

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*The search for national identity in postcolonial, multicommunal
states:*

the cases of Eritrea and Lebanon, 1941-1991

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the process of national identity formation in Eritrea and Lebanon, examining the different paths both societies took after the end of the European colonial/mandate regimes up until the early 1990s. Grounded in theories relating to the concepts of nationalism and national identity, a contrast-orient history approach is taken that seeks to unpack the international, regional, and domestic factors that impacted on the formation of national identity in both cases.

The creation of both countries by their respective colonial and mandate power, Italy and France, took place under different circumstances and by different means. Yet in both cases different communities, half of which were Muslim and the other half Christian, were joined under a single administration. The fact that in both Eritrea and Lebanon one of the communities had nationalist aspirations linked to the larger neighbouring political entity of co-religionists hampered the transfer of allegiances to the newly created entity and the development of a cohesive national identity in the wake of being granted self-determination.

This thesis argues that, despite their different treatment by the international community with regards to their right to self-determination, a form of *syncretistic nationalism* developed in the territorial entities created by the colonial/mandate powers in both Eritrea and Lebanon. While Lebanon was able to obtain independence from the French in 1943, Eritrea was not granted independence after the defeat of their colonial master, Italy. Instead, federation and finally annexation by Ethiopia resulted in thirty years of liberation struggle. Thus this thesis affirms the aptness of the concept of *syncretistic nationalism* for multi-communal societies while attesting to the difficulties of its development and realisation through the analysis of the process of national identity formation in Eritrea and Lebanon.

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I am confident that the views and content of all my sources (primary and secondary) are presented accurately and duly acknowledge. For any potential misrepresentations and/or analytical and factual errors I take sole responsibility, of course.

List of Abbreviations

Eritrea

BMA	-	British Military Administration
ELA	-	Eritrean Liberation Army
ELM	-	Eritrean Liberation Movement
ELF	-	Eritrean Liberation Front
ELF-GC	-	Eritrean Liberation Front - General Command
ELF-GS	-	Eritrean Liberation Front – General Secretariat
ELF-PLF	-	Eritrean Liberation Front - People’s Liberation Forces
ELF-RC	-	Eritrean Liberation Front – Revolutionary Council
ELF-SC	-	Eritrean Liberation Front – Supreme Council
EPLF	-	Eritrean People’s Liberation Front
EPRDF	-	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERA	-	Eritrean Relief Association
GPDRE	-	Government of the Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
IP	-	Independence Bloc
LPP	-	Liberal Progressive Party
MFH	-	Mahber Feqri Hager (Association for the Love of the Country)
ML	-	Muslim League
OAU	-	Organization of African Unity
OLF	-	Oromo Liberation Front
PDRY	-	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PFDJ	-	People’s Front for Democracy and Justice
TPLF	-	Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front
TU	-	Tripartite Unity
UP	-	Unionist Party

Lebanon

ADF	-	Arab Deterrent Force
AUB	-	American University of Beirut
CGTL	-	Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Libanais
LAA	-	Lebanese Arab Army
LAF	-	Lebanese Armed Forces
LNMB	-	Lebanese National Movement
LF	-	Lebanese Front /Lebanese Forces
MNF	-	Multi-National Force
NLP	-	National Liberal Party
PLA	-	Palestine Liberation Army
PLO	-	Palestine Liberation Organization
PSP	-	Progressive Socialist Party
SSNP	-	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
UAR	-	United Arab Republic
UNIFIL	-	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Note on translations and transliteration

All translations from non-English sources have been made by the author with the exception of material in Tigrinya which was kindly translated by Daniel Isaac and Brook Tesfai.

The spelling of Arabic and Tigrinya personal and place-names has been based on the most common practice used in the secondary literature. Other Arabic words have been transliterated in accordance with the standard applied by *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, while Tigrinya words have been transliterated as most commonly applied by Tigrinya native speakers.

Introduction

During a press conference in Beirut in April 1971, one of Eritrea's earliest nationalists, Woldeab Woldemariam, noted that aside from the struggle for self-determination and liberation from Ethiopian control, the Eritrean people still had to overcome religious and regional divisions and to develop a cohesive national identity in order to achieve complete national unity. With regards to this task, he pointed out the similarity between Eritrea and the country where the press conference was held, Lebanon:

Some one [*sic*] has called Eritrea 'The Lebanon of East-Africa'. I think the comparison arised [*sic*] not only from the similarity of the mountainous terren [*sic*] of the two countries, but also and especially from the similarity of the religious, social, cultural, traditional and even radical formation of their respective populations. In fact, as in the case of the Lebanese Communities, the Eritrean population is divided into equal number of Christians and Moslems and each Community enjoys its own culture, traditions and social system. As the Lebanese Communities did in the past, the Eritrean communities speak two different languages. [...] No one better than our Lebanese brothers can fully understand the immense difficulties which any one [*sic*] who takes upon himself the task of creating a nation out of such diversity of races, languages, traditions, social systems and cultures can face.¹

Eritrea and Lebanon indeed displaced remarkable similarities in the evolution of their national identity formation. However, while Lebanon was able to obtain independence from the French in 1943 as European control over former overseas territories ceased, Eritrea had to wait another 50 years. In fact Eritrea became the only case in which independence was not granted after the defeat of their colonial master, Italy, in the Second World War. Instead Eritrea was put under British Military Administration for ten years before being federated with, and finally annexed by Ethiopia in 1962. It was only after thirty years of liberation struggle, commonly referred to as 'Africa's Longest War'², that Eritrea officially achieved national independence after a referendum in 1993. Despite this decisive difference between Lebanon and Eritrea, both countries

¹ RDC, Speech 237/05453, 'Statement made by Mr. Woldeab Woldemariam in his Press Conference in Beirut' 15.04.1971, p. 3.

² See for example David Pool, *Eritrea – Africa's Longest War* (London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1979).

went through the process of developing a cohesive national identity referring to the territorial entity created by the European colonial powers, within which independence was to be achieved and/or maintained. Woldemariam's statement encapsulates the main problem that both countries faced: the existence of opposed nationalist aspirations, largely linked to the existing Christian/Muslim dichotomy. As he emphasized in a 1983 interview by stating 'I am not a Christian, not a highlander; I am an Eritrean!'³, it was the elevation of allegiance to the territorial entity above other forms of identification such as religious or regional affiliation that was key to achieving an overarching and inclusive national identity.

This thesis looks at the process of developing an overarching and inclusive national identity in Eritrea and Lebanon. It examines the different circumstances after the end of European colonialism and how the different treatment by the international community affected the process of national identity formation. It then analyses the changing internal and external circumstances in both countries and the extent to which they impacted the development of national identity, focusing on the role of discourse and political parties, the role of civil war and violence, and the role of education.

This thesis is a comparative study of national identity formation in Eritrea and Lebanon. The cases of Eritrea and Lebanon were chosen for comparison due to their similarities with regards to their size, multi-communal make-up, Muslim/Christian dichotomy, civil war experience and international geostrategic importance. What makes the comparison even more interesting is the stark contrast between the treatments of both countries by the international community, particularly with regards to support of their right to self-determination and independence.

In both cases, the process of national identity formation was rooted in a similar context, namely that of colonial or mandate experience that not only imposed a new

³ RDC, Bio/265/06167, 'Transcripts: WoldeAb and Labor Movement', Interviews conducted at RICE, Rome, April 1983, by Tom Killion and Arefaine Berhane, Part B.

territorial shape for identification, but also impacted the socio-economic make-up of the population in these territories. At the same time, a sense of national identity corresponding to the newly created territorial entities was not nurtured in the state-building ventures in Eritrea and Lebanon, which left the countries divided between communities with different nationalist aspirations. Divisions largely mirrored the Muslim/Christian dichotomy, and the nationalist aspirations of one side were linked to the larger neighbouring political entity of co-religionists that were raising irredentist claims to the territories. In both cases, reconciliation was sought through a system of power-sharing. However, in the case of Eritrea the possibility of developing an overarching national identity under such system was cut short by Ethiopian annexation of the territory, which resulted in the country experiencing protracted colonialism and recourse to the colonial period as reference point for national identification and claims for self-determination. Therefore, while with the Ethiopian annexation Eritrea became subject to another form of colonialism, albeit by a third world country, the term 'post-colonial' in the title of this study refers in both cases to the period after the end of European control.

Aside from the creation by foreign powers and the multi-communal fabric of society common to former colonial and mandate states, regional and superpower interests contributed to the process of national identity formation in both cases. Furthermore, the geostrategic position of both territories made them relevant in the Cold War considerations of the rival superpowers, and the history of the formation of national identity in both Eritrea and Lebanon is, to a certain extent, linked to Arabism and the regional impact of the Arab-Israeli conflicts.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the process of forming a transcending national identity could not be considered a completed process in either case. Yet, despite political splits within the liberation movement in Eritrea, a form of national identity

evolved that has often been described as ‘unity in diversity’⁴ since it aimed to include all of the various communities in the territory. It would, however, still have to prove itself as genuine and stable in an independent state. In Lebanon, the attempt to create such ‘unity in diversity’ resulted in the development of both a nation and a national awareness, yet it has often been described as a rather ‘sceptical’⁵ or ‘confusing and confused nation’⁶ since adherence to the state was never able to supersede communal allegiances.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this comparative study is grounded in theories relating to the concepts of nationalism and national identity. After a definition of the term ‘multi-communal states’ as used in the title and throughout the thesis, the most important strands relating to the concepts of nationalism and national identity and attempts at defining them will be presented in the following. Finally, the concept of *syncretistic nationalism* that is not only considered most apt in the context of multi-communal societies from an academic perspective, but also appears closest to describe the attempts at fostering a cohesive national identity in both countries, will be introduced. This concept will serve as analytic framework throughout this comparative study.

Multi-communal states

A vast variety of terms can be found in the literature that describe the heterogeneous make-up of Eritrea and Lebanon: ‘multi-ethnic states’, ‘multi-national states’, ‘diverse societies’ or, referring specifically to the conflict potential of such states/societies,

⁴ See e.g. Alemseged Tesfai, ‘Diversity, Identity and Unity in Eritrea: A View from Inside’, paper presented at the “Identity and Conflict in Africa” conference, University of Leeds, September 1997.

⁵ Theodor Hanf, *E pluribus unum? Lebanese opinions and attitudes on coexistence* (Byblos: International Centre for Human Sciences, 2007), p. 5.

⁶ Hanna Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), p. 10.

‘divided societies’. Inspired by economic theory approaches, de la Croix defines the term diverse society as ‘one in which there are different types of households; types reflect ideology, culture or ethnicity.’⁷ This certainly mirrors what all the various terms being used try to express: that people with different backgrounds - whether social, religious, or ethnic - are living together in one society, usually represented by a state apparatus and governmental institutions. Hanf opts for the term ‘communities’, defining them, ‘[i]n keeping with the most widely accepted usage in the literature’, as ‘all “peoples”, “national groups”, cultural groups, ethnic, religious or language groups within a state that form “cultural groups for themselves”.’⁸ The aspect of forming groups ‘for themselves’ refers to the important element of differentiation, which means that members distinguish themselves from ‘the others’, those labelled as ‘strangers’, and ‘the different’.⁹ A state composed of several such communities constitutes a ‘multi-communal state’. In accordance with Hanf, and since ‘communities’ appears to represent the term with the most general and inclusive character, it has been chosen for the purpose of this study.

Nations and Nationalism

While it is undeniable that ideological movements based on *nationalism*, the *nation*, and *national identity* have proved to be among the most important and powerful forces in modern times, ‘plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre.’¹⁰ This is not because of a lack of debate surrounding the concepts: on the contrary, these phenomena have been the subject of research by a huge number of political theorists, historians,

⁷ David De la Croix, ‘Education Funding and the Sustainability of Diverse Societies’, in: Theodor Hanf (ed.), *The Political Function of Education in Deeply Divided Societies* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012), p. 321.

⁸ Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), p. 21.

⁹ Peggy Hoyle, ‘The Eritrean National Identity: A Case Study’, *North Carolina Journal of International Law and Commercial Regulation*, 24:2 (1999), p. 392.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), p. 3.

anthropologists and social scientists alike. The vast amount of literature dealing with the subject, and the use of different terminologies to often describe the same things, has contributed to the blurring of concepts.

The roots of the concept of *nation* can be traced back to the end of the major empires in Europe when large multi-communal states disintegrated into smaller units of *nation-states*; these new units then started ‘exporting’ the concept to other parts of the world in their attempts to build new empires overseas through colonization. The *nationalism* that developed in colonial states has often been described as an anti-colonial movement, however, it was based on the concept of *nation* and national sentiments ‘imported’ by the colonial powers and conveyed to the colonized people through various means.¹¹

At the centre of the theoretical discussions on *nationalism* are two opposing schools of thought, the primordialist and the modernist, each offering different explanations for the roots of *nations*. An understanding of how *nations* are formed is essential in order to define the term *nationalism*. For the primordialist school they were natural units that people were divided into, and ‘[...] each nation that has not yet manifested itself is only awaiting the appropriate leader, or circumstances, to reawaken’.¹² The modernist school on the other hand stressed that *nations* are not natural units but rather were invented or imagined in a modern context. They came about as a result of the growth of industrialization and the socio-economic developments this brought with it. As such, the early modernists considered *nations* as something ‘evolutionary’ since they were ‘inevitable consequences of the revolutions that constituted modernity.’¹³ Benedict Anderson specifically points to the role of print

¹¹ Bill Ashcroft/ Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key concepts in post-colonial studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 154.

¹² Dominique Jacquin-Berdal, *Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Horn of Africa: A Critique of the Ethnic Interpretation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), pp. 8/9.

¹³ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 21.

capitalism that not only promoted the development of vernacular languages but also allowed the masses access to information. The possibility of sharing with others without direct contact advanced what he called ‘imagined communities’. The use of the term ‘imagined’ is meant to have a positive connotation and was coined by Anderson, as he explains, ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’¹⁴ This communion makes the members of the political community conceive the nation as ‘a deep, horizontal comradeship’ which ultimately creates a bond strong enough that people would ‘willingly [...] die for such limited imaginings.’¹⁵ The limitedness of the imagined nation also means that it ‘has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations.’¹⁶ This theory constitutes a much more positive understanding of the nation than that promoted by Ernest Gellner earlier. The term ‘invented’ as used by him already implies a more artificial construction. In fact, he propounded the view that modern times require a political and a national unit to be congruent, and to this end a nation would be ‘fabricated’ by inventing previously non-existing traditions or cultural traits.¹⁷

Closely linked to the primordialist and modernist schools are the concepts of *civic* and *ethnic* nationalism. With the emotional appeal of nationalist sentiments moving into the centre of interest of most theorists, the concept of *ethnicity* was introduced in an attempt to ‘reconcile [...] modernist understanding of nationalism (as political consciousness) with [...] primordial conception of nationalism (as a cultural sentiment)’.¹⁸ Anthony D. Smith argues that non-Western models of nationalism are often based on a rather *ethnic* conception, meaning that the community of birth and

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson (2006), p.6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 56.

¹⁸ Dominique Jacquin-Berdal (2002), p. 18.

native culture are strongly highlighted.¹⁹ Yet the concept of *ethnicity* appears no less contentious than those of the *nation* and *nationalism*. Jaquin-Berdal noted that in the colonial context ethnic identities were modern creations brought about by the colonial powers, just as with the concept of *nationalism* itself.²⁰ As such they can hardly serve as the prerequisite for a modern *nation*. Opposing the concept of *ethnic nations* is that of *civic nations*. This refers back to the voluntaristic approach that had already been presented by early thinkers such as Renan, for whom *nations* were modern creations and primordial rights ‘a very great error’.²¹ The voluntaristic concept suggests that nations are based on the individual’s decision, what Renan has described as ‘a daily plebiscite’.²² Whatever it is that nations form around, without the constant approval of its members it would be impossible for them to survive.

The aspect of the voluntaristic nature of *nationalism* is of specific importance when looking at post-colonial, multi-communal states. Firstly, basing *nationalism* and *national identity* on the idea of individuals identifying themselves with the *nation* appears to be a solution on ‘how to facilitate coexistence between groups with different origins, different religious convictions and languages and, in consequence, different self-perceptions’.²³ Secondly, it signifies that a *nation* can be created where a *state* exists already. A *state* has to be understood as the institutions holding the monopoly of power or, as Gellner formulated it, ‘that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order’ within a demarcated territory.²⁴ In cases such as Eritrea and Lebanon, these institutions and the demarcation of the territory were established by the colonial and mandate powers.

By elaborating on the differences between the concepts of *nation* and *ethnie*,

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 11.

²⁰ Dominique Jaquin-Berdal (2002), p. 57ff.

²¹ Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, in: Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 13.

²² Ibid., p. 19.

²³ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 7.

²⁴ Ernest Gellner (1983), p. 4.

Smith affirms that *ethnic identities* can exist without being resident in the territorial ‘homeland’ while the *nation* has to refer to a territorial unit.²⁵ In fact, the understanding of *nations* being territorial political communities was the main assumption made by theorists of *nation-building* which relied heavily on the Western model of *nation-states*. The overriding allegiance of the citizens to the latter was considered essential ‘because it gave form and substance to the ideals of democratic civic participation.’²⁶ According to Smith, the Western model has produced something of an anomaly in Africa: ‘a *state* which aims to turn itself into a *nation*, and a set of old ethnic communities and nations aspiring, it is hoped, to become one new nation.’²⁷ Yet societies composed of different *ethnies* can form a nation within a defined and recognized territory. The concept of such *territorial nationalism* is closely linked to the idea of a *civic* nation and is of special relevance for the development of nationalism in the (post-) colonial context. It was the colonial powers that ‘for the first time defined a *territorial space* for the interaction and loyalty of the included populations’²⁸; local nationalism that developed during the period of colonial rule related to this *territorial space* and in many colonies emerged from the Westernized indigenous intelligentsia. The propagated nation was to be imagined within the boundaries and institutions set by colonialism or the mandate system. Therefore, Bereketeab asserts, ‘colonial societies cannot be other than civic nations because, firstly they constitute aggregation of different ethnic collectives, and secondly their common identity is contingent on the territorialisation of their homeland and the acceptance of it as the creation of colonialism.’²⁹

In that sense, *nationalism* developed in the colonial context basically constitutes the opposite of what was considered the standard *nation-state* in the West, one that was

²⁵ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 40.

²⁶ See Anthony D. Smith (1998), p. 20.

²⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *State and Nation in the Third World: The Western State and African Nationalism* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), p. 124/125.

²⁸ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 107.

²⁹ Redie Bereketeab, ‘Supra-Ethnic Nationalism: The case of Eritrea’, *African Sociological Review* 6:2 (2002), p. 148.

based on a homogenous entity. As Hobsbawm asserts, '[b]oth were typically unificatory as well as emancipatory'³⁰; yet the question remains of how to reconcile all the communities in the territory thus enabling their identification with the territorial entity without being deprived of the communal identity which they are attached to by cultural sentiments. Some theorists such as Smith and Comaroff/Stern point out that the distinction between the two forms of nation, *civic* and *ethnic*, is not always an easy or useful marker since nationalism usually reveals elements of both forms.³¹ A *nation* might be 'invented' or 'imagined' in a modern context but could be based on primordial histories, concepts, and traditions and, as such, cannot be considered as simply being constructed but it could rather be both at the same time. Accordingly, collective identities in a colonial context are defined in response to external forces and should be considered an 'interplay of Western ideals and forms with indigenous structures and cultures.'³² In fact, Smith identifies two ways to create civic, territorial nations in a colonial setting: the 'dominant *ethnie*' model and the supra-ethnic 'political culture' model. The first model establishes the national identity of the new state around the historic culture of the 'core ethnic community'³³ and, while other minority communities may still prosper, the new state integrates the culture of the core community into a modern state. Hanf emphasizes that this concept is only possible in states where this 'core community' forms a clear and overwhelming majority or where power is controlled by use of violence. Yet, as he rightfully notes: '[...] not even massive use of violence can guarantee stability: it often generates counter-violence.'³⁴ The second model comes into use when the new state does not have an acknowledged core *ethnie*

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³¹ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 12.

³² Anthony D. Smith (1983), p. 122. See also John L. Comaroff/Paul C. Stern, 'New Perspectives on Nationalism and War', in: John L. Comaroff/Paul C. Stern (eds.), *Perspectives on Nationalism and War* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1995), p. 5.

³³ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 110.

³⁴ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 27.

but consists of a number of either equal or rival *ethnies* as in multi-communal states such as Eritrea and Lebanon. In such cases, the supra-ethnic ‘political culture’ model aims to create common civic values as the basis for a new, territorial national identity instead of prioritizing any of the communities within the territory.³⁵ However, in this model struggles may ensue between the various communities and lead to conflict, particularly when communal identities are directed against each other and one attempts to overemphasize its own identity over the others. Hanf notes that this can be fostered by the process of modernization that can affect communities to different degrees or at different times which intensifies ‘the sense of economic and symbolic cultural deprivation and thus generate[s] conflicts between communities.’³⁶

He asserts that a promising way to reconcile diverse communities and to regulate conflict over domination in multi-communal states is offered by the concept of *syncretistic nationalism*, which ‘regards existing, organic communities as the building blocks of a transcending nation, aiming neither for unity nor for diversity but for unity in diversity.’³⁷ This concept describes the coexistence of both forms of identities, ethnic and civic, with the civic form overarching the ethnic one. Hanf identifies two forms of arrangement within this concept, which differ regarding the articulation of the various communities. In the first case, communal identities are institutionalized and articulated politically ‘though channelled within a federation of communities that constitute a transcending, multifarious nation.’³⁸ The second form though aims at the de-politicization of communal identities and ‘institutionalizes and encourages cultural diversity in order to prevent symbolic cultural deprivation, thereby facilitating the political unity of the state.’³⁹ While the first form appears to be rather similar to Smith’s

³⁵ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 112.

³⁶ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 25.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁹ Ibid.

supra-ethnic political culture, the second form has to be considered as the potentially more successful model since it is exactly the depoliticizing of cultural cleavages that appears to reduce inter-communal conflict and facilitate identification with a common state.

The concept of *syncretistic nationalism* is important in the cases of Eritrea and Lebanon since it reflects how, in both countries, attempts were made to regulate the coexistence of the various communities in order to develop a transcending national identity. Yet in Lebanon the first form was institutionalized from early on through the 1926 constitution, while in the case of Eritrea the second form developed later, after being subjected to a nationalist approach by Ethiopia that aimed to impose the culture and identity of one ethnic group (Amhara) on all territories within the boundaries of Ethiopia.

National Identity

Related to the above discussed concepts of *nation* and *nationalism* is the collective identity related to them - *national identity* - which Anthony D. Smith has described as 'perhaps the most fundamental and inclusive'.⁴⁰

Identity in general has to be understood as a 'relational term' because it 'defines the relationship between two or more related entities in a manner that asserts a sameness or equality'.⁴¹ While individual identities refer to certain social characteristics (age, class, sex) where the 'object of identification is [...] a person, and the subject is the other people',⁴² collective identities have to be seen in relation to systems. Both forms of identity though, are defined from the outside and can overlap. Since people change throughout their lives, so do their identities, whether on a personal, social or national

⁴⁰ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 143.

⁴¹ Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 11.

⁴² Ibid., p. 16.

level. Hence, identities can never be considered as static or unchangeable but, according to Weber, '[i]n the sense of those using the term at a given time, the concept undoubtedly [*sic*] means, above all, that *it is proper* to expect from certain groups a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups.'⁴³ In fact, the influence of others is essential in determining a person's affiliation to a given group: 'the influence of those about him [...] who try to make him one of them; together with the influence of those on the other side, who do their best to exclude him.'⁴⁴ This means to be able to identify myself with the 'us' of the nation, there always needs to be a 'them', some others that I can identify myself as being different from. At the same time, as Billing pointed out, this implies 'a whole way of thinking about the world', namely 'the naturalness of the world of nations, divided into separate homelands.'⁴⁵

Furthermore, the aspect of continuity also plays a decisive role in the emotional attachment to the *nation*. According to Anthony D. Smith, in addition to the existence of a historic territory, common myths and historical memories are just as important to the development of a national identity as the legal-political community and the legal-political equality of its members.⁴⁶ The historical memories and myths are of specific relevance since their relation to the historic territory is what creates an emotional attachment to the latter. These memories can relate to common suffering or joy⁴⁷ or find expression in traditions and symbols generating what Smith calls 'cultural kinship'.⁴⁸ Anderson has also pointed out the importance of shared symbols such as the map, singing of national songs, and museums in visualizing the common history.⁴⁹ While certain rituals or occasions remind the members of a *nation* of their link to the other members of the *nation* and emphasize what unites them, the daily 'flagging' of the

⁴³ Sam Whimster (ed.), *the essential Weber: a reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 146.

⁴⁴ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 21.

⁴⁵ Michael Billing, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p. 61.

⁴⁶ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', p. 19.

⁴⁸ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 110.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson (2006), p. 167ff.

homeland through 'banal words, jingling in the ears of the citizens, or passing before their eyes' also plays a decisive role as a pervasive reminder.⁵⁰

Two aspects appear of great importance with regard to *national identity*: the temporality of social reality and the acceptance of the existence of a number of identities that may be layered according to varying hierarchies.⁵¹ Smith describes the existence of various layers of identity as multiple identities. Maalouf claims that a person can actually feel as though s/he belongs to more than one nation which, together with all the other layers of identity, would make up the individual identity of that person.⁵² Wodak also notes the fact that 'individuals as well as collective groups such as nations are in many respects hybrids of identity' since the 'members of any *Staatsnation* are enculturated in many heterogeneous and often conflicting regional, supranational, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, sexual, political and otherwise defined 'we'-identities.'⁵³ Consequently, the concept of *national identity* may have different meanings for each person experiencing that allegiance. Such different interpretations may depend on or be formed by various factors, the existing layers of other identities (e.g. tribal, ethnolinguistic, sectarian), but should not make any form of *national identity* awareness less valid than another. In the end, every person is composed of multiple identities, often related to the roles played in society (familial, territorial, religious, class, gender).⁵⁴ Since most of them are overlapping, none of them alone can serve as the basis for a lasting collective identity. However, Smith stresses the connection between religious and ethnic identities and how these two forms of identity often overlap and strengthen each other and 'singly or together [...] mobilize and sustain

⁵⁰ Michael Billing (1995), p. 93.

