structures, we need to understand knowledge (how social actors should conduct matters), the social practices used to gain that knowledge, and the capabilities of those practices (what they can change (Giddens, 1979, p. 250)). Here, structuration reveals the conditions that determine the continuity or transformation of structures and systems (Giddens, 1979, p. 250). According to this approach, the perception of agency involves a notion of practical consciousness, such as everything we know as social actors, which renders social life possible (Giddens, 1979, p. 5; 1983, p. 76). It establishes a relationship between structure and agency, the duality of structure, whereby individuals reflexively produce and reproduce their social life (Giddens & Pearson, 1989, p. 82; Tucker, 1998). Giddens views agency as comprised of individuals or actors who engage in social action with the rationale and cognition to comprehend the repercussions of their actions. He grants agency a central role in structuration, which emphasises the nexus between structures and systems via the role of actors and their social practices. Here a distinctive feature of human agents is rationality, which renders consciousness a central driver of human action.

Therefore, a situation emerging from Giddens' theory of structuration in the context of Lebanon's post-war sectarian politics, especially the political process that the Taif Accord initiated, reveals the significance of social practices for the resilience of sectarianism. Stated differently, the constitutional amendments affected as a result of the Taif Accord delivered repercussions for the political system of Lebanon by redefining the prerogatives of the sectarian community in the

post-war state, notwithstanding their relationship to the state. However, the way the Lebanese politicians chose to behave in the post-war era, in addition to their behaviour following every critical juncture in Lebanese politics, contributed massively to the sustenance of the sectarian order. The behavioural patterns of the political elites, which often included practices such as bargaining, intercession with the state on behalf of their supporters, the appointment of cronies to positions inside the state and carving spheres of influence inside state bureaucracies, among others, compromised the independence of state institutions. These practices, repeated thousands of times every day, became a normalised feature of the interaction within political, economic and social circles of Lebanese individuals, officials and elites. As such, the next section will explain how the practices of Lebanese elites, repeated so naturally and incessantly, contributed to the establishment of political structures, which, in turn, reinforced the political practices that nurtured them and inspired multiple transitions and pathways to crises.

Governance failures during transitions

While the Taif Accord of 1989 remains a watershed moment in Lebanese politics thanks to its establishment of a national reconciliation process terminating Lebanon's fifteen-year war, the political practices emerging in Lebanon's post-war arena are reprehensible for upending *de jure* and launching new transitions and transformations in governance matters. Here we emphasise not merely the introduction of constitutional amendments from the Taif Accord, distortions in the system of cheques and balances and the imposition of a formula to achieve parity in the parliamentary representation of Christians and Muslims, but also the political ambitions of the Lebanese president, prime minister and speaker of the house to consistently reinterpret the Taif Accord to expand the constitutional prerogatives of their office in Lebanon's Second Republic (Taif, 1989; Dabbagh et al., 1997; Leenders, 2012, pp. 128–129; Salamey, 2021a).

Since Giddens (1984, p. 25) shows that actors' social practices can define systems, which, in turn, can determine structures, we seek to explore why reconfigurations of social practices and the entry of new actors in Lebanese politics spawned shifts in the systems of governance across time. Here, we can locate three such periods. First, the post-Taif political process that lasted until the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005. During this phase, Syria, the suzerain tasked with the supervision of Lebanon's post-war recovery by the international community, intervened to broker agreements among quarrelling Lebanese elites (El-Khazen, 2003; El-Husseini, 2012). A hallmark of this era was the Lebanese post-war constitutional imbalances that incentivised Troika politics, which stressed the informal practice of bargaining and negotiations among the president, prime minister and speaker of the house. Such practices were expected to preclude gridlocks, or else invite Syrian intervention to resolve internal Lebanese matters. Second, the post-2005 process that witnessed the enfranchisement of Christian politicians, the Doha Accords and associated political practices and the upscaling of power sharing. Third, the post-October 17 uprising that bred calamitous repercussions for the state governance of multiple sectors in Lebanon.