⁵¹ See Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', in: Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

⁵² Amin Maalouf, *On identity*, (London: The Harvill Press, 2000), p. 3.

⁵³ Ruth Wodak et al. (1999), p. 11.

⁵⁴ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 4.

strong communities.’⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the feeling of belonging to the group inhabiting a clearly demarcated territory, the imagining oneself as part of a community within these boundaries, still allows for sub-identities (e.g. religious, ethnic, etc.) to exist. In fact, the multidimensional character of the concept ‘has made national identity such a flexible and persistent force in modern life and politics, and allowed it to combine effectively with other powerful ideologies and movements without losing its character’.⁵⁶ The fact that sub-identities do not prevent an identity on a national level, but can be combined to form such an overarching identity, points to the concept of *syncretistic nationalism* as a successful model for multi-communal territories such as Eritrea and Lebanon.

Chapter Structure

The thesis is structured thematically but will follow a chronological order within the chapters. This permits specific features of both cases with regard to the development of national identity to be treated comparatively. Both cases are analysed in a parallel manner in each chapter, which helps to draw out similarities and/or differences.

Chapter One focuses on the situation of the territories prior to coming under control of European powers and how they were shaped as territorial states by the colonial/mandate power. An examination of this period is essential to understand the legacies that affected the process of national identity formation after the end of European domination. This chapter argues that it was due to the different pre-colonial circumstances and external factors that opposing nationalist aspirations developed in the territories that were to be joined into the territorial state of Lebanon, while in Eritrea nationalist aspirations only started to develop during the colonial period and their formulation only became possible under the British Military Administration. Yet, they

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

displayed a similar dichotomy, namely that of religious divisions.

Chapter Two looks at the developments towards the end of the colonial and mandate period. It highlights that events in Eritrea were remarkably similar to pre-mandate Lebanon in terms of the articulation of opposing nationalist aspirations facing the prospect of self-determination and independence. Despite the 50 years of common colonial experience, the communities were not able to reconcile and the decision on the future of the country was ultimately based on the interests of the international powers involved. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the opposing camps were able to reconcile long enough to do away with foreign domination. That this reconciliation was temporary and did not solve the main issues of contention will be shown in the analysis of the events following independence up until the end of the civil war. The examination of the period from the end of European domination up until the beginning of the 1990s will also serve as the historical context for the following chapters.

Chapter Three analysis the differing views, ideas, and problems concerning national identity and its relation to the territorial entity created by the colonial/mandate powers that found expression in the intellectual discourse in both Eritrea and Lebanon. While the discourse in both cases initially largely mirrored the existing divide concerning the identity of the country, it will be argued here that a more civic approach, hinting at the concept of *syncretistic nationalism*, developed amidst the changing environment in Eritrea and Lebanon. Experiencing annexation and disintegration through civil conflict, the civic approach appeared to be the only way to maintain territorial integrity and claim self-determination.

Chapter Four looks at political parties in both territories and examines how they initially mainly reflected and/or promoted the opposed nationalist aspirations linked to the differing interpretations of the identity of the country. However, these aspirations were supported by members of the old and new elites mainly to further their own

interests. The existence of multi-communal and secular parties in both countries on the other hand affirms the possibility for a *syncretistic nationalism* to be developed and implemented; yet it was almost impossible to sustain in a climate of politicized religious affiliation. It will be argued that a development towards accommodation took place in both countries which was interrupted by the increasingly militarized environment and the experience of annexation, violence and (civil) war.

Chapter Five focuses on the impact of violence and civil war on the development of national identity. Both countries went through a prolonged period of conflict. Eritrea was fighting for independence over a period of thirty years during which it also twice witnessed civil conflict; Lebanon was embroiled in a fifteen-year civil war. This chapter shows how the experience of civil conflict revived old cleavages and/or created new ones amongst the involved parties. However, it will be argued that a common will to co-exist amongst the civilian population was actually strengthened through the experience of conflict making post-conflict accommodation and the implementation of an overarching national identity possible.

Chapter Six discusses the impact of external actors on the politics of both countries and evaluates how this influenced existing forms of identity or identity formation. It focuses on the influence of the US and Soviet Union on the one hand, and the Arab world and Israel on the other. This chapter concludes that the superpowers and Cold War politics had a degree of influence on the consolidation of national identity in both countries. In Eritrea, the superpowers consistently disregarded Eritrean aspirations for self-determination, causing major negative perceptions of the US and the USSR by Eritreans. In Lebanon the active involvement of the US and the interests and presence of superpower proxies on Lebanese territory constituted a further divisive aspect in the country. The role and influence of the Arab world was largely linked to the politics of alliance with the superpowers in both cases.

Chapter Seven analyses the role of education commonly considered crucial in nurturing social cohesion and a civic national identity. It demonstrates how in both cases the means of education were constantly manipulated by the communities and/or parties in power and no real overarching concept of national identity was ever promoted. Therefore, the impact of education was rather detrimental to the development of a cohesive national identity in both cases.

Drawing upon the experiences of Eritrea and Lebanon of national identity formation this thesis shows the difficulties of developing a concept of syncretistic nationalism in multi-communal states. What sounds promising as an academic concept turns out to be a highly vulnerable notion in the face of a large number of internal and external factors and dynamics that often lie beyond the control of the states/societies in question. Furthermore, the transfer of loyalty and sense of belonging to an overarching civic identity remains problematic not least since emotions and sentiments can hardly be controlled by the state. When an adjacent country or region appears to already offer a concept of identity that part of the population feels bound to or refers to for the definition of its own identity, as was the case for both Eritrea and Lebanon, this exercise is rendered even more difficult.

Arguments

This thesis advances two sets of arguments. The first set relates to nationalism and national identity. Here it will be argued that in both Eritrea and Lebanon a development towards *syncretistic nationalism* was the result of the various communities being placed under a single administration, making them subject to the same institutions for the first time. This led to the emergence of a public culture shared by all communities which, in turn, became the basis for a civic rather than an ethnic nationalism. The second set of arguments revolves around the differences in the formation of national identity between

Eritrea and Lebanon. Here it will be posited that three key factors explain the different evolution of *syncretistic nationalism*: the length of the struggle for independence, the nature of the political systems introduced by the colonial powers, the role of the communities themselves, and the treatment by regional as well as international actors. Lebanon's consociational democratic system introduced by the French institutionalised pre-mandate representation which was based on sectarian affiliations. This was subsequently consolidated throughout the years of independence and was often cited as a positive example of power-sharing before the country descended into its 15-year long civil war in 1975. Although Lebanon's political system did not hinder the development of a civic national identity it never superseded the interests of the various communities and more specifically their leaders. In Eritrea, in comparison, traditional forms of representation were partly based on democratic principles and adapted with modernization. This could have facilitated the development of an inclusive and cohesive national identity yet nationalist aspirations of the communities differed decisively by the end of the colonial period. With respect to the treatment of both countries on a regional and international level, this made a decisive impact on the development of the self-awareness of communities. Most emerging post-colonial states faced a similar challenge of transforming a multi-communal society into a nation and self-determination was sought through claims to nationhood rather than ethnic claims. Yet, Eritrea was put under the control of another African country, Ethiopia, which had 'not itself taken even the most rudimentary steps toward unified national development.'⁵⁷ While union had been aspired to by one group of Eritrean nationalists, suppressive Ethiopian policies soon undermined Eritrean autonomous institutions and culminated in annexation. The fact that the right to self-determination was henceforth constantly denied by both regional actors and the international community, in addition to the repressive policies of

⁵⁷ Dan Connell, 'The Birth of the Eritrean Nation', *Horn of Africa* 3:1 (1980), p. 16.

the Ethiopian regime inside Eritrea, served as a unifying factor with the ability to pull together all communities into one cohesive nation. In Lebanon, sovereignty was only ever questioned externally by Syria; internally, however, varying alliances of the different communities contributed to keeping different interpretations of Lebanese national identity on the communal level alive and all attempts at conflict resolution were largely shaped by the relationship between internal and external (regional and international) elites. Hence, this thesis argues that these internal and external factors were crucial in the emergence of national identity.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis is a contrast-oriented comparative history based on empirical research. The scientific method of the comparative approach in historical research generally serves to compare historical processes across times and places by examining similarities and differences. Skocpol and Somers differentiate between three logics in using comparative history, namely the macro-causal analysis, the parallel demonstration of history and the contrast-oriented approach. While the first two are mainly concerned with proving and developing theoretical hypotheses and generalizations, the main importance of the contrast-oriented approach is ‘that the historical integrity of each case as a whole is carefully respected.’⁵⁸ In order to preserve this historical integrity, the unique features of each case are brought out and their impact on the general social process being researched analysed. The main aim is to identify contrasts between the cases being compared and ‘such contrasts are developed with the aid of references to broad themes or orienting questions or ideal-type concepts.’⁵⁹ While this kind of comparative approach may implicitly confirm or derive theoretical explanations, this is not its main

⁵⁸ Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, ‘The uses of comparative history in macrosocial inquiry’, in: Skocpol, Theda, *Social revolutions in the modern world* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 75.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

goal. It rather helps sharpen the understanding of different contexts and underlines, through emphasizing the contrasts between and among the cases, the uniqueness of each.⁶⁰ For this study, the themes of nationalism and national identity have been introduced as broad themes for the analysis, and the concept of *syncretic nationalism* as the ideal-type concept of how to facilitate the development of an overarching identity in Eritrea and Lebanon, both territorial states with a multi-communal society. The orienting questions as presented above relate to these broad themes and the ideal-type concept.

The empirical research underlying this thesis draws upon a broad base of primary source material including political memoirs, official documents, pamphlets, and archival material collected from repositories in Eritrea, Lebanon, the UK, Germany and France. These written primary sources have been supplemented with in-depth interviews with people who witnessed the developments in Eritrea as well as questionnaires (in both English and Arabic) with a number of Lebanese. These ‘eye-witness’ accounts have to be considered as supplementing the sources mentioned above because of their limited number. Furthermore, the drawbacks of interviews and questionnaires should not be forgotten, specifically with regard to qualitative interviews and questionnaires that cover events in the rather distant past. In the case of the Eritrean informants, the interviews have to be considered as ‘life story interviews’, even though the focus was on specific events and aspects that took place mainly during the Eritrean struggle for independence.⁶¹ Such interviews always carry the danger of ‘retrospective bias’ since the person interviewed always ‘reconstructs memories through his or her

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶¹ On life-story interviews and their analysis see Robert Atkinson, ‘Chapter 6: The Life Story Interview’, in: Jaber F. Gubrim/ James A Holstein, *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 121 – 140.

present construct system.⁶² While interviews help to uncover the meaning behind the facts, they often represent the informant's subjective interpretation of the meaning of events and developments. The same is true for qualitative questionnaires, although they allow for a better comparison since the questions are always the same for all informants. The interview has to be considered rather open-ended since new questions may arise during the interview and conversations take different turns depending on the person interviewed and the quality of the relationship with the interviewer. Bearing the disadvantages of interviews and questionnaires in mind they are, nonetheless, recognized as an important part of oral history and consequently have been chosen to supplement written sources for this study.

Literature Review

The literature dealing with the question of nationalism and national identity in both countries is vast. In the case of Lebanon this is due to the fact that the country became a paradigmatic model for scholars dealing with questions of consociationalism and conflict regulation in multi-communal states. In this regard, Lebanon has also been used in comparative studies a number of times.⁶³ Eritrea, however, has largely been studied with a focus on its long struggle for independence, and the few existing comparative accounts also focus on this aspect of its history.⁶⁴ The following review will highlight the main existing strands of literature on nationalism in Eritrea and Lebanon and present some of the scholarly works.

⁶² Stephen K. Tagg, 'Life Story Interviews and Their Interpretation', in: Brenner, Michael/ Brown, Jennifer/ Canter, David, *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches* (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1985), p. 165.

⁶³ See e.g. Michael Kerr, *Imposing Power-Sharing: Conflict and Coexistence in Northern Ireland and Lebanon* (Dublin/ Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2005) or David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, *The Politics of Pluralism: A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana* (New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1975).

⁶⁴ See e.g. Dan Connell, *Rethinking Revolution: New Strategies for Democracy and Social Justice. The Experiences of Eritrea, South Africa, Palestine and Nicaragua* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2002) or Awet T. Weldemichael, *The Eritrean and East Timorese Liberation Movements: Toward a Comparative Study of their Grand Strategies*, (unpublished thesis, University of California, 2008).

Eritrea

For a long time the topic of Eritrean nationalism constituted probably one of the most contested issues concerning the Horn of Africa. This relates back to the significant divergence of historical interpretations by both Ethiopian and Eritrean nationalists. While the official Ethiopian discourse was for a long time backed up by scholarly support, the Eritrean nationalist argumentation only found international scholarly support in the late 1970s.

The ‘Ethiopianist’, or ‘Greater Ethiopia’, school propounded the historic unity of Ethiopia and put great emphasis on pre-colonial links while denying the development of a distinct Eritrean identity during the European colonial period and throughout the decades of Eritrean struggle for self-determination. The thesis of ‘Greater Ethiopia’, the existence of a historically rooted unity of all the communities within the boundaries of Ethiopia, was first proposed by Donald N. Levine. In his 1974 study *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* he presents Eritrea as ‘the portion of Ethiopian territory the Italians called Eritrea’ which for a short period in history was disconnected from the rest of Ethiopia.⁶⁵ That specifically the inhabitants of the Eritrean plateau never ceased identifying themselves with Ethiopia was shown, according to Levine, in their ‘strong support’ for the proposal of federation of the former Italian colony with Ethiopia in 1952.⁶⁶ Later proponents following Levine’s thesis also emphasised the organic unity of Ethiopia and its rootedness in history, and mainly blamed external Muslim forces and misgovernment by the Ethiopian regime for the emergence of Eritrean armed opposition. Christopher Clapham notes the ‘imperial regime’s inability to construct linkages with regional political interests’ which in Eritrea led to the forceful abolition of

⁶⁵ Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, 2nd edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. xix.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

the local government and full incorporation into the Ethiopian empire.⁶⁷ While he grants that this policy, and later the violence exerted by the Dergue, exacerbated conflicts, he asserts that it was rather ‘the age-old tensions between centre and periphery in the Ethiopian state itself, coupled with the availability of military and diplomatic support from nearby Moslem states, [that] made armed guerrilla opposition a [...] viable option’.⁶⁸ Clapham considered the opposition in Eritrea as part of a political culture of factionalism and warfare that had marked the territory over many centuries, and the Eritrean liberation movement a separatist or secessionist insurgency trying to create a separate state out of one region of an existing state.⁶⁹ Haggai Erlich agrees with the thesis of Ethiopian misgovernment, which resulted in a failed ‘reunification’. He concedes that the western and northern areas of Eritrea had never actually been under Ethiopian control and, thus, ‘cannot historically be considered part of Ethiopia’;⁷⁰ yet the core regions of today’s Eritrea were ‘undoubtedly and integral – indeed the cradle – of Ethiopian civilization, statehood and history.’⁷¹ While he acknowledges that the existence of the country as a separate entity during the colonial period contributed to the strengthening of an Eritrean awareness, he characterizes the early struggle for independence as ‘little more than an Islamic-inspired local separatism’, fuelled by Ethiopian misgovernment.⁷² Only after continuous forceful suppression of any Eritreanness and excessive use of force by the Ethiopians, did a full-fledged nationalist movement develop in the 1960s with the increasing alienation of the Christian community in Eritrea: ‘Once Eritrean Christians joined the Muslim separatists, Eritrean

⁶⁷ Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 207.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.210.

⁷⁰ Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea, 1962 – 1978. War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa* (Stanford, CA.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), p. 11.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.12.

⁷² Ibid., p. 119.

nationalism was on its way.’⁷³ Nonetheless, Erlich asserts that this nationalism was based mainly on the negation of Ethiopia-ness while remaining historically rootless and shallow, and considered it merely ‘a by-product of recent history’.⁷⁴ Tekeste Negash focused his attention on the colonial and federal periods in his two studies that also aimed to deconstruct arguments for a distinct Eritrean national identity. In his doctoral dissertation on the colonial period he comes to the conclusion that the period of Italian administration did not have a meaningful impact on national consciousness in Eritrea, and certainly did not provide the foundation for the emergence of an Eritrean nationalism due to the ‘virtual absence of national consciousness’ by the end of Italian control.⁷⁵ Yet he concedes that ‘Italian colonialism left in its wake some demographic, economic and political impact on Eritrea’.⁷⁶ In his later book which focuses on the federation period he asserts that it was that impact that contributed greatly ‘to the rather widely spread belief in what one might call separate and distinct Eritrean identity or consciousness’.⁷⁷ Yet the ‘separatist’ movements that adopted that belief are largely depicted as instigated and controlled by European powers. At the same time, Negash downplays Ethiopian influence on the pro-Ethiopian *Unionist Party* whose support by Eritreans is described as quite natural due to historic links and the desire of Eritreans to re-join Ethiopia after the period of colonial disruption. He views the dissolution of the federation as an expression of this desire and brought about ‘largely by Eritrean forces themselves’.⁷⁸ The later emerging ELF is depicted as a strictly Pan-Arab and Pan-Muslim movement that ‘did not make any distinction between the Eritrean Christians

⁷³ Ibid. 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁵ Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882 – 1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact*, (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1987), p. 182.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 164.

⁷⁷ Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), p. 18.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

and the Ethiopian state',⁷⁹ which would ultimately result in the conflict with the EPLF.

The second school that emerged with regard to the question of Eritrean nationalism and national identity directly questioned the 'Greater Ethiopia' thesis of Eritrean-Ethiopian organic unity. While some accounts tried to counter this thesis by projecting a distinctive identity of Eritrea into the distant past, its emergence is mainly located in the colonial period which is described as constituting a decisive rupture in an area characterized by centuries of fluctuating domination by various empires. This rupture not only demarcated Eritrea as a distinct unit but also constituted a period of shared experience which unified the various communities within the territory. Incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia is viewed as an act of colonial domination rather than reunification of a previously organic unit and as an act negating the Eritreans' right to self-determination. This Eritrean nationalist school found international scholarly support largely from authors that had first-hand experience of the liberation movements (mainly the EPLF), and who, in their accounts, reiterate the Eritrean liberation organizations' position with regard to historical interpretations and the Eritrean right to self-determination.

Pateman goes back to pre-colonial times, describing early linkages of the Eritrean communities, and dismisses the Greater Ethiopian assertion of organic unity as 'illusory', but he also roots the beginning of a sense of Eritrean identity during the period of Italian colonization.⁸⁰ Comparing the Ethiopian Empire with the European Empires, he considers it 'a colonial occupying power' and emphasizes that Eritrea's legal right to self-determination was not addressed properly by the United Nations.⁸¹ He considers the continuous subjugation of Eritrea to colonial control as having resulted in the maturation of an Eritrean consciousness and 'in the process' the development of 'a

⁷⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁰ Roy Pateman, *Even the stones are burning*, 2nd edition (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁸¹ Ibid.

common culture, a *lingua franca*, and a relatively advanced economic life' when compared to the rest of Ethiopia.⁸² Firebrace and Holland also ascribe to the thesis of the creation of a separate political identity of Eritrea during the Italian colonial period and assert that 'this identity has not been lost over the subsequent years of Ethiopian occupation.'⁸³ The mere change of occupying power would not compromise the right of Eritrea as a nation to self-determination. The authors further point to the role of international and regional actors in compromising Eritrea's rights. A specific focus on the effects of international involvement and pressures on Eritrean independence has been provided by Okbazghi Yohannes. The shaping by external forces is described as having started with Italian colonialism since it was exactly this period that, as everywhere in colonized Africa, provided both 'the context and the basis of anti-colonial nationalism.'⁸⁴ While the role of the superpowers during the Cold War period in enabling continuous Ethiopian control over the territory after annexation is examined, the main focus of his study is on the UN decision on the disposal of Eritrea. Yohannes asserts that union with Ethiopia did not represent the aspirations of the majority of the population and that the decision on the future of the former colony was mainly guided by the interests of external powers involved.

In his examination of Greater Ethiopian and Eritrean nationalist accounts, Sorenson notes the considerable attention that was given to the pre-federation history of Eritrea but emphasizes that 'Eritrean identity is regarded as a product of the shared experience of colonial occupation', starting with Italian colonialism.⁸⁵ As such, contemporary aspects take precedence over rootedness in antiquity and the focus is put on the future and the anticipated creation of an independent state. This emphasizes the

⁸² Ibid., p. 15.

⁸³ Firebrace, James and Holland, Stuart, *Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation in Eritrea* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984), p. 25.

⁸⁴ Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea: a Pawn in World Politics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 3.

⁸⁵ John Sorensen, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 49.

territorial origin of Eritrean identity ‘acknowledging its relatively recent construction and development through different stages’⁸⁶. The recency of Eritrean nationalism is also stressed by Ruth Iyob in her invaluable and comprehensive analysis of the political history of the country over five decades. Placing the development of Eritrean nationalism in the wider regional and international context, she describes how the various communities of Eritrea were ‘strangers to one another’ that ‘were forced to interact with each other on a stage not of their own making’ during the period of Italian colonization and British administration.⁸⁷ The absence of a shared vision and ideology led to the subjection under Ethiopian domination, and it was only during the struggle for independence that a distinctive nationalism and identity developed. In fact, she emphasizes that divisions persisted even during the first two decades of the struggle and ‘[i]t was only during the 1980s, when the single imperative of liberation from Ethiopian hegemonic control emerged to unite the Eritrean factions, that an all-encompassing nationalism was achieved.’⁸⁸ Yet Iyob also cautioned that after the achievement of independence ‘a new covenant between the Eritrean people and the state based on the reciprocities of civic obligation and not the need to survive in the face of a common enemy’ was needed to transform the national identity achieved into a full-fledged, lasting one.⁸⁹

The majority of the representatives of the Eritrean nationalist school have tended to present a rather positive picture of the EPLF. However, more critical accounts of the leadership of the movement emerged after its tyrannical nature had become obvious after years of independence. While Sorenson already noted by the end of the war of independence that ‘[t]here is no need to romanticize the EPLF or overlook its use of

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

⁸⁷ Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean struggle for independence: Domination, resistance, nationalism, 1941-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 146.

violence' he also pointed out the importance of a security system in the context of war.⁹⁰ David Pool in his extensive study on EPLF dedicates a chapter to the forceful suppression of internal dissent in its early years and notes that the official account of the crisis 'provides a clear portrayal of Issayas Afeworki's early conception of democracy.'⁹¹ He details how internal criticism of undemocratic and violent measures by the leadership was silenced and resulted in the establishment of a dominant leadership; yet he also notes that the criticism that had been silenced constituted 'a major impetus to developing the PLF into the successful military organisation that it became'.⁹² Gaim Kibreab roots what he calls 'the seeds of dictatorship', resulting in the autocratic nature of the government in independent Eritrea, in exactly that period of violent suppression of internal opposition by the leadership. While he notes that both movements were 'culpable, not only in sowing the seeds of disunity but also in cleansing their recruits of the civic virtues',⁹³ he also points out the impact left by the conflict between the ELF and the EPLF over hegemony in the field. At the same time he stresses that the divisions were not of a religious or ethnic nature and have to be located mainly at the elite level. In fact, his search for explanations of why the leadership in post-independence Eritrea turned into a ruthless dictatorship was guided by the strong sense of Eritrean community and transcending national identity that he experienced in interviews with Eritrean refugees which he traces back to social capital that had already developed in pre-colonial times.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ John Sorenson (1993), p. 122.

⁹¹ David Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (Oxford: Athens, 2001), p. 77.

⁹² Ibid., 79.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 343.

⁹⁴ Gaim Kibreab, *Critical Reflections on the Eritrean War of Independence: Social Capital, Associational Life, Religion, Ethnicity and Sowing Seeds of Dictatorship* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 2008), p. 2/3.

Lebanon

Despite the description of Lebanese nationalism as ‘sceptical and ‘confused and confusing’, its existence has never been as contested as the Eritrean identity. The majority of the scholarly literature rather deals with the question of how differences were reconciled and conflicts resolved. However, specifically the pre-mandate and mandate period witnessed a history-writing on the local level that displayed a dichotomy very similar to the Eritrean case: The idea of a historically rooted separate Lebanese identity, very much congruent with Maronite identity and rooted in its Phoenician past opposed to the idea of a more geographical based identity of Lebanon as part of the Arab nation or geographical Syria. These diametrical opposed poles had already developed in the pre-mandate period, and that this dichotomy was never properly resolved has generally been considered the root of conflict in independent Lebanon.

Meir Zamir makes this connection in his study of the creation of modern Lebanon from the remains of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of World War I. He posits that the conflicts that occurred in 1958 and 1975 were connected to problems inherent in the concept of *Greater Lebanon*. He depicts the extension of the territory of *Mount Lebanon* to the borders of *Greater Lebanon* as largely the doing of the Maronite community through ‘manipulation’ of the French governments and the ‘exploitation’ of the rivalries between France on the one hand, and Britain, Faisal and the Arab nationalist movement on the other.⁹⁵ The achievement of *Greater Lebanon* represents to him ‘the culmination of centuries of Maronite endeavours’ as he considers Lebanese nationalism basically the ‘continuation of Maronite nationalism.’⁹⁶ However, the heterogeneous nature of the new territory resulted in a deeply divided society and this

⁹⁵ Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 217/218.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

ultimately turned the Maronites into one minority amongst others.⁹⁷ He argues that the Muslims of *Greater Lebanon* continuously questioned the legitimacy of the state and, therefore, the Maronites were forced to seek allies outside the Muslim world to protect the character of the Lebanese state during the sectarian confrontations in 1958 and 1975/76.

Ussama Makdisi's account focuses on nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon and analyses the communities in the area of *Mount Lebanon* and their response to European involvement. While religious identity and communities existed in the traditional society, their meaning and status was transformed through the process of 'discourse' between Ottoman, European and local ideas of modernization.⁹⁸ As a result, the meaning of religion in the construction of identity was transformed decisively and resulted in new forms of authority and identity: sectarianism. Makdisi emphasizes that since sectarianism was produced, it could also be changed. This is a clear repudiation of accounts that treat sectarianism in Lebanon not only as a deeply embedded system but as one inherently linked to Lebanese society. He further cautioned that sectarianism presaged the nationalist era and was 'Lebanese nationalism's specific precursor' as it was rather the formulation of new public political identities than nationalism *per se*.⁹⁹ In her very recent study on the crucial pre-mandate period Carol Hakim provides a similar analysis. She traces the nationalist ideas and myths that had, in fact, evolved by the mid-nineteenth century in Ottoman Lebanon and contends that these did not constitute the development of nationalist movements but have to be considered 'a shifting and tentative quest for national representation among some members of the Maronite elites, as well as their Syrian counterparts, that evolved and fluctuated in relation with their

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 219.

⁹⁸ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

diverse reformist agendas.’¹⁰⁰ It was only in the few months prior to the establishment of the Lebanese state that the developed core ideas matured into coherent nationalist claims.

The protracted civil war that started in the mid- 1970s, and its descent into sectarian violence, led to the reassessment of Lebanese national identity, or rather its various existing forms. One of the most seminal revisionist accounts, aimed at critically evaluating the opposing nationalist ideas from pre-mandate Lebanon onwards, was provided by Kamal Salibi in his *A House of Many Mansions*. He notes that by the end of WWI, the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire had a very limited national consciousness which ‘was blurred and confounded by traditional loyalties of other kinds which were often in conflict with one another.’¹⁰¹ On Arab nationalism, he notes that at the beginning of the twentieth century it was ‘more of a romantic idea than a political movement with clear precepts and a set programme’ before going on to deconstruct the ‘Lebanist’ narrative of Lebanese history. Noting that the Maronites have to be considered as a ‘tribe or a tribal confederation’ rather than a purely religious community he affirms that they ‘originally conceived of what they called Lebanese nationality in terms of their own tribal particularism.’¹⁰² The propounded historical connection to Phoenicia is carefully deconstructed by him as well as a number of other Lebanist myths, and Lebanon’s uniqueness in Arab history refuted. Salibi demonstrates the relevance of the different narratives of history which have blurred the reality of coexistence ever since the creation of *Greater Lebanon* in 1920 and notes that ‘the continuing civil war in Lebanon was, in a fundamental way, a war to determine the correct history of the country.’¹⁰³ He further affirms that without a shared vision of a

¹⁰⁰ Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese national idea 1840 – 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 20.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 41 and p. 53.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 201.

common past, the development and maintenance of a sense of political community is impossible; however, he asserts that the ‘invention’ of a special history pre-1920 was not needed since a distinct sense of territorial identity and a strong state nationality had evolved since the creation of *Greater Lebanon*.¹⁰⁴ The existence of the state of Lebanon is acknowledged by Lebanese people of all denominations, and all Lebanese sects emerged from the civil war with ‘a strong sense of common identity, albeit with some different nuances.’¹⁰⁵

In fact, this claim is reaffirmed in the second most seminal study on the development of Lebanese nationalism, Theodor Hanf’s *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*. Based on a large number of quantitative surveys conducted during the civil war, Hanf argues that ‘[t]he overwhelming majority of the Lebanese want peace, coexistence and national unity.’¹⁰⁶ Hanf examines the pre-war Lebanese political system and asserts that it is best described as a syncretistic system which worked through the mutual deterrence of opposing strategies of communities in the country.¹⁰⁷ This system, coded through the National Pact of 1943, worked as a mechanism of conflict regulation and ‘broke down when one of the Lebanese communities or actors operated their strategy in an attempt to get more than a relative advantage, that is, control over everything’.¹⁰⁸ According to Hanf this was exactly what happened in 1975, and the use of foreign proxies precipitated the country’s slip into a civil war after ‘[w]hat started primarily as a surrogate over Palestine has become a conflict over the coexistence between various Lebanese groups.’¹⁰⁹

Farid El Khazen also analyses the role of internal and external variables but

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 638.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p 5.

focuses his attention on the period leading to the outbreak of civil war in 1975. He analyses the internal and regional dynamics that led to the breakdown of the state in the early 1970s and argues that the Lebanese system lacked 'instruments of control that are at the disposal of other Arab states' which accounts for the failure of the state to deal with these dynamics.¹¹⁰ The open and democratic state in Lebanon as described by El Khazen proved to be unable to survive in the very different regional environment and its pressures and this would become especially evident when the PLO installed itself as a non-state actor in Lebanon. While democracy was needed to manage the relations between the heterogeneous communities of the country, the lack of consensus concerning regional problems opened the country to destabilizing forces which ultimately resulted in the breakdown of the state and civil conflict.¹¹¹

One of the more recent studies dealing with the identity of Lebanon, and mostly the process of nation-building, is Hanna Ziadeh's *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon* (2006). His analysis provides a new approach to tracing the process and development of nation-building in Lebanon through the study of constitutional documents. Ziadeh concludes that the endurance of the 19th century communal system was the result of choices made by the political elites and was not due to any supposedly inherent character within the system.¹¹² While Ziadeh agrees with Makdisi's description of the system being a product, he also incorporates Hanf's contention that the system created a situation of mutual deterrence in which the influence of communities has to be continuously renegotiated. In concert with earlier scholarship, he also emphasizes the strong dependence on developments in the regional system and external allies that this system created.

¹¹⁰ Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon: 1967-1976* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹¹² Hanna Ziadeh (2006), p. 9.

Chapter 1: (Pre-) Colonial state-building

Neither the state of Eritrea nor the state of Lebanon existed in their current territorial shape before their creation by European colonial and mandate powers. Eritrea was created as Italy's first colony during the European 'scramble for Africa' in the late 19th century, shaped out of highly contested territories in northeast Africa. While the first colonial settlements were established in 1882, it was only in 1890 that Eritrea in its present-day borders was consolidated as an Italian colonial unit. The state of *Greater Lebanon* was created as a French mandate territory in 1920 out of the Levantine parts of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the French were granted the mandate over all of Syria and carved out the territorial state of Lebanon by enlarging the previously autonomous region of *Mount Lebanon*. The two newly-created states were under very different control since the mandate was officially envisioned to be of temporary nature only until Lebanon would eventually be released into independence, while Eritrea as a colonial possession was considered an integral part of Italy. Yet, in both cases the creation of the new territorial entity brought together various communities, largely divided into half Christian and half Muslim, under a single administrative unit.

This chapter will first assess the pre-colonial/mandate setting in the territories that were to be amalgamated by the colonial and mandate powers. It will argue that the territorial states were shaped out of areas that were in a completely different state of development in terms of their national awareness and institutions of representation in a Western sense. It will then examine the impact of the colonial/mandate period on the newly created territorial state and the development of a cohesive national identity relating to the new political entity. It concludes that while the system set up in both states aimed to create a sense of loyalty to the colonial/mandate power rather than to the new territory, the administrative structures created worked towards socio-economic

integration in Eritrea and co-existence in Lebanon, both important for the development of social cohesion and national identification.

ERITREA

The Eritrean territories in pre-colonial times

The history of Eritrea as a territorial entity dates back to the advent of Italian colonialism, bringing the inhabitants of the different regions under a single form of political and legal administration as the Italian '*colonia primo-genita*', the first-born colony of Italy. Prior to Italy's joining the European 'scramble for Africa' in the 19th century the different parts of the territory had been subjected to various types of control by the Sudanic Funj Kingdom, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and various Abyssinian (Ethiopian) empires over time.¹ In the third century, most of present-day Eritrea and the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray were part of the Christian Axumite Empire until Arab invasions resulted in the Axumites' loss of their Mediterranean trade routes. This ultimately contributed to the decline of the Empire by the second half of the seventh century.² The interior of Eritrea came under the control of the Beja kingdoms until their loose federation started to crumble in the fourteenth century. In the meantime, the centre of the future Amharic/Abyssinian kingdom developed south of the Beja kingdoms, in the mountains of the plateau.³

In the Eritrean highlands, several autonomous units were established throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Comprising the provinces of Akele Guzay, Serai and Hamasien, a joint kingdom was formed under Governor Bahri Negasi. A number of European travellers and a Portuguese map of 1660 described this kingdom, named Medri Bahri (*Land of the Sea*), as a political entity separate from Abyssinia. The

¹ David Pool, *Eritrea: Towards Unity in Diversity* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 1997), p. 6.

² See Dan Connell, *Against all Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1993.), p. 50.

³ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G., *Eritrea* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2011), p. 33.

Scottish traveller Bruce Scott described the distinctiveness of the two units in 1770 and has often been quoted by scholars in support of Eritrean independence; yet Scott also noted that the autonomous status of the Medri Bahri was fiercely contested by Abyssinia.⁴ As Reid has rightfully noted, the terms Abyssinia and Ethiopia have often been used ‘in their broadest, most generic sense, as mere geographical expression’, especially by European travellers, and cannot necessarily be understood as describing political territorial states.⁵ In fact, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Ethiopia could be described as a modern nation-state. Likewise the entity of Medri Bahri did not constitute a territorial state, yet existed as an entity separate from the territories south of the river Mareb. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the relations of Medri Bahri and Abyssinia were at least intertwined and, as Tesfagiorgis points out, the survival of the entity of Medri Bahri relied heavily on careful manoeuvres between Abyssinia in the south and the Ottomans who had extended their sovereignty to the Eritrean littoral in the late 1500s. Alliances with Abyssinia were sought specifically to guard against attempts at Muslim expansion into the territory of Medri Bahri.⁶ The rule of the Bahri Negasi declined in the eighteenth century while the Abyssinian kingdom was plagued by competition between various nobles and reached the ‘verge of disintegration’ by 1753.⁷ During the following period, referred to as the ‘Era of the Princes’ (1769 – 1855), the Eritrean highlands were subjected to numerous military raids by Tigrean warlords. The process of unifying the various parts of Abyssinia started with the rise to power of Theodros II, who took the throne by force

⁴ Okbazghi Yohannes (1991), p. 31. See also Mussie Tesfagiorgis G. (2011), p. 34; Semere Haile, ‘Historical Background to the Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict’ in: Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (eds.), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for independence and constructive peace* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1988), p. 13. TNA, FO371/172820, ELF: The Truth about Eritrea, 1963.

⁵ Richard Reid, ‘The Trans-Mereb Experience: Perceptions of the Historical Relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 1:2 (2007), p. 242.

⁶ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G. (2011), p. 34.

⁷ Semere Haile, ‘Historical Background’, p. 14.

and became Emperor in 1855.⁸ His policy was continued by Emperor Yohannes IV, who was crowned 'King of Kings' in 1872.

The Red Sea coast had come under Islamic influence and was subject to Ottoman control until the arrival of its Egyptian successors in 1865 who proceeded to expand their control further inland. In 1871, the Swiss adventurer Munzinger Pasha was appointed Egyptian governor of Massawa and a year later he occupied Keren with a garrison of Egyptian soldiers. Throughout his reign, Emperor Yohannes IV was embroiled in fighting Egyptian expansion in Eritrea and led the Ethiopian armies to victory in the battles of Gundet and Gura. While this enabled him to gain control of the Eritrean highlands, the Egyptians remained in control of large parts of the Eritrean lowlands and the littoral. In the areas under their control the Egyptians established a common infrastructure, which Pateman claims constituted the beginning of 'the long process of unifying the disparate parts of Eritrea.'⁹ However, Egyptian control only lasted for a short period and never extended to cover the entire territory that was to be joined into the colony of Eritrea by Italy. Aside from a small portion in the southwest under Ethiopian control, the very southeast of today's Eritrea formed part of the Islamic Afar kingdom, the Sultanate of Awsa, which remained practically independent until the arrival of the Italians.

The different forms of domination together with various waves of migration over the centuries help to explain the accumulation of the different social and religious groups in the Eritrean regions: Coptic Christians on the plateau, an area under occasional Abyssinian/Ethiopian influence or domination, and Muslims in the coastal area due to its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and influence and domination by the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. 'Mixed' areas were found predominantly in the territories connecting the various parts. It is assumed that there was little migration from the late

⁸ Mussie Tesfagiorgis G. (2011), p. 35.

⁹ Roy Pateman (1998), p. 38. See also Dan Connell (1993), p. 50.

eighteenth century onwards. Stephen Longrigg, Chief Administrator of Eritrea from 1942 to 1944, concluded in 1945 that 'the Eritrea of 1750 was racially and in general economically that of to-day.'¹⁰

In fact, the huge variety of ethnic and linguistic groups, described by Munzinger in the early 1860s and further studied during the period of Italian colonialism and British administration, made the comparatively small population into a 'mosaic of tribes, races, linguistic groups.'¹¹ The differences between the various communities making up this 'mosaic' can be distinguished along a number of lines, including religion, language, and mode of livelihood, reflecting the waves of immigration from both the Ethiopian plateau and the Arabian Peninsula over many centuries. The geographical features of the territory and the correlated climatic and environmental differences the population faced in the various areas of the territory also contributed significantly to Eritrea's overall population diversity. This diversification is usually broken down into three main territories: the highlands, the interior lowlands and the coastal plains.¹² Due to the geographical and climatic conditions, the population in the highlands were settled farmers while the lowlands and the coastal areas were dominated by pastoralists and semi-nomadic farmers.

The population of the territory is made up of nine ethno-linguistic groups (Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, Rashaida, Afar, Bilen, Nara, Kunama, Beja) spread over the three different geographical areas. Some of the communities' languages differ quite decisively from each other, ascribed to their different origins and influences over many centuries. The two dominant linguistic communities are Tigrinya and Tigre, both of

¹⁰ Stephen H. Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), p. 73.

¹¹ LSE archives, S.F. Nadel, *Races and Tribes of Eritrea* (Asmara: British Military Administration – Eritrea, 1944), p. 8. See also Werner Munzinger/ Elie Joseph Agoub, *Ostafrikanische Studien: Mit 1 Karte von Nord-Abyssinien und den Ländern am Mareb, Barka und Anseba* (Schaffhausen: Hurter, 1864), Alberto Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, Manuali Coloniali a cura del Ministro delle Colonie (Bologna: L. Cappelli Editore, 1935). A detailed account can also be found in the unpublished Trevaskis papers in the archives of Oxford University: MS.Brit.Emp.s.367, Box 1(A).

¹² See for example David Pool (1997), p. 6-8 and Tony Barnett, *Agriculture in the Eritrean Revolution* (Norwich: School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia, 1983).

Semitic origin and a high correlation exists between language, religion and geographical location. With the exception of some differences in customary law between individual clans, the Tigrinya community can be described as socially quite a coherent group. The Tigre-speaking community is more fragmented, consisting of clans that differ decisively from each other. Despite the huge variety of rural communities in the Eritrean regions and the various forms of domination they endured, it has been argued by some scholars such as Killion and Kibreab that, due to the existence of common-pool resources needed by all for their respective agricultural mode of production, the 'Eritrean rural communities developed appropriate institutional arrangements for collective and intercommunal action.'¹³ Kibreab even refers to the development of a 'civic culture' in pre-colonial Eritrea, based on social capital which he describes as enabling both interaction between different communities and the ability to 'share values and norms that encourage cooperation, openness and compromise.'¹⁴ This does not mean though that conflict and rivalries did not exist. On the contrary, even within communities such as the Beni Amer, conflicts prevailed that, as Gebre-Medhin asserts, 'made strong political unity impossible.'¹⁵ Yet, the various communities had their own systems of conflict resolution and the interconnectedness between the communities and existing social capital also led to the development of conflict resolution strategies and collective actions for the benefit of all communities involved. While these mechanisms are far from sharing a common identity, they can be considered an important pre-requisite for a possible future syncretistic nationalism once the communities found themselves under a single form of political administration. At the same time, the interconnectedness, social capital and forms of conflict resolutions cannot be said to have been limited to the

¹³ Gaim Kibreab, (2008), p. 40. See also Tom Killion, 'The Eritrean Economy in Historical perspective', *Eritrean Studies Review* 1:1 (1996), p. 92.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁵ Jordan Gebre-Medhin, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1989), 53.

Eritrean regions only. Boundaries were rather fluid in pre-colonial times and so regions adjacent to the Eritrean territories also had some, if temporary, experience of the different forms of domination as borders changed; thus interconnectedness also existed with regions outside of the territory that was to become Eritrea.

When the European powers started intervening in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century, the multi-communal area was still highly contested, the Abyssinian Empire continuously trying to gain control over the Eritrean plateau. Hence, the arrival of the Italians must be seen as aggravating a situation of fierce competition. In fact, Italian interests were not limited to the territories that would become the colony of Eritrea. Munzinger's *Ostafrikanische Studien* (East African Studies), published in 1864 and later translated into Italian is said to have been used as 'the primary guide book for the later Italian occupation of Eritrea.'¹⁶ This confirms wider Italian expansionist interests and also means that the 'creation' of Eritrea by Italian colonialism was arbitrary only in the sense that attempts at wider expansion were quashed.

Italy's first-born colony (la colonia primogenita)

The first territorial advances by Italy in the coastal area were not violent in nature, in fact they were quite the opposite. Italy first got her 'foot in the door' through commercial means, by acquiring the Bay of Assab in the very southeast of the territory through a shipping company in 1869. It was not until 1882 that the port town of Assab was declared an Italian colony.¹⁷ The port was of enormous geostrategic importance, not only because of its proximity to the Suez Canal, but for future trade with the Ethiopian hinterland. The first expansion of the colonial territory extended to Massawa in 1885

¹⁶ Frederick J. Cox, 'Munzinger's Observations on the Sudan, 1871: "The Little America of Africa"', *Sudan Notes and Records* 33, Part II, footnote 2. Cox refers to a biography on Munzinger provided in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XXIV, cp-cs, by Attilio Mori.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the first Italian advances on the coasts of the Horn of Africa see Stephen H. Longrigg (1945), pp. 112 – 131 or Angelo del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, Vol. 1, (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1976), pp. 33 – 49, pp. 101 – 126, pp. 359 – 384 .

and was met with resistance by the Ethiopians who were especially irritated by the technical assistance Britain gave to the Italians during the occupation. Ethiopia had emphasized its interest in the port to the British who had by then taken control of Egypt and were trying to mediate an orderly withdrawal of Egyptian garrisons from the Eritrean territories.¹⁸ The British, however, felt that rather than Ethiopia acquiring the coastal areas, they preferred Italian control in order to counterbalance French domination in Djibouti.¹⁹

In the following years, Italy tried to expand its colonial terrain by military campaigns into the highlands. The expansion into the Eritrean highlands was agreed by the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II, successor to Yohannes IV, in the treaty of Wichale (Ucciali) in 1889 and led to the formal consolidation of the territories into the single unit of the colony of Eritrea in 1890.²⁰ However, there was decisive disagreement over Article XVII of the treaty which, according to the Italian text, would effectively have proclaimed an Italian protectorate over all of Ethiopia. After three years of negotiations over the article, Menelik unilaterally denounced the entire treaty. He had already been heavily criticized for ‘selling-out’ a part of the Ethiopian state and was not ready to make any further concessions.²¹ Preparing for an armed confrontation with Italy, Menelik purchased modern arms and equipment and was able to rally leaders of the usually rather disparate empire around him for support. After Italy annexed parts of the north Ethiopian province of Tigre, the first confrontations took place in December 1895, and in February 1896 the six-day battle of Adua erupted.²² The Italians suffered a decisive loss, with a large number of casualties. Not only did this Ethiopian victory send

¹⁸ See TNA, FO 371/131298, Report of the British Consulate-General, No. 4 (501/58), Asmara, 23.09.1958.

¹⁹ See Semere Haile, ‘Historical Background’, p. 15.

²⁰ On the treaty see Redie Bereketeab, *Eritrea: the making of a nation, 1890-1991* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000), pp. 98-101. The roots of the name given to the colony stem from the Greek word for red, Erythraea, which in ancient Greek referred to the strategically important sea separating the Arabian Peninsula from the African continent. See e.g. Dan Connell, ‘The Birth of the Eritrean Nation’, p. 14.

²¹ Edmond J. Keller (1991), p. 33.

²² For a detailed account on the events leading up to the battle of Adua see del Boca (1976), p.649ff.

‘shock waves throughout Europe’, it also resulted in an agreement that halted Italian penetration north of the Mareb River, and the recognition of Ethiopia as an independent country.²³ Italian dreams of larger territorial possessions in Ethiopia were quashed for the time being. Ethiopia, on the other hand, was able to expand and secure territories for its empire by treaties with France and Great Britain. Through these agreements, formerly fluid boundaries were defined and, as Keller rightfully notes, Menelik himself became a participant in the colonial ‘scramble for Africa’.²⁴ Despite the conflict following the treaty of Wichale, its importance has often been pointed out by scholars in support of Eritrean nationalism. Bereketeab emphasizes that Menelik entered freely into the treaty, which was deemed proof that the Eritrean territory was not seen as an integral part of Ethiopia at a time when the Empire itself ‘was as much in the process of being formed as a unified modern state as Eritrea.’²⁵

When the Italians first started their expansion, they were actually welcomed by some of the ethnic groups, especially in the western lowlands (e.g. the Beni Amer, Kunama and Bilen), that had endured Ethiopia’s continuous raids and attempts at occupation.²⁶ For the Italians, however, the colony was initially meant to solve problems of land shortages at home by absorbing a large number of Italian settlers. The confiscation of land sufficient for the needs of Italian colonists in the territory had a decisive impact on the social make-up of its inhabitants, changing existing social structures, and engendering sporadic resistance from early on: some 400,000 hectares of land were expropriated for Italian agrarian colonization. That these measures indeed affected the population can be seen in the manifestations of discontent such as open revolt by some 2000 men (referred to as the Bahta Revolution, named after the leader of

²³ Edmond J. Keller (1991), p. 34.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁵ Redie Bereketeab (2000), p. 97.

²⁶ See Werner Munzinger/ Elie Joseph Agoub (1935), p. 10-12, Dan Connell (1993), p. 51, Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 14.

the protest, Bahta Hagos) in 1894. Yohannes calls the revolt the first Eritrean nationalist uprising²⁷ and, in fact, Bahta Hagos promised his followers he would free them from the Italians so they could be their 'own masters.'²⁸ Yet, he actually appealed to the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik for help in fighting the Italian colonialists. Reid asserts that the sporadic resistance the Italians faced from the 1890s onwards 'was not Eritrean nationalism *per se*, and therefore not even organic Eritrean protest, but was motivated by a desire to rejoin the Ethiopian motherland, actively encouraged by Ethiopia itself.'²⁹ Viewing the Bahta revolution in this context, the recourse to links with Ethiopia in order to challenge Italian rule and expansion appears hardly surprising. These links, however, did not refer back to an Ethiopian national identity; rather they stemmed from the shared system of agricultural livelihood and periods of common political history of the highlands of Eritrea with their neighbours across the border. In addition, open rebellion has to be viewed as a form of social protest that was common in the area throughout pre-colonial times. Taddia describes what is referred to as 'banditry' or *shifta*³⁰ as a social phenomenon of pre-colonial rural Abyssinia.³¹ While the factors behind the banditry varied from economic to political and social, the protagonists of 'banditry' as a form of social protest were traditionally nobles able to mobilize a large following among the peasants. The Italian colonialist policy in the territory resulted in a transformation of the *shifta* phenomenon since most of the influential nobles had been removed and replaced by those willing to collaborate with the Italian colonizers. Taddia

²⁷ Okbazghi Yohannes (1991), p. 9.

²⁸ Richard Caulk, "'Black Snake, White Snake": Bāhta Hagos and his Revolt against Italian Overrule in Eritrea, 1894', in: Crummey, Donald (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London: Currey, 1986), p. 300.

²⁹ Richard Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-East Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since c.1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 106. On the resistance and the Ethiopian role in its emergence see also Tekeste Negash (1987), pp. 127-137.

³⁰ The term 'shifta' or 'shitnet' is usually translated as 'rebel' or 'bandit' even though it complex meaning is rather difficult to translate. For a semantic explanation see Fekadu Ogbasellassie, 'Shifta problems in the Kebesa region of Eritrea (1947-1952)', in: Melake, Tekeste (ed.), *Proceedings of a Workshop on aspects of Eritrean history, 20 – 21 September 2005, Asmara*, (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2005), pp. 51.

³¹ Irma Taddia, *L'Eritrea-Colonia 1890-1952: Paesaggi, strutture, uomini del colonialism* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1986), p. 78.

describes this as the evolution of modern ‘banditry’, from *shifta* to bureaucrats with privileged positions.³² Bahta Hagos was one of them, a *shifta* who had become an Italian protégé. However, he became angered by the destruction of local, traditional modes of livelihood caused by Italian land annexation and came into conflict with Italian officers since he felt offended by their ‘brash jingoism’.³³ Even though making himself spokesperson for a wider discontent, he failed to draw sufficient support due to the distrust he created through his autocratic behaviour and was killed in a battle against the Italian army. However, the revolt led by him constitutes the only documented larger rebellion against Italian rule and, therefore, it later developed into an important myth of resistance to colonial domination for Eritrean nationalists.³⁴

In general, acts of resistance remained limited and never actually threatened colonial rule. However, they did contribute to the abandonment of demographic colonization by the Italians even though land expropriation was only generally renounced by decree in 1906 and 1926.³⁵ By 1906 approximately 482,000 hectares had been turned into Italian state property, including all the lowland areas and large areas of arable land on the plateau.³⁶ The expropriation of land also did not spare the Coptic Church of Eritrea and served to weaken its traditional power. In addition to attempts to Catholicise the Eritrean Christians and create a separate Orthodox Church, the damaging of the church through land expropriation carried the danger of sparking resistance from the Christian inhabitants of the highlands. This danger was further aggravated by the possibility of the Eritrean Christians to ‘one day make common cause with their co-religionists in Ethiopia.’³⁷ The Muslims of Eritrea, on the other hand, appeared to be potentially more loyal subjects to the Italians than the Christians. They

³² Ibid., p. 79/80.

³³ Richard Caulk, “‘Black Snake, White Snake’”, p. 301.

³⁴ Irma Taddia (1986), p. 219.

³⁵ Tom Killion, ‘The Eritrean Economy in Historical Perspective’, p. 99.