During the first period, from 1990 to 2005, several political practices subverted the post-war Taif process (Mansour, 1992), inspiring hybridity in critical governance sectors (Stel & Naudé, 2016) and, ultimately, creating political disagreement that fuelled demands for transitions to new political understandings (Knio, 2008). Here we show that with power sharing informing most of the key decisions adopted in post-war Lebanon, the reproduction of these practices carried the potential to incubate political structures and systems that sowed the seeds for future crises (see Khattab, 2022); for example, the sovereign debt crisis of 2020. The rationale for such an analysis lies in the deeply-divided nature of Lebanese society, which, according to the consociational model of politics, hosts sect-centric actors that express their own perceptions of nationalism, possess communal vetoes that can be used against policies that collide with their communal interests and enjoy segmented autonomy within Lebanon's political system (Lijphart, 1984; Haddad, 2020; Helou, 2020; Salamey, 2021b). For example, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, which oversaw the reintegration of ex-militia members into the Lebanese security apparatuses, excluded the Shia-Muslim armed party of Hezbollah that continued operating autonomously in

South Lebanon against the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. The Taif endorsement of this formula created hybridity in Lebanon's security sector, which, in turn, embraced cohabitation with Hezbollah through the expression of the need for 'the people, the army and the resistance' in consecutive government manifestos issued after 2005. The reproduction of this understanding in Lebanese political lexicography inspired a hybridity that continues to characterise Lebanon's security sector and limit its state enforcement capacities (see Hanau Santini & Tholens, 2018; Hanau Santini, Polese, & Kevlihan, 2020; Mazzola, 2020). With Hezbollah's command of the wars against Israel in 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2006 –notwithstanding several intermittent battles – as a backdrop, multiple Lebanese parties perceive Lebanon's security dossier to be dominated by the Shia sect-centric actor of Hezbollah, which fostered feelings of insecurity among members of other sectarian communities (Helou & Mollica, 2022).

On the economic front, several practices among elites created structures that reinforced the principles of power sharing undergirding Lebanon's sectarian system. Lebanese politicians and their allies among the business class fed the mounting national debt, earned enormous profits off interest payments on treasury bonds, constructed business monopolies and encouraged investments in the real estate sector (Helou, 2022). Their interests converged in a rentier economy and in the adoption of a fixed-exchange rate – the Dollar peg – which incubated tremendous macro-economic dislocations (Baumann, 2019; Helou, 2021). With the Lebanese Lira fixed at the exchange rate of 1,507 to the US dollar from 1997 to 2019, Lebanese political elites built a consumption-oriented economy that provided little impetus for production and contributed to a persistent negative balance of trade (Baroudi, 2000; 2005; Traboulsi, 2014; Helou, 2022). This trade deficit was offset by remittances flowing home from Lebanese expats, Dollar inflows to Lebanese banks and real estate purchases (Baumann, 2019; Helou, 2021; 2022; Salamey, 2021b). As such, national growth was no clear indicator of the expansion of agricultural and industrial output, let alone a sign of a healthy balance of payments, but was overshadowed by a booming real estate sector.⁴ Moreover, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's post-war economic-reconstruction plan – oft-dubbed neoliberal for favouring the interests of the sect-centric parties of several sectarian communities – was notorious for its bank re-capitalisation measures that spawned a series of treasury-bond issuances with annual returns that stood in the range of 20 to 42.5% in the 1990s (Traboulsi, 2014, p. 27). These rounds of treasury bonds increased national debt to approximately \$100 billion by 2020 and rendered three-fifths of state expenditures debt-service payments on the resulting interest (Salti, 2019; Helou, 2021; 2022). Perhaps these structurally-inept political-economic policies persisted because 42% of the members of the board at some of Lebanon's major commercial banks were politicians whose vested interest lay in the banks lending to the Lebanese state (Chaaban, 2016; Helou, 2021).

But the convergence of the political-economic elite in post-war Lebanon forged a set of practices that incentivised monopolies (Gaspard, 2003; Wood, Boswall, & Minkara, 2020), concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, nurtured the growth of private family-holding companies (Traboulsi, 2014) and rendered the discontinuation of such economic practices unachievable (Baroudi, 2002). With these economic conditions characterising post-war Lebanon in the period 1990 to 2005, sect-centric actors, such as the Sunni Future Movement of Rafik Hariri, the Shia AMAL movement of Nabih Beri and the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party of Walid Jumblatt, among many other parties allied to Syria, developed their patron-client networks. They appointed favourites across all first-grade to fifth-grade positions in the state bureaucracy (Salloukh, 2019), including, but not limited to, the central bank governor, the CEO of Middle East Airlines, the President of the Casino Du Liban and national security apparatuses. These sect-centric parties delivered services to loyalists in exchange for their political support during rounds of parliamentary elections. However, Christian disenfranchisement from the post-war political process often marginalised Christian votes in electoral constituencies with predominantly Christian votes, as did the gerrymandering of electoral constituencies and tampering with results (Gambill, 2003). This political reality culminated in distorted electoral districts with huge imbalances in the deputy-to-voter ratios (Salloukh et al., 2015), which was considered a necessary evil to achieve the representation of Lebanon's multiple

4 Author's interview with Dan Azzi, Former CEO of Standard Chartered Bank in Lebanon, Former Harvard Fellow for Leadership and Financial Expert and Commentator on 14 November 2020.

sect-centric actors. Moreover, the first post-war round of municipal elections in 1998 introduced large municipal constituencies in cities such as Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon to provide the Future movement an electoral edge, but carved out hundreds of small municipal districts in Mount Lebanon, which is the province where Maronite-Christians can determine outcomes (Helou, 2020). Here, too, municipal councils are subject to the oversight of the ministry of interior in relation to their expenditures, which contravenes the principles of administrative decentralisation that was enshrined in the Taif Accord (see Taif 1989, III.A.4&5).

Post-2005 transitions

Driven out by mounting international pressure, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon on 26 April 2005 generated several political repercussions that influenced the course of sect-centric parties (see Jeukjian, 2014). Yet, this event delivered consequences for the political composition of Lebanon that showed early signs of a transition – peaceful or violent – to a new political landscape. The return of Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea to the Lebanese political scene implied that the sect-centric parties of both men were vying for a larger share of ministerial portfolios, government posts, administrative appointments and, most importantly, representation for the Christian community (Rowayheb, 2014; Helou, 2020). Therefore, Knio's (2008) depiction of the Shia-imbued March 8 movement (backed by Iran) as anti-Taif and the Sunni-imbued March 14 movement (sponsored by Saudi Arabia) as pro-Taif masks essential nuances in a discussion of Lebanese politics for several reasons. First, the Lebanese speaker of the house, Nabih Berri's AMAL movement, was an active participant in the post-war Taif political process but also an indispensable member of March 8. Members of AMAL assumed ministerial portfolios, staffed loyalists in positions in the civil service and nurtured a web of patron-client services to strengthen their hold on electoral constituencies (see Leenders, 2012; Cammett, 2014). Consequently, Berri's reluctance to amend the Taif order collided with Michel Aoun's objective of re-writing the post-war Taif process to increase Christian representation in the state bureaucracy and in ministerial portfolios. Second, Samir Geagea, the commander of the Lebanese Forces party, may be a supporter of Taif, but engaged in political activity to better represent members of his party in Parliament, the council of ministers and positions in the civil service. Stated differently, Christian re-enfranchisement in post-2005 Lebanese politics created the prerequisite political configurations for the amendment of the prevalent practices of the post-Taif political process. Third, the political forces seeking a reamendment of the Taif order, chiefly Michel Aoun and his ally of Hezbollah, were aiming for an expansion of their sectarian community's prerogatives in Lebanon's consociational model and not a revamping of state institutions. Here, too, Samir Geagea expressed his community's sect-specific concerns and language when he insisted on the perks of the 2018 Parliamentary electoral law, even after this law became the focal point of much criticism during the 2019 uprising in Lebanon. Here Giddens reveals that social actors' comprehension of the way to make progress in society does not make them in control of their actions.