³⁶ Okbazghi Yohannes (1991), p. 10.

³⁷ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 18.

inhabited the areas in which the Italians had been most welcomed and did not have religious or positive historical links to adjacent Ethiopia. However, while the Italian policy towards the Muslims of Eritrea has to be described as favourable throughout the entire colonial period, the reasoning behind this was shaped by various factors in different phases. Miran details how the supportive attitude of the colonial regime was initially guided by the need to maintain stability within the Muslim territories and, at the same time, generate support against Mahdist threats from neighbouring Sudan. After the 1920s, and under fascist rule, Italy 'deployed explicit pro-Muslim propaganda, appealing to public opinion in the Muslim world' which in Eritrea translated into active encouragement of Islam and material support of the Muslim community.³⁸

Under Ferdinando Martini, Governor of Eritrea from 1897 - 1907, the territory became largely used for economic exploitation. Negash described this period as a 'watershed' in the colonial history of Italy in Eritrea and it was, in fact, crucial for the consolidation of colonial rule.³⁹ Eritrea became both a centre for trade, especially with eastern Sudan and northern Ethiopia, and a reservoir of indigenous soldiers to serve the colonial troops fighting colonial wars for Italy in Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Their loyalty to and love for the Italians was described as remarkable by the latter.⁴⁰ Yohannes asserts that the absorption of quite a significant number of Eritreans into the military had an effect on the already growing process of class configuration as 'they were transformed into an incipient class of the petit bourgeoisie, oriented toward modern technology and ideas.'⁴¹ In fact, the contact with modern ideas and the mingling of members of different communities in the colonial army has to be considered as contributing to a growing self-awareness and national consciousness. Hence, it could be

³⁸ Jonathan Miran, 'A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea', *Die Welt des Islam* 45:2 (2005), p.201.

³⁹ Tekeste Negash (1987), p.4.

⁴⁰ Ferdinando Martini (a cura di Mauro Vannini), *Confessioni e ricordi* (Firenze: Ponte alle Grazie, 1990), pp. 297-299.

⁴¹ Okbazghi Yohannes (1991), p. 12.

asserted that Eritreans who served in the Italian colonial army together with the more privileged classes of half-castes and locals working in the colonial bureaucratic administration formed a petty bourgeoisie, the social force that would bring an end to colonialism in most colonial states. As a consequence, maintaining political stability became the main goal of Italian policy in the territory and Negash asserts that it was achieved ‘by a policy of meticulous preservation of the precolonial socio-political structures.’⁴² However, the land expropriations had already broken the power of certain notables on the Eritrean plateau, and in the 1930s a number of colonial decrees abolished the hereditary land tenure system in favour of collective village ownership in order to appease the lower strata of peasants.⁴³ In the lowlands, where communities were universally divided into serf and aristocratic classes, the serfs actually appealed to the new colonial rulers to be relieved of their obligations towards the aristocrats. Yet, since it was ‘an extremely useful system for the imposition and consolidation of colonial rule’, it was modified to serve the Italian administration.⁴⁴ Leonard describes how the Italians intervened in a way so ‘as to reinforce the strength of feudal chiefs and to increase the availability of the serfs for profitable work and military service.’⁴⁵ While the serfs were freed of traditional feudal dues and services, the inheriting of serfs was restricted to a certain number of tribal chiefs which resulted in a more powerful and centralized aristocratic class supported by the Italians. To meet the demands of the Italian administration, even groups such as the Baria and the Kunama, whose self-organization had traditionally been based on democratic and egalitarian principles, had to submit to the institution of chieftainship.

Political stability was maintained for four decades resulting in enhanced material

⁴² Tekeste Negash (1987), p.151.

⁴³ For details see: Document, ‘Third extract of Richard Leonard’s paper entitled: “European Colonization and the Socio-Economic Integration of Eritrea”’, *Eritrea Information* 3:3 (March 1981), p. 8.

⁴⁴ Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Document, ‘Third extract of Richard Leonard’s paper’, p. 9.

well-being and employment of the Eritrean population due to Italian innovations in the colony. Italian development efforts were largely centred in the predominantly Muslim lowlands, including the establishment of an infrastructure network and agricultural developments around Tessenei near the Sudanese border and Keren as well as along the eastern escarpment.⁴⁶ The developments around urban centres together with the land expropriations that had deprived peasants of their land accelerated the process of urbanization as thousands of landless flocked to the cities in search of work. Towns, especially Asmara, Decamhare, Mendefera, Keren and Massawa, witnessed an increased urbanization which resulted in an uneven development of the territories and growing disparities between urban centres and rural areas. At the same time, members of the various ethnic groups for the first time worked together under a new, capitalist-oriented economic system. Yohannes argues that '[u]nder such conditions, it was inevitable that the rural proletariat would develop some sense of solidarity within itself which, over time, would translate into national awakening and political activism.'⁴⁷ In fact, it may be argued that the material basis for a cohesive economic activity was created by the Italians, which resulted in the emergence of a common consciousness mitigating hostilities between the different ethnic groups inhabiting the forcibly joined territories.

The advent of Fascism in the early 1930s impacted deeply upon Eritrea. The Fascist government revived the idea of further expanding into Ethiopia and, therefore, developed the colony 'as a base both for military operations and later for the economic exploitation of Abyssinia.'⁴⁸ Hence, from 1931 onwards the economy in the territory was directed towards this goal and the consequent influx of Italians together with the imposition of racial laws resulted in the effective barring of Eritreans from skilled

⁴⁶ Tom Killion, 'The Eritrean Economy in Historical Perspective', p. 99.

⁴⁷ Okbazghi Yohannes (1991), p. 11.

⁴⁸ OUA, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.367, Trevaskis papers, Box 1(B), Item 5, p. 29.

employment. In addition, social integration between the areas was effectively halted by the fact that ‘there was little labor migration’ between the lowlands and the highlands that had turned into the centre of economic developments after 1934.⁴⁹ Therefore, the period of preparation for the invasion of Ethiopia had a much deeper impact on the central highlands and saw a decisive transformation of the traditional economy ‘from one that was overwhelmingly rural and traditionally-based to one with a significant urban and industrial component.’⁵⁰ Hence, while innovations by the Italians such as the impressive infrastructure, industrialisation and commercialisation of the economy were often described as laying the basic structural conditions for the emergence of an Eritrean nationalism and the beginning of a nation-building process, they actually affected the various communities to different degrees.

In 1935, Italian ambitions to conquer Abyssinia started to become concrete, and under General Emilio De Bono Italian troops crossed the Mareb river on 5 October 1935. Seven months later they marched into Addis Ababa and Ethiopia was officially merged with Italian Somaliland and Eritrea into a new state named *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East Africa) on 1 June 1936. The war against Ethiopia and the development of an administration for the newly created state also had an impact on the growth of a separate Eritrean identity since the Eritreans were to play a specific role in this new state. After having been loyal soldiers for the Italians, they not only made up large parts of the first colonial army in Ethiopia, but were also given priority with regard to certain jobs in the new country, and a 1937 decree asserted that they ‘were to be addressed as Eritreans and not as natives’.⁵¹ Yet, the Eritreans, like all Italian colonial subjects, were subject to the fascist laws of racial segregation, and the consequent treatment of the Eritrean population certainly contributed to an increasing

⁴⁹ Tom Killion, ‘The Eritrean Economy in Historical Perspective’, p. 100.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵¹ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 17.

anti-colonial sentiment.

The British Military Administration (BMA)

Shortly after the Italians declared war on the Allies, its colonial control came to an end with the invasion of British troops into Eritrean territory in early 1941. By the end of the summer of the same year, the British controlled all the former Italian colonies and had brought them under British administration. As a signatory of the Hague Convention of 1907, the territories were to be administered in accordance with the regulations stipulated for occupied territories.

Britain's rapid invasion was aided by the defection of the local *Askari* (the Eritrean soldiers serving in the Italian army) on the one hand, and by Italian over-estimation of British strength in Sudan on the other.⁵² In literature supporting the Eritrean nationalist school it is often suggested that the defection of the *Askari* was proof of the existence of Eritrean nationalist feelings by the end of the colonial period, at least amongst some of the Eritrean people. The key incentive to defect were British promises of the fulfilment of Eritrean nationalist aspirations, propagated by an active British propaganda initiative including the dropping of leaflets over the territory. There has been some disagreement over whether this promise referred to Eritrean independence or (re-)union with Ethiopia. The translation of one of the pamphlets published by G.L. Steer, then chief of the British propaganda unit, appears to confirm the latter interpretation.⁵³ In any case, defections were enormous and contributed decisively to the end of the Italian colonial period. Whether the defections were encouraged by the prospect of independence or of (re-)union with Ethiopia, they were certainly an expression of the desire to end Italian rule, and to that end recourse to links

⁵² Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration of Occupied Territories in Africa during the Years 1941-1947* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948), p. 97.

⁵³ G.L. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered: A Book on the Abyssinian Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1942).

with Ethiopia were sought as seen before in the Bahta Revolution.

Ethiopia was granted independence in 1944, three years after Haile Selassie had returned from exile in the UK to Addis Ababa and been reinstated as Emperor. The remaining former Italian colonial territories were placed under temporary British administration until an international decision on their disposal was taken. In fact, it was clear from early on that the British had no intention of keeping control over the territory longer than necessary, even in form of a trusteeship, as it was considered a burden to British tax-payers.⁵⁴ In addition, the British had not entered Eritrea with the aim of freeing the inhabitants from colonial rule but rather to defeat the Axis powers. While fascist policies such as the colour bar were lifted, the BMA kept Italian administrative structures and functionaries in place in order to keep the costs of administering the territory low. The economic boom that the territory had witnessed during the later years of Italian colonialism continued during the early years of the BMA since the facilities established in Eritrea were used by the British and Americans for military projects in their North Africa Campaign.⁵⁵ However, as Killion notes, it was mainly the remaining Italian population who profited from employment opportunities. Furthermore, the uneven social transformations, due to the industrial and infrastructural developments that had started during Italian war preparations being constrained to the central plateau, continued. While the economic development could have served as the foundation for an integrated Eritrean economy, the uneven distribution 'made the social integration of Eritrea more problematic.'⁵⁶ Besides, the economic boom was short-lived and soon after the end of World War II, Eritrea entered a serious economic recession resulting in a large Italian exodus leading to the closing of Italian businesses and disinvestment. After

⁵⁴ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State, London, August 9, 1948, in: US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948. Western Europe, Vol.3*, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 938/939.

⁵⁵ Tom Killion, 'The Eritrean Economy in Historical Perspective', p. 102/103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

most of the military projects closed down, the British also actively contributed to the destruction of the modern infrastructure achieved during the Italian colonial period. This was actually brought to attention by Sylvia Pankhurst, who in an account of her travels in the region gives clear evidence of what she deemed a ‘disgrace to British civilisation’, the removal and dismantling of facilities in Eritrea by the BMA to either sell the materials or use them in their own territories in the region.⁵⁷ Pankhurst’s indignation was certainly motivated by protecting what she considered part of the Ethiopian Empire. A fervent British feminist, whose ‘hatred of British imperialism had, ironically, turned her into an enthusiastic campaigner for an African empire’, she fought tooth and nail for what she considered the just cause of Greater Ethiopia.⁵⁸ While she has to be considered a biased source at least, she backed up her claims with photographic evidence. Furthermore, the weakening of the Eritrean economy through the removal of facilities made sense apropos the British plans for the territory that were largely based on the assertion that Eritrea did not constitute an economic viable unit. British policies in the territory, especially the maintaining of Italian personnel and the economic exploitation, also frustrated Eritreans who felt betrayed by the failure to deliver the promised independence. Consequently, the BMA was viewed by Eritreans as a mere continuation of European colonialism.

On a political level the question of Eritrea’s future was addressed by the British from early on, especially once the territory had served its purpose as a base for Anglo-American wartime policies in the region. G.K.N. Trevaskis, who worked in the British Administration of Eritrea from 1941 to 1950, described the country at the time of the arrival of the British forces as ‘a well-integrated political unit’.⁵⁹ However, the British

⁵⁷ Silvia Pankhurst, *Eritrea on the Eve: The past and future of Italy’s “first-born” Colony, Ethiopia’s ancient Sea Province* (Woodford Green: “New Times and Ethiopia News” Books, 1952), p. 13.

⁵⁸ Michela Wrong, *I Didn’t Do It for You: How the world betrayed a small African nation* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), p. 128/129.

⁵⁹ OUA, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.367, Trevaskis papers, Box 1(B), Item 5, p. 29.

authorities were not convinced that the territory would be economically viable once Western subsidies were removed. Furthermore, they propagated a 'natural' line of separation where '[t]he main plateau and the coastal areas belong naturally to Ethiopia' and '[t]he inhabitants of the western lowlands are however Moslem nomads and belong more naturally to the Sudan.'⁶⁰ Referring back to the pre-colonial history of the area, they asserted that before European penetration '[n]o historical event has served to unite the Eritreans into a self-conscious community'.⁶¹ Consequently, partition of the territory between Ethiopia and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was envisioned by the British and it was argued that this 'would in no sense involve the dismemberment of an essential unity but merely the discontinuance of an unnatural association of heterogeneous and largely discordant elements.'⁶²

In Eritrea itself, nationalist aspirations were discussed on the elite level as well. Specifically with reference to British promises of independence an 'elite' movement gathered and asked to be included in the decision-making on the political future of the country. This clandestine association of intellectuals formed in May 1941 and named itself *Mahber Feqri Hager* (Association for Love of the Country). While it is often depicted as a strictly pro-Ethiopian movement backed by Haile Selassie, it was a multi-communal, anti-colonial association that, however, quickly disintegrated due to its internal failure to agree on how to realize the nationalist aspiration of being freed from Western foreign domination. Ethiopia's achievement of independence as a fully sovereign state in December 1944 nurtured the largely Christian position of union with Ethiopia while the Muslim communities predominantly advocated independence. An attempt to reconcile the different nationalist aspirations was unsuccessful. Instead,

⁶⁰ TNA, FO371/50791, Future of the Italian Colonies, draft letter confirming the holding of a meeting on Aug. 10, enclosing draft paragraphs on Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Eritrea & Italian Mediterranean Islands, 1945.

⁶¹ TNA, FO371/50791, Future of Eritrea, Enclosed copy of a letter from the Civil Affairs Branch, MEF, on the Future of Eritrea, 05.08. 1945.

⁶² Ibid.

separate political movements organized along the opposed aspirations in the wake of the international community's decision on the future of the territory.

LEBANON

Multi-communal arrangements in pre-mandate Lebanon

The 1920 creation, with its particular boundaries, of the state of Lebanon by the French mandate authorities cannot be considered purely arbitrary. It was rather based on the pre-existing region of *Mount Lebanon* (*Ġabal Lubnān*) which, while part of the Ottoman Empire, enjoyed a number of autonomous privileges and a history of special relationships with France and Great Britain. Therefore, the pre-mandate situation in Lebanon differed decisively from the situation in Eritrea before the advent of Italian colonialism.

The autonomous status of the region of *Mount Lebanon* has been described as a rather 'curious phenomenon'⁶³ in the Ottoman Empire and is attributed to European intervention following a civil war in the region in 1860. In the decades preceding the civil conflict, the situation in the mountain area was rather harmonious among the communities inhabiting the territory:

They had seen the ascent and fall of dynasties arising from their each or any of their communities, had acted as close and accepted neighbours, had been indifferently landlord or tenant or worker on estates of every ownership; they had sustained, in community of interest, scene, language, livelihood, and familiar friendship, a scarcely troubled symbiosis.⁶⁴

In fact, elite status in the rural mountain area was defined by rank rather than religious affiliation, and alliances between the great families were contracted regardless of religion.⁶⁵ Makdisi noted that this system was marked by 'an undeniable respect for sacred boundaries of faith', despite the fact that there existed a 'language of religious

⁶³ Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ussama Makdisi (2000), p. 35.

discrimination and differentiation' based on religious allegiance.⁶⁶ The main inhabitants of the mountain area, the Maronites and the Druze, enjoyed relative autonomy under the Ottoman *millet system* and they had developed a symbiotic relationship with common values and forms of conflict regulation, comparable to what Kibreab has described as 'social capital' in pre-colonial Eritrea. Of course, the Ottoman *millet system* was based on demarcation along communal lines; yet the indirect rule over the region by the Ottoman Empire meant that 'they had to pay taxes, but were otherwise left in peace.'⁶⁷ This had resulted in the development of a stratum of notables whose status was based on their right to collect taxes, and this function and their rank within the 'class' of notables was of more relevance than sectarian affiliation. Yet, while the demographics of the Druze community remained rather static, the Maronite community increased decisively, by the mid-19th century becoming the majority not only in their traditional territories, but also in previously Druze-dominated areas of the mountains.⁶⁸ The tradition of peaceful cohabitation started showing signs of disintegration during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, mainly caused by the erosion of Maronite feudal leadership and disturbances arising from Egyptian occupation. French interest had already manifested itself in the decades before the unrest and resulted in the establishment of a special relationship with the Maronite Christians in *Mount Lebanon*.⁶⁹ While a Maronite Seminary was established in Rome as early as 1584, it was France that saw itself as having the role of protecting the Catholics in the Muslim-dominated Ottoman Empire.⁷⁰ The affiliation with the Catholic Church and France resulted in strong links with French Jesuits. These relations were crucial in the development of the identity of the Maronite community since it advanced the Maronites' education and exposed them to French

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 5

⁶⁷ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 54.

⁶⁸ Farid El-Khazen (2000), p. 34.

⁶⁹ For a detailed account on the traditional relationship of France with the Maronites of Lebanon see John P. Spagnolo, *France & Ottoman Lebanon 1861-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1977), pp. 1 – 28.

⁷⁰ John Spagnolo (1977), p. 4.

culture, language and thinking. Jesuits, such as the often mentioned Henri Lammens, who perfected the theory of the mountain area as a refuge for oppressed minorities, had a strong influence on the Maronites' early perception of their identity.⁷¹ British attempts to discourage rebellion against the Egyptian occupation in 1840 and the subsequent *London Agreement* between the Western powers and Russia constituted the first international intervention in the affairs in the mountains and 'established an important, and at first unofficial, precedent for a tradition of such interventions that became a recognised aspect of Lebanese politics.'⁷² By the end of 1842, *Mount Lebanon* was divided into two districts, the northern part ruled by a Christian sub-governor (*qā'īmaqām*) and the southern part by a Druze sub-governor. However, the religious composition of the two districts was not clear-cut and did not exactly match the division of the sub-governorates.

The resulting imbalance in the system of coexistence led to communal cleavages and finally resulted in the violence of 1860. Problems in the region became more entangled with the politics of the Western powers when the British entered the scene. Like the French they viewed the areas of *Mount Lebanon* 'as an ideal site for the reformation of the Ottoman Empire'⁷³ and, in line with their generally more pro-Muslim policies, they adopted a policy that favoured the Druze. Western policies of different countries siding with different communities resulted in a changed attitude of the inhabitants of the mountains regarding the relevance of their denominations as they were described by Western powers according to their religion and thus 'imagined and experienced separately in Mount Lebanon.'⁷⁴ Makdisi refers to this as the 'invention' of a tribal-like social structure by the European powers and notes how it, in connection

⁷¹ See Aher Kaufmann, *Reviving Phoenicia: The search for identity in Lebanon* (London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004), p. 32/33.

⁷² John P. Spagnolo (1977), p. 15.

⁷³ Ussama Makdisi (2000), p. 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

with the process of modernization, resulted in affiliation with religious communities becoming the main marker of identity in the area. On 9 June 1861, an international constitutional settlement, the *Règlement et protocol relatives à la réorganisation du Mont Liban*, was signed. This agreement was structured ‘by the French under the watchful eye of the British and other members of the Concert of Europe, the precursor of the League of Nations.’⁷⁵ While the French had actually advocated the establishment of an autonomous Maronite principality, the whole area of Mount Lebanon was reconstituted as a single Ottoman province. This crucial change to the pre-existing system was enshrined in the *Règlement* which managed to secure peace for the next fifty years. Yet, as Longrigg noted, ‘[i]t had been installed in the sole interests of a single Syrian community, the Catholic and French-protected Maronites.’⁷⁶ In fact, the governor was to be a Catholic Christian assisted by a central administrative council composed of twelve members representing the various communities of the area. The Maronites were given predominance in the council, allocated four seats while the Druze had three, the Greek Orthodox two and the Catholics, Sunni, and Shi‘a one seat each. With this new system, the territory of *Ġabal Lubnān* had special status within the Ottoman Empire; yet as both Firro and Salibi point out, the specific situation did not reflect the emergence of an uncontested Lebanese identity: ‘what one finds, rather, is that in cultural and political terms most Maronites continue to think of themselves as Syrians (*shawām*, s. *shāmi*, i.e., belonging to Bilād al-Shām), or of course Arabs, and as Lebanese only in the more restricted territorial sense.’⁷⁷ In fact, despite enjoying relative political autonomy through the *millet system* and later on the *Règlement*, the area of *Mount Lebanon* remained connected specifically with the adjacent Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Being subject to the same Ottoman structures and sharing

⁷⁵ John P. Spagnolo (1977), p.2.

⁷⁶ Stephen H. Longrigg (1958), p. 23.

⁷⁷ Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: nationalism and the state under the mandate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 16; see also Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 70.

established trade networks in the provinces resulted not only in a close economic integration but also in frequent social interactions.⁷⁸ Therefore, the fact that many Lebanese, especially among the elites, actually perceived themselves as Syrians is hardly surprising. This was certainly facilitated by the fact that Syrian identity itself was in its infancy since a state of (Greater) Syria had never previously existed. The lack of clearly demarcated boundaries and ancient roots meant that Syrian national identity remained rather fluid and open to individual definitions in its early stages. Wild asserts though, that at least the Maronites of this time ‘can be rightly called the “first Lebanese”’ as they did not consider themselves citizens of the Ottoman Empire after the enacting of the *Règlement*.⁷⁹ Yet, not identifying themselves as Ottomans does not mean they specifically perceived themselves as Lebanese rather than Syrians. However, the fact that a specific identification in relation to the territorial unit of Mount Lebanon existed means that an ‘embryonic’ sense of identity had developed in the area, facilitated by its special status, recognized not only by the Ottoman Empire but by international powers as well. In that sense there was ‘differentiation’ from the ‘others’ and this differentiation was based on religion as well as the minority status of the Maronites in the Muslim Arab regions of the Empire.

For the French, the passing of the *Règlement* was of great importance since they considered the region of *Mount Lebanon* a place where they ‘had established a political position of critical strategic advantage to their cultural and economic presence in Beirut and in the bordering regions of Syria.’⁸⁰ Throughout the years, the region of *Mount Lebanon* remained a priority for the French so that when the Ottoman Empire fell apart, France tried to gain control over the Levantine territory that included it.

⁷⁸ Carol Hakim (2013), p. 215.

⁷⁹ See Stefan Wild, ‘East of Lebanon: colonial borders?’, in: Philipp, Thomas/Christoph Schumann (eds.), *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2004), p.150.

⁸⁰ John P. Spagnolo (1977), p. 2.

The creation of Greater Lebanon

The creation of today's Lebanon was preceded by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which agreed the division of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire between France and the United Kingdom once the Empire had fallen. However, while the agreement would have allowed the two powers to establish 'such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire'⁸¹, the International Peace Conference of 1919 decided on the establishment of trusteeship, thus decisively limiting the planned liberty of action of France.⁸²

Amidst the demise of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, extensive discussion on the future of the Arab provinces took place not only amongst the international powers. Facing the prospects of self-determination and independence in line with Wilsonian principles, Lebanese and Syrian elites presented their own, diverging ideas concerning the future of their territories. Hakim details how the campaign for the future of Lebanon was first initiated by the emigrant communities abroad as the local population was paralyzed by the impact of World War I in the territories.⁸³ The ideas propounded by the majority centred on the inclusion of *Mount Lebanon* as an autonomous unit into a larger Syrian state (*Greater Syria*), either under Prince Faisal or a French/Western trusteeship.⁸⁴ However, some of the mainly Maronite emigrant communities, most notably the *Alliance Libanaise*, based in Cairo, promoted the idea of a *Greater Lebanon*. To support the case of an independent Lebanon as a separate entity a number of books and pamphlets were published, basing the claim not only on the principle of self-determination but on a carefully developed historical

⁸¹ The Sykes-Picot Agreement: 1916, available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp (last accessed 13.01.2014).

⁸² Harold W.V. Temperley (ed.), *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, Vol. VI, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), p. 167.

⁸³ See Carol Hakim (2013), pp. 214 – 223.

⁸⁴ A number of books in support of the idea of *Greater Syria* were published which serve as testimony to the popularity of the idea even amongst the Lebanese, e.g. Nadra Moutran, *La Syrie de Demain* (1916) or Edgar P. Tawil, *Syrie* (1916).

narrative.⁸⁵ While the main argument of the proponents of a *Greater Syria* was largely based on the economic unity of the Syrian provinces, the supporters of a *Greater Lebanon* attempted to root their claims in ancient history, referring to a purported Phoenician legacy. A separate history of a *Greater Lebanon* was constructed, one that was marked by a constant fight against conquest by the Arabs and Ottomans and that witnessed the compromising of its ‘natural frontiers’ by the Ottomans and the British in 1861.⁸⁶ Consequently, a *Greater Lebanon* would merely be a return to historical boundaries, (despite the lack of proof that such ever existed in history) and enable the economic viability of an independent Lebanese state.

When the Allied forces reached the Lebanese and Syrian provinces in October 1918, the local elites of the Lebanese mountains were caught ‘unprepared, with no clear plan for dealing with the new situation and explicit national claim to uphold.’⁸⁷ In addition, the decision on the future status of the provinces was suspended amidst rivalry over control of Syria between the French and King Faisal, who had been installed by the British as de facto ruler of Syria in 1918. Faisal described Syria as the ‘gem in the Arab crown’ and considered it an important part of the independent Arab state to which he aspired.⁸⁸ The clashes between France and Faisal contributed to a polarization of the local population, specifically amongst the inhabitants of the Lebanese mountains that feared their autonomous status would be bargained away by France in exchange for an extension of French influence over all the Syrian provinces.

Since the existence of nationalist feelings and aspirations amongst the local population was recognized by the international community, a fact finding mission endorsed by US President Wilson – the King-Crane Commission – was sent to the non-

⁸⁵ The most notable accounts are Auguste Adib Pasha, *Le Liban après la guerre* (1919) and Yusuf Sawda, *Fi Sabil Lubnān* (1919).

⁸⁶ Carol Hakim (2013), p. 220.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

Turkish parts of the crumbled Ottoman Empire. The aim of the Commission was to establish whether the emergent nationalism in the area could be considered strong enough for independent and sovereign states. The papers of the King-Crane Commission (which visited the territory for 42 days from June 10 - July 21 1919) consist of a large number of petitions by the communities of the area, their demands ranging from complete independence and independence under French trusteeship to autonomy within a larger Syrian state.⁸⁹ The expressions of national aspirations were very much in line with those formulated earlier by the emigrant communities. While the Maronites advocated for a *Greater Lebanon* ‘absolutely independent of the rest of Syria’ and even expressed the wish ‘to become French citizens at an early moment’, the other community traditionally inhabiting the mountains, the Druze, ‘asked emphatically to be left out of the Lebanon in case it be given to France’.⁹⁰ The inhabitants of the territories that were meant to be included in a state of *Greater Lebanon* - consisting of mainly Muslims, some Greek Orthodox Christians and a small group of Protestants – also voiced their aversion to French control. A delegation representing these inhabitants, consisting of both Muslims and Christians, asked for autonomy within a Syrian state based on fears regarding the economic future of a separate Lebanon.⁹¹ The Commission also noted the impact of what they called the ‘French policy of “colonization”’ in the area and how it had resulted in some form of separate identity since the affected inhabitants ‘are apt to hold themselves as of a distinctly higher order of civilization than the people of the interior.’⁹² That this was limited to the Maronites of the mountains was proved by the fact that a mere fourteen percent, mainly Lebanese Maronites, actually

⁸⁹ See Oberlin College Archives, RG 2/6, box 128, folder 3, Henry Churchill King Papers, 1873 – 1934, King-Crane Commission: Reports and correspondence, 1918-19.

⁹⁰ Report of the American Section of the International Commission on Mandates in Turkey, submitted by Charles R. Crane and Henry Churchill King, Paris, August 28, 1919, in: United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference*, Vol. 12, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 775.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 767.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 776

requested a mandate held by the French if one were to be imposed on the territories.⁹³

The final report of the King-Crane Commission to the peace conference in Paris recommended a Western power trusteeship for a united state of *Greater Syria* governed under Prince Faisal. The report specified that the power that was to take over this trusteeship was to enter 'not at all as a colonizing Power in the old sense of that term, but as a Mandatory under the League of Nations with the clear consciousness that "the well-being and development" of the people form for it a "sacred trust."' ⁹⁴ It was noted that Lebanon was considered to be best served by remaining part of Syria, albeit with an autonomous status:

Lebanon has achieved a considerable degree of prosperity and autonomy within the Turkish Empire. She certainly should not find her legitimate aspirations less possible within a Syrian national State. On the contrary, it may be confidently expected that both her economic and political relations with the rest of Syria would be better if she were a constituent member of the State, rather than entirely independent of it.⁹⁵

However, the report was shelved and at the Conference of San Remo on 26 April 1920, the future of the territories of the former Ottoman Empire was officially decided. Since British opposition to French control over Syria had been side-tracked by the mounting crisis in Egypt, France was granted the mandate over the entire Levant. Once again, the temporary character of the mandate as well as its ultimate goal of preparing the territories for independence was emphasized in the Covenant of the League of Nations.⁹⁶ In the wake of the removal of British troops in October 1919, Prince Faisal gained *de facto* control over Syria and confrontation with France intensified. In an attempt to avert the granting of the mandate over Syria to France, Faisal 'decided to promote and assist the formation of armed bands in the regions adjoining the French zone to harass French forces and with a view to forcing the French government to withdraw its forces from

⁹³ See Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 78.

⁹⁴ Report of the American Section of the International Commission on Mandates in Turkey, p. 789.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Art. XXII of the Covenant, 16 (a), published in Harold W.V. Temperley (1924), p. 521.

Syria.⁹⁷ The armed bands mainly raided the contested areas of the Biqā' valley and the hinterland of Tyre and Tripoli, finding support from local Shi'a and Druze forces. The aim of the banditry did not remain limited to harassing French forces but soon turned against Christian villages that were perceived to be pro-French. The raids also continued after France had officially been granted the mandate over the entire territory and was meant to spread feelings of insecurity. The violence culminated in early May, 1920 with an attack on the Catholic village of 'Aīn 'Ibl by a large Shi'a gang from neighbouring Bint Ġbaīl: 50 residents were massacred.⁹⁸ Attempts by members of the Administrative Council of the Lebanese mountains to attain independence through a deal with Faisal were quashed by the French, and Faisal was expelled from Syria following the defeat of his forces in July of the same year.

On 1 September 1920, France officially drew the borders for what was to become the *State of Greater Lebanon*, adding the coastal cities, 'Akkār plain, Biqā' valley and Ġabal 'Āmil to the region of *Mount Lebanon*. As such, the mandate power created a territorial entity along frontiers that had never before existed. The annexation of the coastal cities was a contentious issue since it cut the Syrian capital of Damascus off from its closest port, Beirut. While the extension of the mountain area turned the new state into an economically viable entity, the redrawn borders had the potential to seriously weaken Damascus' economy. Specifically the question of access to the sea was an issue, at least until the Alawite State, comprising the port city of Lattakia, was fully incorporated into Syria in 1936. The French decision to separate the territory of *Ġabal Lubnān* from the rest of Syria was contrary to the recommendations made by the King-Crane Commission and joined territories with strong Sunni and Shi'a Muslim majorities with the Maronite and Druze communities inhabiting *Ġabal Lubnān*. Furthermore, the adding of territories to the north and east disrespected the wishes of

⁹⁷ Carole Hakim (2013), p. 252.

⁹⁸ William Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600 – 2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 177.

their inhabitants who had clearly expressed their desire to be part of a Syrian state.

The creation of *Greater Lebanon* was driven by economic considerations, and designed to make the new Lebanon a viable entity; it was being planned in France and amongst some Christian Lebanese intellectuals even before World War I.⁹⁹ In fact, the autonomous Maronite principality advocated by the French in the wake of the *Règlement* had been accompanied by a detailed map. This map was also used by Lebanese nationalists presenting their claims for an independent state to the Paris Peace Conference and ‘the Greater Lebanon that ultimately emerged in 1920 looked strangely in shape like the one already devised in 1860.’¹⁰⁰ Both Longrigg and Zamir argue that French decisions on Lebanese independence were guided by the gratification of loyal friends and ‘the final decision on borders was prompted more by Maronite demands than by French interest.’¹⁰¹ This argument, however, seems to overestimate Maronite influence on France’s policies in the Levant. While the special relationship with the Maronites certainly played an important role, it should not be forgotten that France had been willing to compromise an independent *Greater Lebanon* when contesting for influence over all Syrian provinces. Furthermore, General Gouraud admitted in a memorandum that France’s own power interests in the territories had played an important role in the decision since ‘[i]t is easy to maintain a balance between [...] states that will be large enough to achieve self-sufficiency and, if need be, pit one against the other’.¹⁰² In any case, the solution met with opposition, both from Syria and from within the new entity, even from some Maronite Christians who considered the large number of adherents to the Muslim faith a threat to the Christian state they had aspired to create.

The system set up by the French for the Levant States, and particularly for

⁹⁹ See Kais Firro (2003), p. 16 ff.; Stefan Wild (2004), p. 150 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Carol Hakim (2013), p. 66.

¹⁰¹ Meir Zamir (1985), p. 97. See also Stephen H. Longrigg (1958), p. 117.

¹⁰² ‘Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, Vol. 32, 20.08.1920, pp.188-9, as quoted in Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 85.

Lebanon, has been characterised by Patrick Seale as practically providing ‘little more than a fig leaf for a colonial regime’.¹⁰³ While there can be no doubt that France was trying to extend her influence in the territory as much as possible and to instil loyalty to France within the Lebanese population, her policies were bound by the regulations for mandate regimes and could never go as far as, for example, using the territory for settlement as the Italians had in Eritrea. Furthermore, the mandate countries obtained their own constitutions and set up their own government. Yet, French policy towards Lebanon differed decisively from that adopted towards Syria. The special attitude towards Lebanon was described in 1924 by Temperley and helps to elucidate France’s later reluctance to release Lebanon into independence:

The French administration [...] regarded the Lebanon as being an integral portion of France, in much the same way as Algeria, and their policy was based upon this unavowed but governing assumption. [...] Even when the election of representatives to the State Councils was adopted and the Syrian States were officially called ‘autonomous’, the form of government remained a façade behind which French officials exerted complete power.¹⁰⁴

Despite France’s official policy of educating and assisting weaker nations, following their *mission civilatrice*, the French actually worked towards retaining their authority in the territories by controlling every detail of constitutional and administrative life. Even more importantly, ‘no efforts of the Mandatory availed to correct the weaknesses of Lebanese politics, so deeply rooted in the nation’s civilization and its leaders’ conception of public life.’¹⁰⁵ The new territorial reality rather fostered contesting forms of nationalism that had existed and dominated the debates in pre-mandate Lebanon: Lebanism, Syrianism and Arabism. While nationalist tendencies were often connected with religious affiliation, it cannot be said that there was a clear-cut Muslim-Christian dichotomy in pre-mandate Lebanon. Diversification existed within the various camps

¹⁰³ Patrick Seal in his Preface to Youssef Chaitani, *Post-Colonial Syria and Lebanon: The Decline of Arab Nationalism and the Triumph of the State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. XII.

¹⁰⁴ Harold W.V. Temperley (1924), p. 168.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

and allegiances with opposing nationalist camps had been rather fluid. The most obvious testimony to this is the fact that a large number of Christian intellectuals, mainly Greek Orthodox, played a crucial role in the emergence of Arab nationalism, especially in its early days. As Hanf asserted, 'the main currents of Arab nationalism in Lebanon as well as of Lebanese nationalism are not so much 'Arab' and 'Lebanese' as codewords for what is best termed a Sunni and a Maronite sense of community.'¹⁰⁶

The political system applied by the French in *Greater Lebanon* was based on the sectarian system that had been established following the *Règlement*. The 1926 Constitution of the *State of Greater Lebanon* basically re-instituted sectarian power-sharing following the model of the 1861 agreement. The system is often termed sectarianism (*tāi'fiye*), confessionism or consociationalism, all basically describing the same thing, namely a system that legitimizes and institutionalizes the distribution of power according to confessional affiliations. Of course, the term consociationalism is not intrinsically linked to power-sharing based on religion but describes 'a state or region within which two or more cultural or ethnic or national communities peaceably coexist, with none being institutionally superior to the others, and in which the relevant communities cooperate politically through self-government and shared government'.¹⁰⁷ The institutionalization of this system through the Constitution contributed to the further politicization of confession and resulted in the almost complete disappearance of any religious and confessional fluidity. Other identity markers basically ceased to play a decisive role and, as Ghassan Salame phrased it, 'ethnic differences in the true sense of the word have no place in Lebanon. It is a tribal confessional system that separates an ethnically and linguistically homogenous population into distinctive groups.'¹⁰⁸

The nationalist ideology that would have to be developed for the new territorial

¹⁰⁶ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 133.

¹⁰⁷ Brendan O'Leary as quoted in Michael Kerr (2005), p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ghassan Salame, *Lebanon's Injured Identities: Who Represents Whom During a Civil War?* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1986), p. 4.

entity, one overarching communal divisions, was decisively hampered by the politicization of communities ascribing to different ideas of national identity. A further hindrance was the fact that the system that was imposed on the state of *Greater Lebanon* had been in operation in parts of the new territorial entity, namely *Mount Lebanon*, before. The Christians, familiar with the system and socially more developed due to decades of contact with Western powers, secured most of the key positions in the new state. Naturally this alienated the Sunni Muslims and their boycott of the new state facilitated the Maronites' achievement of a virtual monopoly over the country.¹⁰⁹ The latter, on the other hand, felt they had to maintain control over the state as they did not trust the Muslims who felt more bound to neighbouring Syria by historical and religious links.¹¹⁰ Rather than the different communities serving as building blocks for a transcending, civic national identity, the federation into a new state was not accepted by all communities and the politicization of cleavages rather seemed to have increased the potential for conflict. Therefore, the prospect of a syncretistic nationalism developing appeared rather limited during the early stages of the mandate.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the territories that were to be joined into the territorial states of Eritrea and Lebanon had very different histories before the arrival of their respective colonial and the mandate powers. While control over the Eritrean territories was highly contested by various regional empires over many centuries, the regions that were to become *Greater Lebanon* had all been part of the Ottoman Empire for a long time.

The colony of Eritrea was carved out through expansionism and partially through treaties with Abyssinia in the period of the 'scramble for Africa'. While there

¹⁰⁹ Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 35.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

were connections between various communities in the region and the adjacent territories, nationalist sentiments in a Western sense did not exist. The emergence of a growing self-awareness and consciousness only came through the establishment of a comprehensive infrastructure, socio-economic integration and the impact left on the social structure of the territory by the Italians. The latter primarily refers to the creation of new social classes arising from the Italian policy of land expropriation and consequent urbanisation, as well as the drafting of large number of Eritreans into the Italian colonial army. In the case of Lebanon, the regional situation was completely different when France sought to gain the mandate over the Levantine territories in the wake of the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The Arab regions of the Empire were already experiencing the emergence of nationalist sentiments and, facing the prospect of self-determination, the various communities articulated their own nationalist aspirations. The core area of *Mount Lebanon* had had an autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire, based on a system of sectarian representation, and developed an ‘embryonic’ sense of identity. The creation of *Greater Lebanon* centred on this autonomous unit but, guided by economic considerations, brought communities with different nationalist aspirations into the new territorial state. These aspirations were largely based on identification with their Syrian neighbours and co-religionists and, consequently, allegiance to the new state was refused.

The differing states of political consciousness at the time of the creation of the new territorial entities of Eritrea and Lebanon were certainly due to the difference in political development. The Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire were more advanced in terms of political awareness and already familiar with the concepts of national identification and self-determination, not least because of their earlier contacts with Western powers. The Eritrean communities became familiar with the concepts of Western political organisation only after they came under Italian control. The

development of a national consciousness was not directly fostered by the colonial power but slowly emerged and manifested itself in small-scale resistance to the colonial regime. Despite largely keeping the Italian administrative apparatus in place, the BMA differed from the colonial regime as it was only as a temporary measure, much like the French mandate in Lebanon. However, while the BMA had taken over a territorial unit that had already existed for 50 years (with exception of the short period as part of Italian East Africa), France had created a new territorial unit that only satisfied the wishes of part of the population. In both cases the question with regard to the future of the territories was whether all the communities involved would be willing and able to identify with the territorial state as an integral part of their national identity. This will be analysed in the next chapter which mainly examines the nationalist aspirations in Eritrea in the final stage of British administration, and compares it with the development of nationalist aspirations resulting in the abolishment of the French mandate.

Chapter 2: Towards independence?

By the end of World War II, Eritrea and Lebanon both faced the prospect of independence due to developments in the international arena. Italy had been defeated by the Allies and, consequently, lost power over its colonial territories in Africa that had been part of the battleground. During the British Military Administration this brought about the question of the future of Eritrea, and the multi-communal population was asked to define its own nationalist aspirations. In the case of Lebanon, nationalist aspirations had already been formulated prior to the establishment of the mandate of *Greater Lebanon*. However, the multi-communal state that had been created by the French only met the aspirations of one of the communities and had, above all, served French interests. The provisions of the mandate had not established a time frame for the release of the country into independence, but British domination in the Middle East and its attitude towards independence for the mandate territories provided the preconditions for its final achievement.

This chapter will examine the events leading to the end of European control in both Eritrea and Lebanon and analyse the state of their national cohesion at that time. It will show that both countries were divided by opposing nationalist aspirations that defined their identity as either being linked to the neighbouring territorial entity or as separate from it within the boundaries of the territorial state created by the colonial/mandate regime. However, it will argue that at the same time a certain degree of allegiance to the territorial unit had developed. In Lebanon this was strongly fostered by economic and power considerations. Indeed, the experience of political consociation and power-sharing facilitated a reconciliation of opposed aspirations to achieve independence within the boundaries of the territorial state. In Eritrea on the other hand, nationalist aspirations had only had a short period to be articulated politically since it was only during the BMA that political consciousness was fostered, and this process

was strongly influenced by the interests of Ethiopia and the major international powers involved in the decision on the future of the territory.

After the examination of the end of European control, the second part of the chapter will give a historical outline of the events leading up to the early 1990s when Eritrea finally achieved independence and the civil war in Lebanon ended. This will serve as the background for the subsequent chapters that analyse at the post-colonial/mandate period.

ERITREA

The disposal of the former Italian colony

In the Treaty of Peace with Italy of 10 February 1947, the former colonial power renounced all rights and titles to its overseas territories and the decision on their final disposal was to be taken unanimously by a commission of the Governments of the USSR, the US, the UK and France by 15 September 1948.¹ The interests of Ethiopia, an ally of both the UK and the US, played a decisive role in the debate on the disposal of the Italian colonies, especially when it came to Eritrea; unlike the British, the US was mainly concerned with the issue of access to the sea for Ethiopia while historic links to the region were dismissed as ‘vague.’² Following the principles of the Atlantic Charter with regard to the right of self-government and self-determination, the US initially proposed the creation of an international trusteeship followed by independence before putting their support behind the earlier proposal by the French to put Eritrea back under Italian administration for a period of transition. This proposal was also supported by the USSR while the UK advocated partition.

¹ See Section IV, Article 23 of the Treaty of Peace with Italy of February 10, 1947, in: Habtu Ghebre-Ab, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: A Documentary Study* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1993), p. 40.

² ‘Briefing Book Paper, No. 248, Italy: Territorial Problems’, Eritrea, Washington, June 30, 1945, in: United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference)*, Vol. 1, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Print Office, 1945), p. 308.

In order to come to an unanimous decision, the Four Powers decided to send a commission to the territories to investigate the wishes of the population. As in the case of the King-Crane Commission in pre-mandate Lebanon, the aim was to determine whether there existed a strong separate Eritrean identity that would warrant independence. The commission visited the territory from November 1947 to January 1948, held numerous official hearings and accepted submission of the political views of various political parties as well as religious and professional associations. As the report of the Commission of Investigation reveals, a few groups were not included in the hearings such as religious minorities in some areas, and in some instances pro-Ethiopian forces actually prevented people from attending hearings.³ Union with Ethiopia, full independence for Eritrea and a 'Greater Eritrea', incorporating the Tigrinya speakers south of the river Mareb were among the desired realizations of self-determination.⁴ The final report of the Commission concluded that 55.2% of the people were in support of Eritrean independence.⁵ Yet, the degree of political understanding of the population was actually doubted by the Commission of Investigation, and Eritrean representatives were described as 'politically backward' and 'coached by their party leaders in the appropriate replies to be given.'⁶ The Four Powers again failed to come to an agreement, mainly due to their differing wider interests as Iyob rightfully noted. While the emerging superpowers of the US and the USSR were competing to establish a foothold in the Horn of Africa, France was worried about its own colonial possessions and wanted 'to prevent precedents of early independence for its colonies in the Horn and the Maghreb.'⁷ For the British, partition would have meant an expansion of their

³ TNA, FO371/69362, 'Report of the Four Power Commission of Investigation on Eritrea', August 1948, p.114-5.

⁴ Iyob notes that 'very little is known about its emergence and very quick demise.' Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 67.

⁵ TNA, FO371/69362.

⁶ TNO, FO371/69326, 'Record of the Decision taken at the 122nd meeting of the Commission of Investigation', 03.5.1948.

⁷ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 63.

own colonial possessions in the region. Negash on the other hand asserts that the British plan for partition 'was based primarily on their appreciation of the local realities'.⁸

In fact, amidst international discussions regarding the future of the territory, and frustration with continuous foreign occupation, the political climate within the territory was tense and the anti-colonialist nationalist platform fragmented into two main camps supporting differing nationalist aspirations. When the Four Power Commission toured the territory, it not only encountered the *Unionist Party* (UP) demanding union with Ethiopia but also four parties advocating independence (*Muslim League*, *Liberal Progressive Party*, *National Party of Massawa*, *New Eritrea Pro-Italia Party*). The Eritrean Orthodox Church also played a decisive role in the formation of public political opinion at the time. After having been stripped of its privileges by the European colonial powers, alliance with Ethiopia appeared to be a way to regain these privileges, an option that was, of course, actively encouraged by the Empire itself. Trevaskis described the pro-Ethiopian actions of the Orthodox Church as follows:

By 1942, every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village church had become a centre of Ethiopian nationalism, and popular religious feast days [...] had become occasions for open displays of Ethiopian patriotism. The cathedral, monasteries, and village churches would be festooned with Ethiopian flags and the sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal political language.⁹

This active adoption of ideological leadership by the Church did have some negative implications since Christians opposing the pro-Ethiopian ideology were often subjected to 'religious punishments' such as ex-communication.¹⁰ Scholars of the Eritrean nationalist school often reiterated accusations made by supporters of independence of that time, namely that the UP was supported not only verbally and financially by the Orthodox Church and the Empire, but that it was actually created by the latter in order

⁸ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 43.

⁹ Gerald K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition: 1941-52* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 60.

¹⁰ See for example James Firebrace and Stuart Holland (1984), p. 20.

to back up irredentist claims.¹¹ Yet, it has to be acknowledged that the pro-Ethiopian nationalist sentiment was not merely imposed on its supporters. Specifically the inhabitants of the highlands did not only consider themselves as sharing values and customs with their neighbours south of the Mareb river, these territories used to be inter-connected over the centuries prior to the advent of Italian colonialism. Furthermore, as Killion rightfully noted, these aspirations have to be considered ‘a manifestation, at least in part, of an anti-colonial ‘proto-nationalism’ that regarded unity with Ethiopia as a means of empowering indigenous Eritreans against European colonizers.’¹² Proponents of independence for the territory, mainly from the Muslim lowlands, were also driven by the desire to end colonial rule, yet they saw their aspirations best fulfilled as an independent sovereign country that they considered much more advanced economically than Ethiopia. Therefore, annexation to Ethiopia was considered as ‘going back a hundred years’ in terms of socio-economic development.¹³

The legitimacy of the parties advocating for independence was questioned by supporters of the unionist cause using the same argument that had been used to discredit the UP, namely that the independence movement was instigated from outside, predominantly by Britain and Italy who wanted to prolong their control over the territory.¹⁴ It should be noted that, while there was decisive disagreement on how to end European colonial domination, neither the UP nor the supporters of independence were willing to endorse partition as proposed by the British. This shows that allegiance to the territorial unit created by Italian colonialism had developed amongst Eritreans and that even the supporters of the opposing nationalist aspiration were ‘imagined’ as belonging

¹¹ See for example Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 72, James Firebrace and Stuart Holland (1984), p. 20, Gaim Kibreab (2000), p. 102/103.

¹² Tom Killion as quoted in Dominique Jacquin-Berdal (2002), p. 103.

¹³ TNA, FO371/69365, ‘Statement by the Liberal Progressive Party’, Four Power Commission, Report on Eritrea, Appendix 101, 1948.

¹⁴ See for example Dominique Jacquin-Berdal (2002), p. 102, John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years* (Michigan: Reference Publications, 1984), p. 213, Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 50 ff.

to the same nation. In his study on colonial Eritrea, Negash argues against a decisive impact on Eritrean national consciousness brought about by the colonial capitalist activities. He bases this on the fact that the sections of the Eritrean population that were most affected by colonialism, the inhabitants of the highlands, should have been the ones rallying for independence but instead fervently supported union with Ethiopia.¹⁵ However, this argument ignores the fact that the Muslim communities in the lowlands not only witnessed the integration of their territories early on during the colonial period through the establishment of infrastructure and agricultural development schemes; they had also experienced 'special' treatment by the Italians due to their pro-Muslim policy, specifically under the fascist regime, which Miran describes as having 'worked towards the genesis and formation of an 'Eritrean' Muslim consciousness, at least among the growing urban elite'.¹⁶ Consequently, it seems only logical that the Eritrean Muslims with their developed self-consciousness would rather have seen their aspirations fulfilled in an independent Eritrean state than in a larger Christian Ethiopia where they would be reduced to a minority status.

With Eritrean nationalism being fragmented, and the Four Powers unable to come to a unanimous decision, the matter of Eritrea's disposition was passed to the United Nations. However, the discussions in the General Assembly mainly reiterated earlier proposals regarding its future. The necessity of access to the sea remained Ethiopia's main argument for its claim over the territory, and long term cultural and religious links were also stressed. Italy, despite the official renunciation of any right to its former colonial possession had been successfully lobbying for Italian trusteeship over at least parts of its former colonies. The result was the division of the UN General Assembly into a pro-Italian bloc (mainly Latin American states and France) and an anti-

¹⁵ See Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 148.

¹⁶ Jonathan Miran, 'A Historical Overview of Islam', p. 203.

Italian pro-independence group (mainly the Asiatics).¹⁷ An agreement was hammered out between Britain and Italy, the Bevin-Sforza agreement, in which the British proposal for partition of Eritrea was incorporated.¹⁸ The agreement was based only on the interests of international powers and did not take the wishes of the inhabitants of the territories into consideration. It was rejected by the UN mainly because of its provisions for the other two former Italian colonies, Libya and Somalia. Instead it was decided to send another Investigation Commission to Eritrea.