He mentions that: 'The production or constitution of society is a skilled accomplishment of its members, but one that does not take place under conditions that are either wholly intended or wholly comprehended by them' (Giddens, 1993, p. 108).

Illustrating this point, Michel Aoun exploited opportunities to step up Christian representation inside state institutions, which reinforced his position as a sect-centric actor representing a segment of Christian supporters. In 2008, Qatar hosted a mediation conference to break an 18-month political stalemate in Beirut that culminated in an episode of violent clashes between the supporters of Hezbollah and the Future movement in Beirut on 7 May 2008. A source close to the FPM discussed Aoun's role in negotiating for increased representation of Christians in the electoral law of the 2009 Parliamentary elections during his participation in Doha (Helou, forthcoming).⁵ The outcome of Aoun's efforts resulted in the migration of specific Christian parliamentary-seats to predominantly Christian constituencies; for example, from the predominantly-Muslim quarters of Beirut to Beirut's Christian quarter of Achrafieh. This effort gerrymandered electoral constituencies to provide Christian voters a decisive vote in constituencies where Muslim voters exhibit a

5 Anonymous. Interview by this author. 2015. Beirut, (October 1).

demographic advantage (Helou, forthcoming).⁶ Moreover, the Doha Accords emphasised the principle of power sharing by granting Lebanon's political opposition – then March 8 – the constitutional third of the seats in the council of ministers.⁷ This practice deepened the fragmentation of executive authority, thereby rendering sect-centric parties holders of political vetoes against government decisions regardless of their alignment to the majority or minority parliamentary blocks. With the reproduction of power sharing across the period of 2008 to 2019, the governance of several sectors witnessed fragmentations as multiple politicians vied for shares of that sector; for example, appointments of employees, bids for favoured contractors and the capacity to make decisions.

Then, Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea endorsed – and laboured tirelessly to achieve – a proportional electoral law that reinforced sect-centric voting patterns for the 2018 Parliamentary elections (see Elghossain, 2017; Mourad & Sanchez, 2019). Therefore, the entry of new political agents in Lebanon's post-2005 scene, namely Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea, reinforced the principle of power sharing that scaled-up demands for appointments in the state bureaucracy, shares of ministerial portfolios and services to Christian provinces – in geo-sectarian terms – which were marginalised in the period 1990 to 2005. Of course, this realignment of political forces often created gridlocks that hamstrung the governance of critical sectors. For instance, the tense political relationship between Michel Aoun and Nabih Berri impinged on the energy sector, where the projects of FPM-affiliated ministers of energy were obstructed by AMAL-affiliated ministers of finance as of 2014 (Helou, forthcoming).

However, the power sharing practices undergirding sectarianism were always in need of a sound resource base to feed the demands of different sectarian communities (Khattab, 2022). Here concomitant shifts in Lebanon's geopolitical orbit culminated in simmering political-economic conditions that were reprehensible for the country's swelling economic-resource pool (see Baumann, 2019; Helou, 2021; Salamey, 2021b). Hezbollah's intervention in Syria and its consistent provocations towards GCC states contributed to diminishing financial flows to Lebanon. Such convulsive political events spelled out Lebanon's downgraded international-credit ratings, diminished foreign direct investments and difficulty in accessing financial transfers due to international-financial regulatory oversight, which resulted in a negative balance of payments as of 2011 (Helou, 2021; Salamey, 2021b). During this period, the flow of fresh funds to Lebanon was decreasing significantly, which obliged banks to distribute payments to Euro-bond holders from their existing pool of foreign reserves, thereby leading to a greater attrition of foreign currency reserves from the country (Helou, 2022). The depletion of foreign currency reserves reflected on the Lebanese-Liras' foreign-exchange rate on the market, which inspired parallel rates of trading on the market. Helou (2021, 2022) discusses the conditions that emerged on Lebanon's parallel markets following the 17 October 2019 uprising. He shows how the Lebanese central bank's effort to regulate the exchange rate on the market contributed to further distortions in currency that bred several informal practices. The absence of an effective capital control law and governance failures on the currency market have brought the foreign-exchange rate of the Lebanese Lira to approximately 100,000 to the US dollar by May 2023.