Within Eritrea, political conditions had deteriorated decisively partly due to the negatively perceived Bevin-Sforza agreement and fears of partition. Anti-Italian sentiments were running high and *shifta* activities increased decisively, taking on the form of a 'political weapon'.¹⁹ At their height (1947 to 1952) they were triggered by the widespread uncertainty concerning the future of the territory and, initially, mainly directed against Italians. However, the *shiftas* also targeted advocates of Eritrean independence, specifically in the wake of the arrival of both the Four Power and the UN Commissions of Inquiry. Kibreab asserts that they were deliberately planned to coincide with the arrivals of the missions of inquiry.²⁰ Ethiopia was often accused of financing and instigating the *shifta* activities against anyone opposing the struggle for Eritrean union with Ethiopia.²¹ Gebre-Medhin refers to documents found by the British authorities and deposited in the British National Archives that prove links between the Assistant of the Ethiopian Liaison Office and *shifta* activities of the UP's Youth League.²² Yet, in a telegram from the Chief Administrator of Eritrea to the Foreign

¹⁷ 'Memorandum by the Assistant Chief of the Division of African Affairs (Palmer)', Washington, May 27, 1949, in: United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949: Western Europe*, Vol. 4, (Washington D.C.; U.S. Government Print Office, 1949), p. 558.

¹⁸ For all points of the Bevin-Sforza agreement see 'Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Rusk) to the Secretary of State', Washington, May 9, 1949, in: United States Department of State (1949), Vol. IV, p. 552/553.

¹⁹ Fekadu Ogbasellassie, 'Shifta problems', p. 55.

²⁰ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 111.

²¹ See for example Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 72, Dan Connell (1993), p. 55.

²² See Jordan Gebre-Medhin (1989), p. 126/127.

Office it was emphasized that behind the attacks were rather ‘local Eritrean *shifta* leaders, with perhaps some Ethiopians in their gangs, who have sympathetic instigation from the local Unionist Party.’²³ Incidentally, the politically motivated *shifta* activities largely ended after the UN decision on federation with Ethiopia and the declaration of a general amnesty by the British administration.²⁴ Aside from the *shifta* actually having been a traditional instrument of social protest throughout Eritrean and Ethiopian history, the use of banditry to create a feeling of insecurity and to push through political aspirations was actually not a phenomenon limited to the northeast African regions. It had also been used in Lebanon in the wake of the establishment of the French mandate with a similar goal as in Eritrea, namely to ensure that territories containing co-religionists would be joined with the larger neighbouring state that had only just come into existence itself. Moreover, it has to be noted that while the politicization of religion, due to the division of nationalist aspirations largely running along religious lines, resulted in certain schisms and also culminated in some violent clashes between Christians and Muslims, it did not degenerate into a larger civil conflict along religious lines. In fact, religious leaders and elders from both denominations actively promoted reconciliation in order to avoid the confrontations turning into larger sectarian violence.²⁵

The UN Commission of Investigation, which included representatives from Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa, spent roughly four months in Eritrea in early 1950, but since ‘there were marked differences in regard to essential factual matters’ failed to deliver even a joint report.²⁶ Guatemala and Pakistan were in

²³ FO371/73791, Chief Administrator Drew to the Foreign Office, London, telegram no.238, December 15, 1949, as quoted in: Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 65.

²⁴ Fekadu Ogbasellassie, ‘Shifta problems’, p. 59.

²⁵ RDC, His/Brit/278/06357, Giuseppe Puglisi, ‘Note sul pericolo di una Guerra civile sull’Ltopiano [sic!] eritreo fra Copti e Mussulmani, Asmara, 10.01.1951.

²⁶ A/1285, ‘Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea (Excerpt)’, 08.06.1950, in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *The United Nations and the Independence of Eritrea*, (New York: United Nations/ Department of Public Information, 1996), p. 61.

support of independence, mainly because they were convinced that the Muslim Eritrean population would never accept any form of annexation or federation. Burma, Norway and South Africa on the other hand submitted a memorandum which concluded that Eritrea lacked the capacity for self-government largely due to the high illiteracy rate and, furthermore, was not viable as an economic unit. While the report further stated that support for independence within the territory had actually decreased, it noted that

a common past and seventy years of common rule have had potent unifying effects not only between the diverse peoples of Eritrea but also in their relations with the Italian settlers; such amity cannot readily be destroyed and there is no doubt that resort to violence is repugnant to the deep-rooted desire of all sections in Eritrea to continue to live in peace side by side.²⁷

This ruled out any form of partition of the territory. Based on an additional proposal submitted by Burma and South Africa, federation with Ethiopia was recommended and a draft resolution with a detailed plan was developed. Federation was seen as a compromise solution since the problem in Eritrea was considered to be the existence of ‘two ardent forms of nationalism’ that were irreconcilable because both had ‘the stamp of validity’.²⁸ The US agreed that an autonomous Eritrea federated with Ethiopia represented a just solution for the opposed interpretations of nationalism, since the autonomy within the Ethiopian Empire would ‘satisfy element [sic] supporting independence Eritrea’.²⁹ Yet, US support of the federation proposal was also triggered by the increasing realization of the strategic importance of the territory. In 1949, the achievement of a ‘long-term agreement assuring the continued right to maintain and operate existing communication facilities at Asmara, Eritrea’ was considered a military necessity by the US that ‘should be obtained on the highest priority.’³⁰ The conviction

²⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ ‘The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Italy’, Washington, October 18, 1949, in: United States Department of State, Vol. 4, (1949), p. 594.

³⁰ ‘Views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Military Rights in Foreign Territories’, Washington, undated, in: United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949: National security affairs, foreign economic policy*, 1949, Vol. 1, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Print Office, 1949), p. 304/305.

that this would be more likely if the territory was under Ethiopian sovereignty was also nurtured by Ethiopian military support in the Korean War. Despite continuing opposition in the General Assembly and within Eritrea, the resolution was adopted on 24 November 1950 by a vote of 38 to 14, with 8 abstentions.³¹

In accordance with the resolution, a United Nations Commissioner went to Eritrea to draft a Constitution in cooperation with Eritrean political and religious leaders and after consultations with inhabitants of the territory.³² On 25 and 26 of March the first ever elections in Eritrea took place. The Unionist leader Tedla Bairu was voted President of the Assembly, and the leader of the Moslem League of the Western Province, Ali Mohammed Mussa Radai, Vice-President. Under its UN-designated autonomous status, the Eritrean political system was based on power-sharing, drawn along religious lines:

As in other parts of the world where two religious communities, almost equally balanced, live together, side by side, the Coptic Christians and the Moslems in Eritrea share the positions of precedence in the state between themselves. Thus the Chief Executive is a Christian and the President of the Legislature is a Moslem; the latter's Deputy is a Copt and of the six Secretaries of the Eritrean administrative departments half are Copts and half are Moslems. Again, the Mayor of Asmara is a Christian (though not a Copt) and his Deputy a Moslem. Of the 66 members of the Assembly 33 are Moslems and the great Mohammedan religious festivals are officially declared as general public holidays.³³

A similarly balanced power-sharing could be found in all the divisional offices. The only exception was the central administrative department in Asmara, where the ratio favoured the Christians; this can be explained by the lower educational levels of the Muslim population in general as well as the preference of better educated Muslims to work in commerce rather than in the civil service. Overall, this system of power-sharing can be described as one of 'political consociation' and is thus comparable to that

³¹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali 'Introduction', in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 11.

³² See A. Arthur Schiller, 'Eritrea: Constitution and Federation with Ethiopia', *American Journal of Comparative Law* 2 (1953), pp. 379.

³³ TNA, FO371/131298, Report of the British Consulate-General, No. 4 (501/58), Asmara, September 23, 1958, p. 9. In fact, the Assembly consisted of 68 (!) members, equally divided between Christian and Muslims.

adopted in Lebanon.

During negotiations on the exact terms of the agreement, the Emperor had tried to push through things aimed at annexation rather than federation such as the appointment of the Eritrean Government by the Emperor. He also opposed the idea of a separate flag for Eritrea as well as plans for the preservation of the distinct languages of the Eritrean territory, albeit with no success.³⁴ In fact, the granting of the flag as a symbol of autonomy and the preservation of Tigrinya and Arabic as official languages, in addition to the democratic institutions provided for the autonomous unit, have to be considered of utmost importance in the crystallisation of an Eritrean identity. Not only would they serve to ‘differentiate’ Eritrea from the rest of the Ethiopia but also facilitate the ‘imagining’ of the various communities as part of the Eritrean unit.

Eritrea was officially federated with Ethiopia after the Eritrean Constitution was finalized in July 1952, and the Federal Act was approved in Ethiopia on 15 September 1952. Inside Eritrea, the federation was accepted as a compromise by both the Unionists and the ‘Independentists’ who adapted their plans to realize their nationalist aspirations within the autonomous institutions created for Eritrea.

LEBANON

Achieving independence and the national pact

While Eritrea only witnessed the prospect of self-determination and the considerations of their wishes towards the end of World War II, the Lebanese had already been through the exercise prior to the French mandate period. The territorial entity of *Greater Lebanon* as established by the mandate power only satisfied the nationalist aspirations of one community within its boundaries, yet all the inhabitants had understood the French mandate to be a temporary measure and, hence, were anticipating their

³⁴ Okbazghi Yohannes, *The United States and the Horn of Africa: An Analytical Study of Patterns and Processes* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 134.

achievement of independence.

During World War II, conditions favourable to Lebanon's independence increased decisively due to a number of developments, especially the competition between France and the UK concerning the future of the peoples in the Near East and the situation in France itself. After the collapse of France under Nazi occupation in 1940, the Germans attempted to get a foothold in the territories by promising independence as the Vichy government in the Levant became increasingly unpopular.³⁵ The Lebanese in particular grew resentful of being controlled by a country itself under enemy occupation. In fact, agreements on independence had already been negotiated but not ratified by the French parliament which was reluctant to give up any mandate power. In 1941, the Free French and British troops managed to overthrow the Vichy administration in both Lebanon and Syria in a concerted effort, however the prospect of the Free French taking over control in the territories was not met with great enthusiasm by either population. British administration appeared to be more appealing since the British were considered more supportive of independence. However, the British guaranteed to both Syria and Lebanon that the promise of independence would be realized under Free French administration.³⁶

Hence, while they were still under French mandate by the end of World War II, Lebanon and Syria had the promise of imminent independence secured by the British. Churchill's personal representative to the Free French, Sir Edward Spears, described how the Lebanese had these expectations in mind and '[i]t was fascinating to see the pride of nationhood developing in quite ordinary people; sailors in the harbour, taxi drivers, began to feel they were now citizens of a beautiful country, the loveliness of

³⁵ Sir Edward Spears, *The Fulfilment of a Mission: The Spears Mission to Syria and Lebanon 1941-1944* (London: Cooper, 1977), p. 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

which they seemed to realize for the first time'.³⁷ However, it must be questioned whether the anticipation of independence can be considered an expression of genuine nationhood or whether it was rather an anti-mandate nationalist sentiment.

In fact, the earlier differences concerning nationalist aspirations were brought up again during discussions surrounding the matter of impending elections and the elaboration of a constitution for an independent Lebanon. The matter of contention was the allocation of seats in the new parliament and Muslim communities threatened to boycott the elections as they felt the distribution of power, based on the 1932 census, was unfair (32 Christian as opposed to 22 Muslim deputies). The numbers recorded by the 1932 census were no longer considered to be accurate as demographic changes had almost equalised the Christian-Muslim ratio.³⁸ Letters of protest were sent to the representatives of Great Britain, the US and Egypt. Sunni elites even called for a re-union with Syria of the provinces that had been attached to *Greater Lebanon* in 1920 in case the demands for equal representation were not met.³⁹ Sir Edward Spears reported though that 'this idea was particularly unwelcome among the Lebanese Moslems.'⁴⁰ In fact, the Muslim boycott was quickly renounced after a revised agreement allocated 30 seats to the Christians and 25 to the Muslim and the Druze. This implies that the idea of recourse to (re-) union with Syria was only used to put pressure on the Christian communities to agree to the adjustment of the seat quota. Envisioning the achievement of independence within the boundaries of *Greater Lebanon* became possible for the Muslim communities as long as they felt fairly represented in the state. In fact, within the Syrian state the Muslim communities of Lebanon would have become part of a Muslim majority and, consequently, had less political influence. Furthermore, as

³⁷ Ibid., p.208.

³⁸ Longrigg states that by the end of the wartime period (1945), the population of Lebanon was approaching 1.25 million, the Christians maintaining a small majority of 53% (see Stephen H. Longrigg (1958), p. 340).

³⁹ See Kais Firro (2003), p. 201 and Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 106.

⁴⁰ Sir Edward Spears (1977), p. 209.

Chaitani noted, economic considerations also played a decisive role since within the boundaries of *Greater Lebanon* the capital of Beirut had developed into 'an administrative and trading centre, and an important gateway to the Arab hinterland.'⁴¹ While reconciliation of the previously opposed nationalist aspirations of Lebanese Christians and Muslims was mainly based on the agreement to end French domination, the elites of both sides realized that a solution to the remaining contentious issue of the identity of the country was necessary. During negotiations on Lebanon's independence in Cairo in June 1942, Bishara al-Khoury and Riad al-Sulh had already come to an agreement that would be established in the summer of 1943, and together with the new constitution would form the basis for independent Lebanon. The formula of the agreement that came to be known as 'National Pact' was Christian acceptance of the Arab identity of Lebanon and renunciation of Western protection in exchange for Muslim acceptance of the legitimacy and independence of the Lebanese state. Included was a formula for sectarian representation, also enshrined in the constitution of independent Lebanon which, with the exception of the new ratio agreed upon, left the main articles relating to the sectarian system of the 1926 constitution largely untouched.

While agreement was reached amongst the communities of Lebanon, de Gaulle was still reluctant to give up the mandate territories for good and attempted to trade the elections for treaties. His brazen statements such as 'there is no question of France maintaining the same position she occupied in Syria before the war' not only gave offence to the local governments but also put the guarantees given by the British into question.⁴² Under great pressure Lebanese elections took place in July 1943. The Christian Bishara al-Khoury became the first President, and Riad al-Sulh (Sunni Muslim) the first Prime Minister of independent Lebanon. Following the elections, the Lebanese government asked for the French mandate to officially end and to have all

⁴¹ Youssef Chaitani (2007), p. 12.

⁴² TNA, FO226/234, Draft Telegram to the Foreign Office from the British Legation, Beirut, 22.06.1942.

authority transferred to the newly elected Lebanese Government. Furthermore, Arabic was designated the only official language of the country. The French reacted by suspending the Constitution and dismissing the government. The majority of the ministers, including the President and the Prime Minister, were arrested; some were able to flee to the mountains from where they started to agitate.⁴³ Emile Eddé was appointed the new head of government by the French authorities. This was not only a violation of Lebanon's right to self-determination but also an open affront to the British who had observed the elections and continuously guaranteed the independence of Lebanon. At this point, the Lebanese government was determined to finally push through the independence that had long been promised to them. French behaviour had further alienated the Christian community, its traditionally close ally in the region, and helped to forge unity between the Christian and Muslim components of the Lebanese government. Lord Casey reported from his conversation with the representative of the Maronite community in Lebanon, that Archbishop Monseigneur Mobarek affirmed that the 'French now had to go finally'.⁴⁴ He further noted the 'complete accord between Christians and Moslems' and that '[t]he country could not be held quiet for much longer'.⁴⁵ During the meeting, it was also made clear that if the British did not protect the Lebanese from the French, they would take matters in their own hands. While the Free French actually tried to trick the Archbishop into a public declaration of support,⁴⁶ Mobarek publicly affirmed his sympathy with the lawfully elected Lebanese government and vowed to fight for the unity of Lebanese of all denominations:

They must know that the propaganda which they sow by words serves only to increase unity and cohesion between both Moslem, Christian and Druze alike around Lebanese independence and self-respect and liberty. [...] I beg you, O sons of Islam and Druzes and Lebanese Christians, as I

⁴³ TNA, FO226/245 (File 94 I), Cypher Telegram from H.M Minister, Beirut to the Foreign Office, No. 637, 11.11.1943.

⁴⁴ Sir Edward Spears (1977), p. 248/249.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 249.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO226/245 (94II), Cypher Telegram by H.M. Minister, Beirut to the Foreign Office, No. 656, 12.11.1943.

beg every Lebanese to be in readiness to shed his blood to water the roots of our cedar which thirsts for blood.⁴⁷

French proposals to release, but not reinstate, the ministers were dismissed by the British and attempts to approach the elected Lebanese government in its refuge in the mountains were unsuccessful.⁴⁸

The British finally set an ultimatum for the release and reinstatement of the Lebanese president and the ministers, or else martial law would be imposed and the prisoners freed by British troops. General Catroux himself recognized that the French 'had failed to notice the development of a Lebanese nationalism'⁴⁹ and 'the strength of nationalist feeling and [...] complete unanimity of all sections of the population'.⁵⁰ With the Lebanese population on the cusp of revolt, the French finally gave in to the pressure. They released and reinstated the elected government which was met with great joy by the population of the country:

The twenty-second of November was principally noteworthy for the fact that large crowds carrying deputies shoulder-high converged on the Chamber, while others tore down the old Lebanese flag (the French tricolour with a cedar on the white) and replaced it by the new banner which consisted of a broad white band between two red ones, and a cedar tree on the white, as on the old flag.⁵¹

The spirit of unity sweeping the country was also voiced by leaders of the various communities, such as the Moslem leader of Tripoli Hamid Karame. While hoisting the new flag himself, he declared that 'in future no one in the Lebanon should speak of Christians and Moslems, but only of Lebanese.'⁵²

The National Pact, which was essential in achieving reconciliation between the Lebanese communities and facilitated independence, was described by the Lebanese

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 226/245 (94II), Speech by Mgr. Moubarak, Collège de la Sagesse – 1800 hrs, 12.11.1943.

⁴⁸ Sir Edward Spears (1977), p. 260.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 263/264.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

⁵¹ Sir Edward Spears (1977), p. 275. In fact, the new flag was hoisted all over the country, see TNA, FO226/245 (94VII), cipher Telegram from H.M. Minister, Beirut to the Foreign Office, No. 752, 23.11.1943.

⁵² Ibid., p. 280.

journalist René Aggiouri as the ‘expression of the will of the different minorities to coexist within the structures of an independent and sovereign state’.⁵³ In that sense, it represents the foundation stone for a possible civic nation bound together by the transcending will to live together. National symbols had evolved, such as a common flag that was hoisted by members of all communities amidst the achievement of independence. The Pact, in combination with the Constitution and the Electoral Law, converted Lebanon into a constitutional democracy in which all crucial political questions could be solved by consensus only.⁵⁴ Yet, as Hourani pointed out, the agreement of the National Pact was only amongst the leaders of the communities and not necessarily the expression of a widespread agreement that existed among the Lebanese people, or as he put it, ‘that there really existed a Lebanese political society’.⁵⁵ In fact, the Lebanese president in the period leading up to independence, Alfred Naccache, had noted that

[t]here is very little feeling of civic responsibility in this country. There is very little national sentiment. The Lebanon is not, according to occidental standards, a nation. It is little more than a conglomeration of populations of different religions, and religion here is the important thing.⁵⁶

The question after independence was whether the provisions of the National Pact would be sufficient to turn this conglomeration into a federation of religious communities, adhering to an overarching national identity related to the territorial state of Lebanon. Since communities remained politicized and religious identity was not moved to the private realm, the imminent danger remained that conflict would always automatically acquire a religious connotation and the preservation of the identity of the religious community remain the priority.

⁵³ René Aggiouri, *L'Orient*, 06.04.1957, as quoted in Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 72.

⁵⁴ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 73.

⁵⁵ Albert Hourani, ‘Ideologies of the Mountain and the City’, in: Owen, Roger (ed.), *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 35.

⁵⁶ Public statement made by President Naccache, Dispatch (No. 483) from U.S. consul to U.S. Secretary of State, October 1, 1942, published in: Walter L. Browne, *The political history of Lebanon, 1920-1950*, Vol. 2, (Salisbury: Documentary Publications, 1977), p. 367.

Formally, the mandate was ended by the Franco-Syrian-Lebanese Tripartite Agreement of 22 December 1943 and the Lebanese Republic received the ‘blessing of the two superpowers’, the US and the USSR, through their recognition of Lebanon as a fully independent state on 19 and 20 September 1945 respectively.⁵⁷

ERITREA

Eritrea as an autonomous part of the Ethiopian Empire and annexation

Similar to the Lebanese, the Eritreans exited European domination with their own constitution based on power-sharing between the religious communities and their own elected government; yet, these institutions had been established by the international community for an autonomous unit that was joined with Ethiopia through federation. Moreover, from the very beginning Ethiopia started weakening the autonomous Eritrean institutions and worked towards annexation of the territory. The attitude of the Emperor and the Ethiopian administration during the negotiations on the federal agreement had already shown that it was interested in incorporation rather than federation. Indeed days before the federal plan was officially installed, the Ethiopians took measures to physically control the territory by ‘a brigade of Ethiopian troops’ as well as ‘an virtual army of Shewan tax collectors and bureaucrats’.⁵⁸ Suppression started with decisively limiting the freedom of the press, especially with regard to any voice critical of the Ethiopian regime. Measures such as incarceration were taken against critics from both the Muslim and the Coptic Christian communities and a number of prominent Eritrean nationalists were forced into exile, including the Protestant Woldeab Woldemariam and the Muslim Ibrahim Sultan, both elected members of the first Eritrean parliament and

⁵⁷ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 112.

⁵⁸ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 135.

staunch nationalists who fled to nearby Egypt.⁵⁹

The situation initially appeared more difficult for the Muslim population of Eritrea since Eritrean Muslims were being discriminated against both by the Imperial government and by the Eritrean government, which was completely dominated by the UP.⁶⁰ A British memorandum of May 1953 noted that the Chief Executive of Eritrea and UP leader, Tedla Bairu, had failed to implement the democratic provisions of the constitution, violated the freedom of the press and vetoed persons politically opposed to him.⁶¹ The developments in the territory and Ethiopian behaviour did not go unnoticed by the international community. Shortly before Christmas 1953, a US intelligence report noted that '[t]he federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea is leading to dissatisfaction in the latter area due to Ethiopia's tendency to ignore the local autonomy assured Eritrea by the UN. The federation increasingly will be dominated by Ethiopia despite Eritrean protest.'⁶² In fact, the Ethiopian representative in the Eritrean parliament openly declared in 1955 that 'there is no internal or external affair as far as the office of His Imperial Majesty's representative is concerned and there will be none in the future.'⁶³ In 1957, the British ambassador noted in a report that annexation was basically only a matter of time and the autonomy of the Eritrean province was no more than a 'facade' by the later 1950s.⁶⁴ In his study on the federation period, Negash argues that it was not the Ethiopian but rather the Eritrean government that 'on its own initiative dismantled

⁵⁹ Ethiopian authorities constantly harassed and, in some cases, attempted to murder some nationalist figures in order to silence them. Woldemariam alone survived seven attempts on his life before going into exile.

⁶⁰ TNA, FO371/118744, Moslem Mosques Committee to H.E. Chief Executive, Government of Eritrea, 21.05.1956.

⁶¹ TNA, FO371/102635, Memorandum by Mr. J. Wilson Heathcote on Eritrean Politics and Finance, London, 06.05.1953.

⁶² National Intelligence Estimate, 'Conditions and Trends in Tropical Africa', Washington, 22.12.1953, in: United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Africa and South Asia (in two parts)*, 11:1 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 86.

⁶³ DOS775A.21/3-3055, Opening of Eritrean assembly, Foreign Service despatch from American Consul Asmara to Secretary of State, 30.03.1955, as quoted in Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 145.

⁶⁴ TNA, FO 371/131298, Report of the British Consulate-General, 1958.

the federation.⁶⁵ Yet, most of the relevant positions were actually occupied by members of the UP heavily directed by Ethiopia. In 1955, Tedla Bairu was forced to resign from his position as Chief Executive of Eritrea after growing increasingly unpopular within Eritrea.⁶⁶ Asfaha Woldemichael, Vice Representative of the Emperor in Eritrea and according to British assessment ‘a man even more closely bound to Unionist interests’ than Tedla Bairu, was voted his successor in a secret ballot in August of the same year.⁶⁷ Woldemichael did not renounce his former position of Vice Representative of the Emperor after being appointed Chief Executive of Eritrea, which resulted in the lines of authority being blurred and the autonomous status of Eritrea being compromised.⁶⁸ It seems hardly surprising that this contributed decisively to the acceleration of the dismantlement.

The abolition of the Eritrean flag in 1958 and the introduction of Amharic as the official language in 1959 were parts of a gradual process of annexation that culminated in the forcing of the Eritrean assembly to dissolve itself and vote for union with Ethiopia. Eritrea was officially declared part of the Ethiopian Empire on 14 November 1962. Even the advisor to Haile Selassie, the American John Spencer, had to admit that these acts plainly ‘violated the spirit of UN resolution 390 V’, but he believed that it would be ‘more difficult to claim that a technical violation of the resolution had been committed.’⁶⁹ In fact, as British documents reveal, the take-over was considered a violation of the UN resolution; yet the fact that the dissolution of the Eritrean Assembly and union with Eritrea had actually been voted for by the Eritrean Assembly complicated the matter since, as such, it would have to be considered an act of self-determination.⁷⁰ At the same time, the irregularities surrounding the vote were known

⁶⁵ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 33.

⁶⁶ TNA, FO371/118738, Eritrea: Annual Review for 1955.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 132/133.

⁶⁹ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 318.

⁷⁰ TNA, PREM11/3631, From Addis Ababa to Foreign Office, Telegram No. 621, 17.11.1962.

and it was noted how ‘they beat the hedgerows on November 13 for reluctant Eritrean Deputies and even then had to push the measure through by acclamation without a vote or even a show of hands: and we still do not know how many Deputies there were present.’⁷¹ The fact that neither the British nor the rest of the international community officially disapproved of the events in Eritrea may be explained by ‘the convenient distraction afforded by the graver events in Cuba, China and India’ at that moment.’⁷²

The struggle for independence

While pro-independence sentiments in the territory had never completely ceased to exist, Ethiopian policies and the slow abrogation of the federation certainly contributed to the Eritrean independence movement growing in strength. Cliffe noted the impact of ‘the failure of Ethiopian policy to build an alternative national consciousness’ on the growth of ‘a genuine pan-Eritrea national consciousness’, especially in the 1970s when it became shared by the Christian population as well.⁷³

In fact, instead of trying to build an alternative national consciousness Ethiopia, lacking a cohesive national identity itself, wanted to forcefully impose the identity of the Amhara elite on Eritrea and all other communities within its boundary. Anthony D. Smith has noted how the establishing of national identity around a ‘core ethnic community’ can serve to create a civic and territorial nation in a multi-communal society. However, this can only be successful if enough space is left for the other existing minority communities to prosper.⁷⁴ Therefore the imposition of the Amharic identity on Eritrea, where a national consciousness had already developed during the BMA and the process of building its own autonomous institutions, was destined to lead to conflict. In fact, leaders of the independence movement reiterated their rejection of

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lionel Cliffe, ‘Forging a Nation: The Eritrean Experience’, *Third World Quarterly* 11:4 (1989), p. 136.

⁷⁴ Anthony, D. Smith (1991), p. 110.

what they called ‘Unity by Force’, and the abolition of autonomous achievements such as the Constitution.⁷⁵

Ethiopian repressive policies in Eritrea not only alienated Eritrean Muslims, but also the Christian population. Eritrean Christians had supported union with Ethiopia to realize their own nationalist aspirations but were quickly disillusioned by the disregard of Eritrea’s autonomous status. Consequently, in the 1950s and 1960s they started to join the resistance to Ethiopian hegemony in the territory, albeit in limited numbers. They participated in popular demonstrations and strikes largely organized by workers’ and students’ associations ‘which waged organized action and demonstrations towards the end of the Fifties.’⁷⁶ The 1958 nation-wide strike organized by the *Union of Free Workers of Eritrea* was supported by both Christians and Muslims and Yohannes asserts that this indeed made it ‘evident that a unified nationalist leadership composed of Moslems and Christians was in the making.’⁷⁷

Since Ethiopian policies in Eritrea did not allow any opposition to form, and a number of prominent Eritrean nationalist figures lived in exile, Eritrean independence movements started organizing abroad. The origin of what would turn into an armed struggle for independence can be traced back to the formation of the *Eritrean Liberation Movement* (ELM) in the Sudan. While the leadership was based abroad it functioned through a network of cells existing in all Eritrean cities, and due to its secular ideology it appealed to Christians and Muslims alike. Its strategy was mainly based on raising awareness and encouraging civil disobedience; however, it did take up military action shortly before its demise in 1964 when it came into competition with the *Eritrean Liberation Front* (ELF) that had been established in Cairo by the leadership of the

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 371/172820, ‘One more letter by the Eritrean people to their Excellencies the African Head-of-States’, 15.051963.

⁷⁶ ‘Recollections of a Veteran, Romedan Mohamed Nour’, by Idris Awate, *Eritrea Profile Electronic* 2:25 (September 1995), GS private archive.

⁷⁷ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 158.

former independence movement and nationalist Eritrean students in 1960. From its inception the ELF promoted a military solution and quickly found followers inside Eritrea and among Eritreans serving in the Sudanese army and police force.⁷⁸ The ELF's first fighters came almost exclusively from the Muslim lowlands and received support from a number of Arab states which made the front look suspicious to many Eritrean Christians. Furthermore, it made the Ethiopian government 'well positioned to present the ELF as an organization inspired by Arabism and Islam, confronting an African, pro-Western Christian state.'⁷⁹

The first shot, marking the beginning of the armed struggle in Eritrea, was fired by Hamid Idris Awate on 1 September 1961. While Awate was depicted as a patriotic hero in independent Eritrea, and the date made a public holiday, his role has to be considered as being far from uncontested. During the Italian colonial period, Awate had been an *Askari* for many years, unwilling to submit to the new administration after the territory came under control of the BMA. Negash describes him as one of the 'most notorious' bandits (*shifta*) who was raiding the Kunama and Baria people with his own small army in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁰ In fact, his raids left a lasting negative impression of 'mass murder' on the affected communities as Lassier showed in her anthropological study on the Kunama in Eritrea.⁸¹ The launch of the armed struggle by him has often been depicted as spontaneous rebellion; yet, it was in fact initiated by requests from ELF leader Idris Mohamed Adem and ELF proponent Muhammad Sheikh Dawd.⁸²

The Ethiopian response to growing Eritrean nationalism and its increasingly violent expression can only be described as immediate and brutal. Accounts of

⁷⁸ David Pool (1997), p. 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 62.

⁸¹ Dominique Lussier, 'Local Prohibitions, Memory and Political Judgment among the Kunama: an Eritrean case study', in: Fukui, Katsuyoshi, Eisei Kurimoto and Masayoshi Shigeta.(eds.), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: papers of 13th Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 2, (Kyoto: Shokado Book Sellers, 1997), p. 444.

⁸² Interview with fighter Mohammed Al-Hassan Dohen, *Eritrea Al-haditha* 75, (2nd year), Günter Schröder (henceforth GS) Private Archives.

Ethiopian brutality in Eritrea include everything from burning down villages and slaughtering livestock to arbitrary detention, rape and torture.⁸³ In December 1970, Eritrea was placed under martial law which allowed Ethiopia to rule the territory through military commanders.⁸⁴ The independence movement experienced internal struggles towards the end of the 1960s, caused by ethnic tensions in several areas fuelled by the repressive practices of the ELF, and tensions between the outside leadership and the fighters. These were exacerbated when educated cadres and a larger number of Christian highlanders started joining the Front. As demands for reforms went unanswered, increasing divisions resulted in a number of top to bottom splits between 1968 and 1970. Connell asserts that the leadership prevented the development of ‘a truly national organization with a nationwide military strategy and a social content to their struggle’, while the majority of its members were fighting for exactly that.⁸⁵ In fact, despite the splits of the liberation movement, more and more people joined the armed struggle. As conversations with ex-fighters reveal, the decision on which organization to join was not based on the agendas of the various movements but rather on proximity and personal contacts.⁸⁶ In 1970, The *Eritrean People’s Liberation Front* (EPLF) emerged out of dissident groups of mixed religious adherence and became embroiled in two rounds of civil war with the ELF. The first civil conflict from 1972-1974 only ended due to public pressure. Attempts to build a united front failed mainly due to the conflict over hegemony over the independence struggle. Instead tensions were exacerbated and loyalty to each group was reinforced leading to the outbreak of the second civil war at the beginning of the 1980s.

That the nationalist struggle for independence was not completely defeated

⁸³ See e.g. David Pool (1979), p.47ff.

⁸⁴ See Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 166/167.

⁸⁵ Dan Connell, ‘The Birth of the Eritrean Nation’, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013, Interview with Almaz Z. (by phone), Heidelberg/Munich, 03.01.2014.

during the first civil conflict to the fact that Ethiopia was dealing with its own internal struggles. In 1974, the Ethiopian Revolution replaced the old regime of Haile Selassie with the new, more Communist-oriented system of the Dergue. The Ethiopian power struggle allowed both Eritrean fronts to progress decisively, and they managed to gain control of most of the countryside and many towns by 1977. However, just one year later a major setback was suffered when the Ethiopian army, greatly bolstered by their new ally the Soviet Union, took back control over most areas. The ELF was hit especially hard by the Ethiopian army while the EPLF was able to save the majority of its forces due to a timely strategic retreat. Already weakened by fighting the Ethiopians, the second civil war led to the ELF being pushed into the Sudan border area by the forces of the EPLF in 1982. The ELF further suffered from increasing internal splits and disintegrated more and more.

Inside the field, the EPLF had become the sole liberation organization and began to create a strong political campaign on the national and international level in order to attain recognition of the legitimacy of the Eritrean struggle. At the same time, it continued functioning as a military organization and carried on the armed struggle. While new 'professionalized' diplomatic efforts finally managed to break the international isolation of the independence movement, US attempts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between the liberation front and the Ethiopian regime failed.⁸⁷ The EPLF was able to achieve some decisive military victories though, especially in the battle of Afabet in 1988 and the capture of Massawa on 10 February 1990. The parallel campaign against the Ethiopian regime waged by the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF), an umbrella organization uniting various armed Ethiopian opposition groups, proved critical in capturing Asmara and in achieving complete victory. The EPLF had strong links with the EPRDF, especially with one of its largest

⁸⁷ See Ruth lyob (1995), p. 133 ff.

groups, the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front* (TPLF), and they coordinated their attacks against the Ethiopian army. On 24 May 1991, the EPLF took over Asmara. The following day, the EPDRF took control over Addis Ababa and established an interim Government coalition. Military victory was also facilitated by the fact that the Mengistu regime in Addis Ababa had lost most of its military and financial support despite continuous attempts to portray the conflict in Eritrea as part of a larger anti-Arab alliance. Although in control of the entire territory, including the capital Asmara, the EPLF 'stopped short of declaring full sovereignty' and agreed to a referendum that was to be observed and verified by the UN in order to gain full international legitimacy.⁸⁸ The interim Government in Addis Ababa, with the TPLF as its largest faction, agreed Eritrea's right to self-determination and supported the decision for an internationally supervised referendum which was held between 23 and 25 April 1993 and resulted in a clear majority of over 99 per cent voting for independence.

While the long struggle for independence had brought together Eritreans of all religious and ethno-linguistic communities, Iyob warned that 'the evolution of a common identity in the face of an external threat [...] should not be mistaken for a full-fledged national identity.'⁸⁹ In fact, the EPLF⁹⁰ recognized in their *National Charter* that the Eritrean process of nation-building was not over yet:

Nationhood is a long, complicated historical process ... this process is not yet concluded [so] we should consider the development and strengthening of Eritrean nationalism and the unity of its people ... It is necessary to build a national government which ... rejects all divisive attitudes and activities, places national interest above everything else and enables participation of all sectors of Eritrean society.⁹¹

The foundation for an effective governmental and administrative framework had been laid in the liberated areas during the struggle, and national symbols and a common

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁹ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 96.

⁹⁰ In 1994 the EPLF renamed itself the *People's Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ), and continued to be the sole party existing in Eritrea.

⁹¹ From the National Charter of the PFDJ, as quoted in: David Pool (1997), p. 24.

history of struggle existed. The Eritrean government would now have the task of transforming a highly militarized society and creating civil values that could serve as the basis for an overarching national identity for members of all the religious and ethno-linguistic communities in a state in which they would all be represented equally.

LEBANON

Stability through the National Pact?

While the Eritreans, deprived of their autonomous status, had to fight to achieve their independence, the Lebanese had to make co-existence work in their independent state after the end of the French mandate. The events leading up to the achievement of independence had given the impression that a broadly based Lebanese cohesiveness had developed. However, the basic ideological problem concerning the identity of the country had been only superficially solved by the National Pact and only on the elite level. The possibility of an overarching national identity developing through allegiance with the state was decisively hampered by the reinforcement of the sectarian system through the National Pact and the constitution, not only because it ‘was an inadequate way to run a modern country’ but because it preserved Maronite domination.⁹² Furthermore, it facilitated the nurturing of communal ties with regional and international powers.

In order to preserve its independence and sovereignty in the Arab context, Lebanon tried to demonstrate its engagement with Arab states within the framework of the Arab League, becoming one of its founding members on 25 September 1944. As such, Lebanon also contributed to the drafting of the League’s charter, known as the Alexandria Protocol, which contained a special clause on the status of Lebanon reaffirming ‘the independence and sovereignty of the Lebanon within her present

⁹² David Gilmour, *Lebanon: The Fractured Country* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), p. 70.

frontiers.’⁹³ Nevertheless, the Muslim majority quickly grew more and more discontent with the system and in 1953 published a manifesto, *Moslem Lebanon Today*, asking for ‘effective steps to abolish state sectarianism and afford equality of opportunity and treatment to all Lebanese, irrespective of their religious preferences’.⁹⁴ Worries were also voiced that dominance by the Maronites would ‘split Lebanon from the rest of the Arab world’.⁹⁵ The thirteen points put forward in the manifesto included calls for a census, a constitutional revision of the sectarian system, and the establishment of a completely secular state.

The political situation in Lebanon had become aggravated by regional events, especially the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the wave of Palestinian refugees arriving in Lebanon as a result. Given the precarious sectarian balance of the country, the influx of a large number of predominantly Sunni Muslim refugees was considered a danger to the system by the Maronite elites.⁹⁶ Palestinian Christian refugees (who numbered around 28,000) and a smaller number of Armenian Christian refugees were granted citizenship throughout the 1950s. The same right was not extended to Palestinian refugees of Muslim faith which, of course, led to criticism by Lebanese Muslims who claimed such policy was only ‘to support the officially propagated myth of a Christian Lebanon’ and furthermore was considered making ‘a mockery of the religious freedom and equality clause of our constitution.’⁹⁷ Fears grew among the Lebanese Muslims that some radical Christian elements wanted to ‘create an anti-Arab

⁹³ ‘The Alexandria Protocol (to create a League of Arab States), 1944’, in: Anita L.P. Burdett (ed.), *The Arab League: British Documentary Sources 1943-1963, Vol. 3: Before the Arab League: preliminary inter-Arab talks in Alexandria, 1943-44* (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1995), p. 599.

⁹⁴ TNA, FO1018/93, ‘Moslem Lebanon Today’, 1953, p. 3

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ An UNRWA report of 1957 gives what the British intelligence considered ‘fairly precise figures for religious groupings’ in Lebanon. These figures show that the Christians altogether still constituted a majority in the country (772,000 as opposed to 624,000 Muslims, including the Druze community). See TNA, FO371/134186, British Intelligence Survey on the Lebanon, 29.07.1958.

⁹⁷ TNA, FO1018/93, ‘Moslem Lebanon Today’, p. 12.

and anti-Moslem separatist state in Lebanon’⁹⁸, while the Christians were afraid of the possible influence of Hashemite unity projects in the region, as well as the growing influence of Nasser on the Muslim population from the mid-1950s onwards.

In fact, regional developments decisively impacted Lebanese domestic developments and the Muslim community was infected by ‘the virus of the “new” Arab nationalism.’⁹⁹ The first manifestation of this ‘infection’ was the declaration of a popular uprising by the leader of the *Syrian Social Nationalist Party* (SSNP) that accused the Lebanese government of being responsible for the ‘bankruptcy of Arab nationalism’. The ‘uprising’ was quickly halted by the Lebanese army and collapsed completely after only 72 hours.¹⁰⁰ In 1952, President Bishara al-Khoury was forced to resign amidst sectarian tensions, and Camille Sham’un was elected his successor in September of the same year. However, tensions were further aggravated by Sham’un’s domestic policies, specifically changes in the electoral system which reduced the number of deputies from 77 to 44. As Traboulsi notes, ‘[w]ith the majority of Muslim leaders outside parliament, the Muslim ‘street’ was massively attracted to the Nasserist nationalist and anti-colonialist discourse.’¹⁰¹ This attraction was further nurtured by Sham’un’s foreign policy. Following a neutral stance, Lebanon had joined neither the Western-imposed Baghdad Pact between Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran, nor the Arab Defence Pact between Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria which was created in response. However, Sham’un issued a joint communiqué with the US, linking Lebanon to the Eisenhower Doctrine which inflamed domestic and international tensions and entangled the country in Cold War dynamics in the region. Furthermore, it led to claims from pro-Arab elements that alignment with the Western powers was a breach of the covenant of

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.13.

⁹⁹ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani Papers (digitalised), Emile Bustani, *The Lebanon: A Dissection of the Current Situation* (unpublished paper, 1958), p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ See Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 114/115.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 130.

1943 as it turned the country into ‘a bridgehead and base for imperialism’.¹⁰² This led to mounting opposition, growing allegations of corruption, and the joyous welcome by Lebanese Muslims of the founding of the *United Arab Republic* (UAR). Pro-Arab sentiments were also stimulated by propaganda from the newly established Arab state asking for ‘the return of those predominantly Muslim areas which had been joined to the old Lebanon in the time of the French mandate.’¹⁰³ Riots and disturbances occurred in Tyre, Biqā^c and Šūf districts as well as the Hermel area.¹⁰⁴ As Hanf says, the escalation of regional developments into an internal crisis has to be considered the result of the continuously existing split on an ideological level within the Lebanese population and the vague formulation of the National Pact that made it possible that ‘controversies over foreign policy [...] dragged the question of national identity into the political arena.’¹⁰⁵

The deteriorating situation weakened the position of President Sham’un and created strong opposition to his re-election not only from the majority of the Muslims majority but also a ‘substantial fraction of Christians’.¹⁰⁶ By June 1958, the situation had become very serious and it was evident that Sham’un would not be able to control it. When the Iraqi monarchy fell to rebel army units on 14 July 1958, American fears over an increasing disintegration of the region greatly intensified. Hence, when Sham’un asked for US military intervention, the US agreed and sent marines within days. As had been anticipated by the British, the mere presence of American soldiers led to a quick ending of the crisis.¹⁰⁷ Small skirmishes, known as the ‘counter-rebellion’, continued for another three weeks until there was agreement on the formation of a reconciliatory four-man cabinet comprised of two representatives from the loyalists and

¹⁰² AUB Archives, Emile Bustani Papers (digitalised), Emile Bustani, *The Lebanon*, p.11.

¹⁰³ TNA, WO402/387, ‘Historical Note on 1958 Middle East Crisis’, June 1958.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO371/134116, Disturbances in Tyre in March, 11.04.1958.

¹⁰⁵ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 110.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, FO371/134116, Cypher from Beirut to Foreign Office, No. 385, 23.04.1958.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO371/134116, Beirut Telegram to Washington, No. 2644, 13.05.1958.

two from the rebels. Furthermore, ‘with discreet American mediation’ the election of Fuad Shihab as the new President was agreed.¹⁰⁸ Emile Bustani asserted that the fear of an aggravated confrontation facilitated the quick end of the confrontation and was confident that ‘[t]he Lebanese in all their factions have learnt their lesson.’¹⁰⁹ This assessment, however, does not take into consideration that agreement was only reached after external intervention and the basic issues underlying the confrontation were still left unsolved. In fact, the end of the 1958 crisis is often described by the slogan of ‘No Victor, No Vanquished’.

From ‘Shihabism’ to social crisis

Attempts were made to solve the issues at the root of the conflict over the following decade, first under President Fuad Shihab (1958-1964) and then President Charles Helou (1964-1970). The period of the two presidencies has become known as the era of ‘Shihabism’, characterized by policies focused on the development of the physical and political infrastructure of the country and, most importantly, on attempts at nation-building by creating allegiance to the nation as a whole rather than allegiances to individual leaders and communities.¹¹⁰ The desire to develop the physical infrastructure of the country reflected Shihab’s awareness of the growing economic gap in the country and the increasing anger of the inhabitants of the more deprived areas. The fact that Beirut had become the main port connecting the Arab hinterland to international markets had resulted in a flourishing economy with an impressive average growth rate; yet it was completely dependent on external factors such as the price of oil and Arab capital being transferred from abroad. Furthermore, this favourable economic development was mainly confined to Beirut which resulted in increasing social tensions

¹⁰⁸ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 117.

¹⁰⁹ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani papers (digitalised), Letter from Emile Bustani to Mr William Whiteford, Beirut, 20.11.1958.

¹¹⁰ See Helena Cobban, *The making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1985), p. 92.

as it widened the economic gap between the city and the rural areas. Infrastructure development was considered the first step towards the more equitable distribution of the economic prosperity of the country and was accompanied by a rise in spending on government schools and a social security system. Measures guaranteeing economic and social justice were also meant to help correct the failures of the sectarian system. Yet, instead of working towards an abolishment of the latter, the general power-sharing framework was basically re-affirmed even though a 'principle of strict parity' was introduced.¹¹¹

The new policy soon met with opposition from the traditional business oligarchy and the traditional political elites who saw their influence in the administration marginalised. Shihab's political support came mainly from parties that shared similar ideas regarding modernization and Shihab was able to win a solid and inclusive base within the population. The quickly foiled attempted military *coup d'état* on New Year's Eve 1961, led by officers from the SSNP, further helped to rally large sectors of the public around the president and his politics.¹¹² On the foreign policy level Shihab restored Lebanon's traditional neutrality regarding Arab politics and sought closer collaboration with the UAR. While this rapprochement met with opposition from pro-Western Christians and members of the Sunni bourgeoisie who feared Nasser's example of nationalisations in Egypt in 1961, it 'calmed tensions between the opposing forms of national definition: they were not removed, but much reduced.'¹¹³

The elections of 1964 resulted in a clear victory for the Shihabists, even though he refused to extend his term, stating he did not want to become the focus of personalized loyalties.¹¹⁴ Charles Helou, a compromise candidate, was elected the new

¹¹¹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 95.

¹¹² For a detailed account of the roots of the coup see Adel Beshara, *Lebanon: The politics of frustration – the failed coup of 1961* (London/New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), pp. 29-47.

¹¹³ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 121.

¹¹⁴ Helena Cobban (1985), p. 92.

president of the country; throughout his time in office he found himself embroiled between Shihabists and their opponents. It became more and more obvious that the system introduced by Shihab had not been able to close, or even decisively narrow, the gap between rich urban populations and poorer inhabitants of rural areas. This obviously hampered the overarching goal to create a wider loyalty to the Lebanese nation. The government attempted to displace criticism of the economic situation by blaming external forces: 'poverty was attributed to strangers and social problems seen as manifestations of a "foreign" conspiracy aiming at destabilising the economy'.¹¹⁵ The relatively peaceful and hopeful period of Shihabism in Lebanon was finally shattered by the Six Day War in June, 1967.

The Civil War and its settlement

After the disastrous defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan following *Black September* in 1970¹¹⁶, Lebanon became the main base for the Palestinian guerrilla struggle. Initially there was widespread support for Palestinian resistance within Lebanon, but it was soon realized that guerrilla raids against Israel from Lebanese territory constituted a threat to Lebanon itself. Retaliatory Israeli cross-border shelling was often intentionally directed against the Lebanese rather than against the Palestinians in order to turn the population against the resistance movement and to put pressure on the Lebanese authorities.¹¹⁷ Aside from the physical threat of becoming the target of Israeli retaliatory attacks, the presence of the *fīdā'īn* and the fact that they were using Lebanese territory to launch their fight turned into a political and ideological issue. As Cobban pointed out, alignment for or

¹¹⁵ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 148.

¹¹⁶ "Black September" refers to the conflict between the *Palestinian Liberation Organisation* (PLO) and the Kingdom of Jordan in September 1970. After an attempt to overthrow the monarchy, the PLO and thousands of Palestinians were driven out to Lebanon.

¹¹⁷ Rex Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival: The PLO in Lebanon* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), p. 66/67.

against the Palestinian guerrilla movement turned into the key issue, replacing the question over alignment for or against Nasser.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, protests in support of the Palestinian movement were often linked to socio-economic issues prevailing in the country, and often ‘such protests seemed devoid of confessional content [...] – a dangerous development for the ruling class in a country where the privileges of the elite rested on the pillars of a sectarian status quo.’¹¹⁹ The popularity of the Palestinian movement constituted a threat to the role of the traditional Lebanese political leaders since parts of the population, specifically in the rural areas in the south, did feel a stronger affinity for the Palestinians than for traditional elites or central authority. The Sunni Prime Minister, Rashi Karami, tried to regulate the situation in 1969 through the conclusion of the *Cairo Agreement* that basically recognized the legitimacy of the Palestinian armed presence in the country and granted it freedom of movement. Responsibility for the camps and their inhabitants was to be taken over by local committees ‘in cooperation with the local Lebanese authorities within the framework of Lebanese sovereignty.’ Furthermore, ‘non-interference in Lebanese affairs’ by the organization and its members was also to be guaranteed.¹²⁰ While the agreement stressed Lebanon’s independence and sovereignty, it effectively compromised the latter as Palestinian refugee camps were no longer under the control of Lebanese authorities thus creating small pockets of autonomous, armed forces.

Furthermore, as a result of ongoing uneven economic development and continued Israeli retaliation in the south, more and more members of the rural population started moving to the cities, mainly Beirut, and settled in the poverty belts around them. A large number came from the Shi’ite rural areas in the south and the east of Lebanon. While the Shi’a community had remained relatively passive in the

¹¹⁸ Helena Cobban (1985), p. 102.

¹¹⁹ Rex Brynen (1990), p. 48.

¹²⁰ ‘The Cairo Agreement (1969)’, in: Rex Brynen (1990), Appendix, p. 201/202.

Lebanese political arena, its demographic growth, the growing socio-economic gap and the appearance of a charismatic leader, Imam Musa Sadr, resulted in the mobilisation of the community and its claims for more participation in the sectarian system.

Rising inflation and living costs further contributed to socio-political tensions and the emergence of socially-oriented movements. In fact, for a short while this resulted in sentiments of class solidarity and 'introduced class identities that challenged traditional identity patterns based on religion, tribe or region.'¹²¹ However, identity based on sectarian divisions was quickly reaffirmed after the civil war broke out in 1975 and went through different phases over the course of fifteen years.

The outbreak of hostilities in Lebanon is usually identified with the ʿAīn ar-Rummaneh bus shooting on 13 April 1975, after which violence spread quickly. What started as a confrontation between Palestinians and the Maronite *Phalange* swiftly also pitted the latter against the *Lebanese National Movement* (LNM), which consisted of a variety of Sunni, Shiʿa and leftists groups under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt.¹²² The first phase of the civil war ended after direct military intervention by the Syrian army and the establishment of the *Arab Defence Forces* (ADF) by the Arab League in the summer of 1976. In 1978 Lebanon witnessed the first direct military intervention by Israel on Lebanese territory. This first intervention was followed four years later by the invasion of South Lebanon as far as Beirut by the *Israeli Defence Forces* (IDF), and after the evacuation of the PLO to Tunis, Lebanon was to experience yet another round of civil war. While the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon was seriously weakened after 1982, the remaining militant forces in the refugee camps quickly re-armed themselves. This brought them into confrontation with the Shiʿa 'Amal movement that, prior to the Israeli invasion, 'had [already] tired of paying the cost – in blood, sorrow, and wealth -

¹²¹ Hassan Krayem, 'The Lebanese Civil War and the Taif Agreement', American University of Beirut, available at: <http://ddc.au.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html> (last accessed on 09.02.2012).