Recently, Lebanon's sovereign debt crisis of 2020 illustrated that a major downfall in the governance of critical political-economic sectors has unfolded. Yet, dissatisfaction with this new state of affairs among the citizens of Lebanon metamorphosed alternative informal modes of governance. For example, deficiencies in Lebanon's energy sector, which has drained 40% of the state's national budget over the past twenty years, has incentivised Lebanese citizens to install photo-voltaic solar-panel units on roof-tops for the generation of electricity for house-hold consumption. During this author's ethnographic research in coastal and mountainous towns and villages in the province of Mount Lebanon, conversations with dozens of citizens confirmed that these solar units are their informal coping mechanism against the collapsing state electricity sector and the regulation of private electricity providers.⁸ While the costs associated with the installation of electricity-

6 Anonymous. Interview by this author. 2015. Beirut, (October 1).

7 Constitutional Third refers to one-third plus one of seats in the council of ministers in Lebanon. Also known as the blocking third, this allows the political parties holding on to this third the ability to force the resignation of a cabinet or prevent government sessions upon resignation and absence of these members respectively.

8 Anonymous informal conversations with two-dozen solar-panel installers, Mount-Lebanon, Summer 2022.

generating solar units are quite exorbitant for citizens in the midst of a crisis, every town and village examined here contained hundreds, if not thousands of homes that have installed these units. This author's conversations with some suppliers suggest that political elites are also sponsoring, if not directly partaking in, the importation of these devices to Lebanon.⁹ Such an intervention by the political elite may be considered natural given that less than 1,000 importers are responsible for more than 90% of Lebanese imports. This alarming phenomenon can have tremendous implications for the future of the governance of several critical sectors in Lebanon, which we will discuss next.

Conclusion: remarks on transitions in post-war scenarios

Giddens' theory of structuration revealed the significance of elite practices in the dilution of the post-Taif political process and the governance failures it bred. Our application of Giddens' theory related the practices of patron-client relations, the intensification of the sect-specific discourse and the consolidation of power sharing practices for a reproduction of structures and systems, which, in turn, can elucidate the role of Lebanese elites in departing from the principles of the Taif Accords. Giddens revealed that structures emerge when the rules and resources are managed as properties of social systems, where systems are recognised as reproduced relations between actors organised as social practices (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Therefore, this reproduction of systems and structures via the social practices prevalent in a given political context implied that changes in political actors and their practices bred new transitions. Here, the entry of Michel Aoun and Samir Geagea into Lebanon's post-2005 political scene highlighted the rise of at least two new political actors with a set of sect-specific demands, concerns, and ultimately, practices. Therefore, Knio's (2008) binary description of the pro-Taif March 14 and anti-Taif March 8 movements stood on very shaky grounds for three main reasons. First, not all the political actors constituting March 8 were in support of an amendment of Taif. Second, some of Taif's cornerstones, such as the abrogation of sectarianism, the establishment of a senate and the need for administrative decentralisation, were overlooked by Taif's keen proponents between 1990 and 2005. As such, the post-war political process exhibited political practices diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Taif Accords (Mansour, 1992). Third, Giddens' concentration on social practices as the main propellant of shifts in systems and structures can explain why the entry of the Lebanese Forces Party, albeit a proponent of Taif, in post-2005 Lebanese politics contributed to amendments of the political practices that further impinged on the immediate post-Taif political process.

Giddens' theory of structuration emphasised the role of agency and its possession of practical consciousness (everything they know as social actors) that facilitates social life (Giddens, 1979, p. 5; 1983, p. 76). Here agency interacts with structures and the duality of structure to enable individuals to unconsciously produce and reproduce their social life (Giddens, & Pearson, 1989, p. 82). However, Lebanese politicians as sect-centric actors were sharply reproducing sect-specific discourse, strategies and practices, thereby identifying with state institutions and national politics on the basis of their sectarian identity. By adopting Fanar Haddad's (2020) four inter-linked levels of doctrinal, sub-national, national and transnational analyses of sectarian identity, we may safely conclude that Lebanese political actors reproduced power sharing practices to favour the interests of their sectarian community. Lebanese elites have never succeeded in achieving an over-arching sense of nationalism, let alone agreements over the efficient allocation of resources nationally (Helou, & Mollica, 2022). As such, Lebanon's political context incentivised the convergence in a group-mentality where resources, positions, shares of government positions, inter alia, were crucial for the political longevity of these groups. This may explain why sect-centric parties, such as the FPM and Hezbollah, vied for a constitutional third of the seats inside the council of ministers in every government formed after the Doha Accords of 2008. It could also explain Samir Geagea's embracement of the proportional electoral law of 2017, which reproduced sect-centric patterns of representation, thus reinforcing his sect-centric position among the Christians of Lebanon.

9 Anonymous interview with supplier of solar-panels (2022). Interview by this Author, Beirut (July 7).

However, Lebanon's political scene accommodated numerous civil society initiatives and political campaigns that diametrically opposed the strategies of Lebanon's sect-centric actors. First, student-led campaigns on university campuses have resulted in non-sect-specific or inclusive demands, such as an insistence on civil personal status laws, abolishing sectarian quotas in government positions and terminating disproportionalities in the deputy-to-voter ratios across Lebanon's electoral constituencies (one-man-one-vote), inter alia, which collided with the demands of Lebanon's sect-centric actors. The narratives and frames formulated by such movements (e.g., the Beirut Madinati campaign for the 2016 municipal elections) contrasted sharply with the sect-specific discourse of Lebanon's sect-centric actors (Rønn, 2020). Second, the rise of the 'you Stink' movement in 2015 to point out the flaws of critical governance sectors, such as landfills in the treatment of garbage disposal, underscored civil society's role in proposing viable alternatives to the policy formation of sect-centric actors (Geha, 2019a). Therefore, the cascading effect of these civil society campaigns provided tremendous impetus for the organisers of the 17 October 2019 uprising to break away from the clutches of the sect-specific discourse and strategies to call for an overhaul of Lebanon's sectarian system. But these efforts confronted several impediments as the organisers of the October 2019 uprisings reflected on the challenges of adopting inclusive strategies; for example, increasing the representation of Shia youth in the uprisings (Rønn, 2022). In fact, these considerations point to the resilience of Lebanon's sect-centric actors in commanding resources, co-opting social movements and campaigns, resorting to a sect-specific discourse to invoke fear in the hearts of their supporters (Helou & Mollica, 2022), and exploiting state institutions to foster a base of support.

As such, The reproduction of the political practices undergirding sectarianism after the 17 October uprising, the sovereign debt crisis of 2020, the Covid-19-related disruptions (Mollica, 2022), the Beirut-port explosion and the multiple crises afflicting Lebanon, renders a political-elite rebound in the governance of post-crisis Lebanon a real possibility. The electoral victory scored by most of Lebanon's entrenched political elites in the 2022 Parliamentary elections indicated their ability to mobilise resources and voters for their agenda. But Lebanon's swollen resource pool should constitute grounds for the transition towards political conditions that weaken the grip politicians have over national politics. However, the fluid market with its associated political-economic dislocations have highlighted patterns of elite resurgence. This implies that Lebanese elites are going to tap into the resources at their disposal, albeit individual or communal resources, to ensure a regeneration of their influence in society. Perhaps the exact shape and form of governance in post-crisis Lebanon remains a conjecture at best. Therefore, this issue may constitute a topic for future research. Now, we may say that unless forces external to Lebanon's sectarian system – the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and Donor Conferences – contribute to shifts in elite configurations and/or their entrenched practices, the transition to any political scenario will entail an active role for Lebanese politicians. This role may be institutionalised in state governance and/or remain part of the country's burgeoning informal sector.

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