¹²² See Chapter Four.

of the armed guerrilla presence in their midst' and started to actively fight the *fedayyin* which led to direct confrontation of the latter by Syria.¹²³ Between 1984 and 1987 there was fighting between the 'Amal, backed by Syria, and the Palestinians over the control of the refugee camps, known as the 'War of the Camps', one of the many sub-conflicts of the Lebanese civil war.¹²⁴ Violent conflict during this last phase of the war also spilled over into various Lebanese communities. The fact that the whole conflict from the beginning had been fuelled by the uncertainty over the identity of the country, which was intrinsically linked to sectarian affiliations, left all attempts at reconciliation unsuccessful. Following the assassination of Prime Minister Rashid Karami on 1 June 1987, and the end of President Amin Gemayel's term of office in September 1988, the country witnessed the existence of two parallel governments for a short while. A Christian military government established under Michel Aoun, was mainly recognized in East Beirut whereas a Sunni civilian government under Selim al-Hoss controlled West Beirut. After Aoun's confrontation with Syria and its allies in Lebanon, he fled to exile in Paris at the end of 1990.

In the meantime, an Arab League committee had started to formulate possible solutions to the conflict and during a meeting in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia an agreement was reached between Lebanese parliamentarians and ratified on 4 November 1989. The *Ta'if Agreement* included quite a large role for Syria in Lebanon and basically was a reaffirmation of the political power-sharing system based on the constitution and the 1943 National Pact. Once again institutionalised sectarianism was kept alive even though the civil war actually witnessed the development of quite a cohesive national awareness amongst the Lebanese of all denominations, as will be elaborated later on in this study.

¹²³ August R. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 107.

¹²⁴ See Theodor Hanf (1993), pp. 302-304, pp. 312-314.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of European control, both Eritrea and Lebanon were not only in a similar position with regard to having the prospect of independence at hand, both exited the period of European domination in a multi-communal state within the boundaries created by the colonial/mandate power, with a system of constitutionally enshrined power-sharing and an elected government. However, while Lebanon had become an internationally recognized sovereign state, the international community had decided that Eritrea would be federated with Ethiopia as an autonomous unit. The Eritrean constitution and political system constituted a novelty and were created and enacted by the United Nations. While the territory had been under a single administrative unit during Italian colonialism, they were now to represent themselves for the first time and jointly take decisions concerning internal matters of their autonomous entity. In Lebanon on the other hand, both the constitution and the political system were continuations of the ones that had been in place during the French mandate, albeit with some modifications concerning the equality of representation. Therefore, in both countries the foundation for a syncretistic nationalism was existent when the European powers departed.

Preceding this outcome, the populations of both countries had been divided over the identity of the country and this division was expressed through opposing nationalist aspirations. These clashing identifications were largely ascribed to the religious dichotomy of both countries, composed of more or less half Christians and half Muslims. In the Lebanese case, competing nationalist aspirations had already crystallized prior to the creation of the territorial state when the population first faced the prospect of self-determination, and they endured throughout the mandate period. However, agreement came about to do away with the mandate and foreign domination. During the rather short mandate period, the Muslim communities that had envisioned

joining their co-religionists in Syria rather than being part of a multi-communal state dominated by a Christian minority had created some allegiance to the new territorial state. However, this was not based on reconciliation regarding the question of the identity of the country but rather on the experience of political and economic participation in the state. Therefore, the pre-condition to join forces against the French was more equal participation and an agreement that would, at least superficially, reconcile the contentious issue of the identity of Lebanon. This was found through the compromise formula of the National Pact. In the Eritrean case, nationalist aspirations had only developed towards the end of the colonial period and, as in the case of pre-mandate Lebanon, the prospect of self-determination and independence led to the expression of diametrically opposed positions, albeit both anti-colonial and related to the unity of the territorial state created by the Italians, and articulated for the first time during the British Military Administration. The opposing forms of national aspiration failed to reconcile when the future of the territory was to be decided upon and the outcome of the decision must largely be ascribed to the international powers involved. The result was federation, and the supporters of both nationalist aspirations accommodated themselves to co-exist in the autonomous unit. However, the meddling of the Ethiopian authorities in what was supposed to be an autonomous Eritrean government during the federation and subsequent annexation contributed to the growing urge for self-determination through independence, and finally burst into a violent struggle to realise nationalist aspirations. As in the case of Lebanon, nationalist aspirations started to reconcile in order to end foreign domination, albeit this time by another African country, and in the face of serious repression and the forceful imposition of an identity alien to both sides of the Eritrean divide. The territorial state created by the colonial power and the autonomous symbols installed by the UN were to constitute the reference points for national identification and claims for self-

determination. In Lebanon on the other hand, while the existence of the state in its mandate boundaries was no longer a matter of contention except for tactical reasons, the only superficial reconciliation of the different interpretations of national identity through the National Pact together with the institutionalized sectarian system, left the country vulnerable to events in the instable Arab region. Disagreement over such developments led to a number of internal crises and finally culminated in the protracted 15-year long civil war starting in 1975.

The following chapter will look at the nationalist discourse in Eritrea and Lebanon that, in both cases, reflected definitions of national identity linked to the opposed nationalist aspirations examined in this chapter before moving towards a tentatively more civic and transcending definition influenced by the different experiences of both countries after the departure of the European colonial/mandate powers.

Chapter 3 – The discourse on identity: Whence one nation?

The formation of national identity in newly created territorial states such as Lebanon and Eritrea has to be considered a political exercise as well as a cultural one. While the first exercise mainly describes the institutionalization of the new identity, for instance by incorporating it into the constitution, the second one works towards the socialization of the population within the new entity. Both forms ultimately work towards the creation of shared forms of understanding, the foundation for a common *civic* culture and ideology which is described by Anthony D. Smith as one of the elements necessary to make up a *civic nation*.¹ The intellectual discourse concerned with the identity of the new state, its role and vocation, is part of the cultural exercise taking place on the elite level. As Wodak et al. elaborated, national identity is ‘the product of discourse’ since it is constructed and conveyed through it.²

In both the case of Lebanon and Eritrea this discourse can, however, be seen as also being part of the political exercise since most of the participating figures were not only intellectuals but also politicians or at least had great influence on the national politics of the state. In fact, the linkage between intellectuals and politics was a common trait of new territorial states created by colonial and mandate powers, and the educated elites have often been understood as ‘intermediaries’ in the development of popular nationalism.³ Furthermore, it was specifically the elite of ‘powerful social groups and institutions’ that had access to and control of the various types of public discourse.⁴ While the reception of the discourse at the elite level by the population can hardly be tested, its analysis helps to identify competing ideas and diverging narratives of national identity. Usually it holds true that

¹ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 11.

² Ruth Wodak et al. (1999), p. 22.

³ See Edward Shils, ‘The Intellectuals in the Political Development of the New States’, *World Politics* 12:3 (April 1960).

⁴ Teun A. Van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 90.

[i]n imagining national singularity and homogeneity, members of a national community simultaneously construct the distinctions between themselves and other nations, most notably when the other nationality is believed to exhibit traits similar to those of one's own national community.⁵

Yet in both Eritrea and Lebanon it was exactly this 'creation of difference' that proved to be difficult since strong links were felt by parts of the population to the neighbouring entity, largely based on common religion and traits.

This chapter will analyse the discourse at the elite level in Eritrea and Lebanon and show how it developed in both cases from the presentation of conflicting ideas of national identity towards a more transcending concept, based on civic values such as self-determination and the will to live together. In both cases the discourse emerged under similar circumstances, namely in the context of imminent decision with regards to the future of the territory, and was initially marked by opposing nationalist aspirations largely linked to religious affiliation. This chapter will argue that a reconciliation of the competing interpretations of national identity took place in both cases despite the decisively different circumstances after the departure of the European colonial/mandate power. In Eritrea, this development was largely fostered by Ethiopian suppression and annexation which enabled consensus and the overcoming of divisions based on religion or different historic claims. In Lebanon, in comparison, the presentation of conciliatory approaches and a more civic interpretation of the national identity by members of the elite were motivated by ongoing frictions related to divisions over the identity of the country. However, the institutionalised and accepted confessional system hampered a consensus on civic values without putting the system itself in question.

ERITREA

The 'awakening' of a discourse in Eritrea

Like most colonial states, Eritrea did not witness any open intellectual debate during the

⁵ Ruth Wodak et al. (1999), p. 4.

colonial period; such was not aspired to by colonial powers, especially not with regard to the national identity of the people since they were rather expected to be loyal subjects to the colonial rulers. Any discourse on identity would have been considered prone to endangering the Italian colonial administration. Hence, intellectual discourse only emerged with the increasing politicisation of the population and a future yet to be decided upon during the BMA.

After taking over the administration of the former Italian colony of Eritrea, the British immediately suspended the Fascist controlled paper *Corriere Eritreo*, and established the English *Eritrean Daily News* and the Italian *Quotidiano Eritreo*, to allow the population to experience ‘for the first time in many years the lesson of objectivity in the presentation of news’.⁶ Moreover, the British declared ‘that Eritreans, both Moslem and Christian, shall not forget their mother tongue in learning Italian – or English’⁷ and introduced the first newspaper in Tigrinya (and Arabic) in 1942, the *Semunawi Gazetta* (*Eritrean Weekly News*). However, during the first half of the 1940s the organization of parties, as well as the expression of political thoughts and ideas, was still rather constricted. Consequently, open debate initially did not really exist in the print media, although some journalists tried to express political ideas indirectly by using short stories or parables.⁸ When political parties started establishing themselves in the wake of the arrival of the Four Power Commission, most of them also started publishing their own party organs. The two main party newspapers were the *Sawt Al Rabita Al Islamiya* (*Voice of the Muslim League*), published by the Muslim League in four languages and the *Hebret (Union)/Ethiopia*, published by the Unionist Party mainly in Tigrinya and Arabic, with a few articles in Italian. Expression of political opinions and ideas through

⁶ British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia/ Ministry of Information, *The First to be Freed: The Record of British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia, 1941 – 1943* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office. 1944), p. 35.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Nicole D. Saulsberry, ‘The Life and Times of Woldeab Woldemariam, 1905-1995’, (unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2001), p. 96.

these media was allowed by the BMA but they were still monitored by the authorities, and harsh punishments were imposed for publishing anything that would incite or distress the population.⁹ After its formation, the *Independence Bloc* started publishing *Hanti Eritra (One Eritrea)*, which in the wake of the federation was voluntarily suspended and replaced by the organ of the *Muslim League* (renamed *Dehai Eritrea (The Voice of Eritrea)*) in September 1952. The latter's stance was to support the autonomous status of Eritrea within the federation, but, due to increasing Ethiopian pressure the paper was not able to publish continuously, and finally, after less than two years, ceased to exist in December 1954.¹⁰

Although quite a number of avenues opened through which ideas and beliefs concerning the future of the territory and its identity could be communicated and discussed, their dispersion amongst the population has to be considered as limited since most Eritreans, especially in rural areas, were still illiterate at the end of the 1940s.¹¹ Furthermore, what was formulated in the early stage were, according to Quehl, merely 'thoughts and reflections about the nation, carried by a patriotism gaining strength, but hardly programmatic or ideological lines'.¹² Yet the importance of the existence of diverse media in the country should not be underestimated. For the first time Eritreans actually had the chance to openly express their ideas, and '[n]ewspapers in Eritrea were thus essential to nation-building and garnering political support and set the stage for nascent Eritrean nationalism to be played out in the public sphere'.¹³

In preparation for the arrival of the Four Power Commission to Eritrea, the

⁹ See for example the trial of the director in charge of *Ethiopia* in August 1948. *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 10.08.1948, p.3.

¹⁰ Yohannes Okbazghi (1997), p. 138.

¹¹ See A/1285, 'Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Eritrea (excerpt)', 8 June 1950, reproduced in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 64.

¹² Hartmut Quehl, *Kämpferinnen und Kämpfer im eritreischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg 1961 – 1991. Faktoren der Diversität und der Kohärenz: Eine historische Untersuchung zur Alltags- und Sozialgeschichte des Krieges*, Band 1, (Felsberg: Edition Eins, 2005), p. 176.

¹³ Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 97.

Quotidiano Eritreo defined its role as giving a public platform for all political opinions, even the most opposed ones, while it would itself ‘maintain an attitude of the most rigid impartiality between the various political parties and groups’ at the same time.¹⁴ However, this declaration has to be assessed carefully since the newspaper was still under the firm control of the British authorities who had their own vision with regard to the future of the territory. In fact, the British administration actively used the newspaper to try to manipulate the discourse on identity and the future of the country by having fake articles, that supported a division of the territory, translated and published in their attempts to silence critical voices in the territory.¹⁵

One of the people playing a crucial role in developing the discourse on Eritrean national identity was the Protestant Woldeab Woldemariam, often called ‘the father of Eritrea’¹⁶. Saulsberry notes that Woldemariam switched his position quite frequently during the 1940s ‘based on the convenience and options available on world stage’. But from 1949 onwards he has to be considered one of the most devoted advocates of Eritrean independence who laid the foundation for what would later largely be adopted by the EPLF as defining Eritrean national identity.¹⁷ He started writing and working as an editor for the *Weekly Newspaper* in 1941, which he used as a forum to present his ideas in a series of essays published throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, and for a while, even to carry out disputes with political adversaries.¹⁸ In retrospect, though, Woldemariam viewed the role of the *Weekly Newspaper* rather negatively, stating that it simply ‘was another clever British strategy to control Eritrea. It provided a forum for Eritrean discussion, and diverted attention from political organization’.¹⁹ After he was

¹⁴ *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 28.06.1948, p. 1.

¹⁵ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 62.

¹⁶ Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20/21.

¹⁸ This refers mainly to the media feud he had with Tedla Bairu in April/May 1947. See Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 69.

¹⁹ RDC, Bio/265/06167, ‘Transcripts: WoldeAb and Labor Movement.’ Interviews conducted at RICE, Rome, April 1983, by Tom Killion and Arefaine Berhane’, Part A, Interview One, p. 3.

forced to leave Eritrea and sought exile in Cairo, he became very active in broadcasting radio programmes from Cairo into Eritrea, calling for the unity of the Eritrean nation, and quickly became an important figure to the liberation fronts.

The following analysis will trace the most dominant strands of the discourse on Eritrean national identity based on selected essays published in the different newspapers, mainly the most accessible one, *Quotidiano Eritreo*. It will also be supplemented by a few documents and/or speeches of national leaders and intellectuals concerning the question of the history and identity of the country.

Eritrea between Ethiopian history and distinctive national history

The discourse emerging in the 1940s concerning the identity of the country was very much shaped by the question of the future of the territory. Consequently, two main currents developed: a pro-Ethiopian interpretation of identity and a pro-independence one, insisting on the distinct identity of the former colony. Both sought to legitimize their claims by referring back to their own versions of pre-colonial history. This meant that while one side claimed that Eritrea had always been an integral part of the Ethiopian Empire, the other insisted that it had never completely belonged to the latter in terms of all the parts making up the territory today. These parts had instead been linked to each other, not Ethiopia, to form a distinct territorial entity throughout history.

The pro-independence arguments described the inhabitants of Eritrea as being ‘subjected to strong pressure from without, which they withstood only because of a deeply-rooted love for their country and their freedom’.²⁰ This country referred to was Medri Bahari (The Country of the Sea), which was argued to have endured numerous invasions, and when the Empire of Ethiopia was established still managed to retain

²⁰ RDC, History/General/149/03298, ‘Some points on the People of Eritrea in support of their strife for Independence, edited by the Association of Eritrean Intellectualists [sic]’, Asmara, September 1949, p. 3.

some autonomy:

Modern Eritreans now [*sic*] consider this territory, the old MEDRI BAHARI, as the cradle of their resurrection after the fall of their ancient kingdom; as the sacred birthplace of their traditions; as the land of their ancestors; in one word as their fatherland. Here, in this land bordered by Ethiopia, the Nile valley and the red Sea, Eritreans of ancient stock mixed with the newcomers, refined their language and traditions, set up their organization, created a safe balance between the country's two religions: the Christian faith, that had come to them in the IV Century, and [*sic*] the Mohammedan creed, that was introduced much later. [...] there was created the new fatherland, so much dearer to the hearts of the people in that it had come into being through their sweat and toil."²¹

Portuguese maps from the 17th century were cited as evidence, as well as reports by European explorers referring to the territory of the Medri Bahari and describing it as 'a federal republic'.²² In addition, the fact that the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik concluded a treaty with Italy in 1889, granting Italy the right to occupy the land of the Medri Bahari, was interpreted as a clear sign of Ethiopia considering the territory as not being part of the Empire. The Axumite Empire, often brought up by pro-Unionists to prove a common history of Ethiopia and the territory of Eritrea, was in fact recognized as having had its centre in Eritrea. Yet,

the Eritreans have never recognized the present Ethiopian Empire as the continuation of the Axumite Empire and therefore they have never considered themselves as part of it. As a matter of fact: ever since the fall of the Axumite Empire Eritrea has never been part of the present Ethiopia.²³

The Italian community, who considered their interests would be better represented in an independent Eritrea, possibly under Italian trusteeship, supported the pro-independence argument of an Eritrean pre-colonial history distinct from that of Ethiopia:

We deny that there is a right of Ethiopia to incorporate Eritrea for reasons of historical or ethnic nature. The territory that constitutes Eritrea, according to the royal decree of 1 January 1890, no. 8692, corresponds almost exactly with the <Medri-A-Baha>: a territory that for historical and ethnic reasons was almost always separated from the real territory of the Ethiopian Empire

²¹ Ibid., p. 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ RDC, ETH/HIS/148/01, 'The truth about Eritrea', Lecture delivered by Mr. Woldeab Woldemariam, Head of the Eritrean Liberation Movement' Delegation Abroad, Khartoum, 20.01.1965, p. 1.

itself.²⁴

In accordance with that, the Axumite kingdom was considered to not have been an Ethiopian creation but rather the product of traces left by Semitic emigration on the development of the population in the area. In addition, the Medri A-Bahar were 'quasi always effectively independent from the Ethiopian Empire, even if its <Bahar Nagassi> recognized the high authority'.²⁵ Ethiopian claims of the opposite were considered to be prompted by economic reasons, namely the need to get access to the sea through Eritrean ports.

These allegations were directly answered by a representative of the Unionist Party. R. Tesfit asserted that the ethnic differences of the northern regions had been exaggerated in an attempt to use them as 'historical proof' in favour of the argument that Eritrea was never part of the Ethiopian Empire, and pointed to the lack of historical documents to support the claim.²⁶ Similarly, he asserted there was no proof of how far the Semitic incursion actually went and which territories it included. In fact, his main argument appeared to be that no historical proof had been presented to affirm assumptions that Eritrea used to be a territorial entity autonomous from the Ethiopian Empire. Additionally, autonomy as described in recognition of the sovereignty of the Empire was to be considered as 'relative autonomy and not complete independence [...] Historically for us, autonomy is a general phenomena [*sic*] for all of Ethiopia. Autonomous Eritrea existed only because these parameters existed amid other autonomous Ethiopian regions'.²⁷ Therefore, the Bahri Negasi was not independent but rather had autonomous regional administration just as had existed elsewhere in Ethiopia. Other replies to the pro-independence Italian position were less factual and rather harsh. An unknown author voiced the opinion that the whole question was not

²⁴ Felice Ostini, 'Il "Comitato" e la sua azione politica', *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 03.07.1947, p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ R. Tesfit, 'Futuro politico dell'Eritrea', *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 26.07.1947, p. 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

even any business of the Italians and that they had no right to ‘falsify our Ethiopian history or to contaminate our Ethiopian-ness with childish statements’.²⁸ Referring to the arguments raised by the Italians actually supporting the aims of the *Independence Bloc*, he described them as ‘disgraceful statements that from time to time appear in the local newspapers and bear the signatures of some illiterates or former pastors of camels’.²⁹ A more conciliatory approach was presented by the pro-Ethiopian Haddis Teodros who affirmed the great joy, after sixty years of separation, of finally having the chance of returning to the mother country:

We Eritreans that, without even giving way to words without sense and place, want the union with our Motherland and live within its motherly frame, in communion with our brothers the Galla, Amhara, Muslims and Christians, supporting us mutually in those dark and those happy hours.³⁰

His claim that unification with Ethiopia was very much wanted and had been demanded for centuries was questioned in an article in reply to his piece. Garzoni wondered why if that was, in fact, true, there had never been any evidence of it during the sixty years of Italian rule? Even more interesting, in his opinion, was the fact that ‘during the Italo-Ethiopian campaign Eritreans joined willingly and enthusiastically under our flag and fought with a courage and a passion that certainly did not suit brothers that were involuntarily pushed to fight against brothers’.³¹

Another, quite conciliatory, approach was adopted by Woldemariam for some time. While aiming at establishing a new kind of distinctive Eritrean citizen, his intention was to promote a nationalism that ‘entailed pride in the commonality of ancient Ethiopia and Eritrean history’.³² This shift has to be understood, though, in the context of his desire for Tigray – Tigrinya unity, which he promoted for a period.

²⁸ ‘Il futuro dell’Eritrea’, *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 31.07.1947, p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Haddis Teodros, ‘Abbiamo la Commissione quadripartite in casa – Il pensiero degli Eritrei’, *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 25.11.1947, p. 2.

³¹ Ezio Garzoni, ‘Risposta a Haddis Teodros’, *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 02.12.1947, p. 2.

³² Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 20.

Guided by the belief in linguistic and cultural affinities between the Eritrean highlands and the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray, a plan to join the two regions was devised by a limited circle of Eritrean notables and Tigrayan nobility.³³

With regard to the colonial period, there was no praise really for it with the exception of contributions made by resident Italians, former *askaris* and half-castes. Expounding on the various countries marking their claims on the Eritrean territory, Woldemariam noted in one of his pro-Ethiopian essays in 1947 how Italy had purposely divided Eritrea from Ethiopia and ‘it should feel regret about isolation of Eritrea from Ethiopia. It should strongly support Eritrean unity with Ethiopia as it was the main factor of the isolation’.³⁴

The negative experience of colonial domination and cruel treatment by the Italians was emphasized by Ethiopian officials as well as pro-Ethiopian Eritreans as this statement by Fitaaurari Tesfa Mikael Gobaze shows:

Many of you Eritreans were made “Shum-Bash” by the Italians. I also was a “Shum-Bash”, and I know the kind of mark they left on our backs. Do not forget that mark. We know how the enemy played with us making us, though in our own country, as men without home and without country.³⁵

Furthermore, it was stressed that while restraint was to be advised, feelings of revenge towards the former colonial power had to be understood as Italian racial politics and actions in the territory could never be forgotten.³⁶

Yet, pro-independence voices actually propounded the positive aspects of sixty years of Italian domination as it allowed the people and the territory to progress and achieve a greater civilization than other African countries. Furthermore, referring back to the country of Medri Bahari, it was asserted that the Italians did not artificially create

³³ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 67. See also Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 115/116.

³⁴ Woldeab Woldemariam, ‘Eritra n’men?’ (To Whom Eritrea?), *Weekly Newspaper*, No. 241, 17.04.1947 reproduced in: Teqabo Aresie (Ed.), *Mrutsat aanqetsat ato Woldeab, 1941-1991 (Selected articles of Ato Woldeab, 1941-1991)* (Asmara: Hedri Publishers, 1995), p. 70-76.

³⁵ FO 371/31608, From the British Military Administration in Eritrea to the British Legation, Addis Ababa, 23.07.1942. ‘Shum-Bash’ was the highest rank an Eritrean could achieve in the Italian colonial army.

³⁶ *Il Corriere Eritreo*, 26.06.1949, p. 2.

the territory but 'Italy merely acknowledged and confirmed a centuries-old truth: the existence of this country as an entity by itself, with characters of its own'.³⁷

Even Italian voices that generally did not agree with staunch pro-independence positions, as they considered that at the very least a cordial relationship with Ethiopia was essential for Eritrea's economic survival, stressed the relevance of the colonial experience for the future of the territory:

For sure, the rule of an European country for sixty years cannot, through the immigration of people educated to a system of superior life, not have had any influence on the soul of the natives which, in contact with a more developed civilization, got accustomed to broader outlooks and have, albeit limited, adopted habits of a more comfortable life not yet spread, undeniably, throughout all of Ethiopia.³⁸

Aside from evaluating Italian politics as positive or negative, the fact remained that a territorial entity was created and given the name Eritrea, and exactly this common experience would be translated into a historical foundation for an inclusive Eritrean nationalism.

Religious dichotomy or equal partnership?

The discourse on the national identity being so closely linked with the imminent decision on the future of the territory certainly contributed to it being coloured mainly by political opinions. Yet, views were often closely linked to religious beliefs on an ideological level as the example of Woldemariam demonstrated. Despite propagating an inclusive approach to identity regardless of religious or regional backgrounds, his Christian beliefs found expression in relation to his understanding of the nation:

A man should love his God above all. Then, he should love his family and then his country. If he doesn't follow this path and says that he loves his country he is wrong. How can a man who doesn't love his mother, father, brothers and wife claim that he loves his country? [...] A nation does not mean the fields, rivers, lakes, houses, or monuments. A nation means the people. They are the people who live in the same place where you and your grandfathers lived, with the same colour and the same tongue as yours. They are your country. If you don't love them, you must

³⁷ RDC, History/General/149/03298, p. 5.

³⁸ *Il Corriere Eritreo*, 02.06.1949, p. 3.

understand that you are a person who does not love his country.³⁹

Such reasoning based on religious beliefs continued throughout his essays, but he also tried to reconcile it with a more scientific position. While he directly referred to the Bible to describe how everything was God's creation and how all human beings were created equal, he also accepted the fact that science had a different explanation for the creation of the world, its division into different nations, and the existence of a diversity of languages.⁴⁰ However, he ultimately seemed to be convinced that the best way to create national consciousness and a cohesive nation was a belief in God and love.⁴¹ In fact, he addressed the Eritrean youth to remind them that: 'Our homeland is a gift of God. We are living here not only for our daily activities but also to accomplish God's task'.⁴² Consequently, everyone should be willing to sacrifice for the fatherland, just as the forefathers have done.

Woldemariam's use of non-denominational religious terms has to be analysed in light of the pro-independence and pro-union division towards the late 1940s/early 1950s. These divisions on a political level were often equated with religion as supporters of union were predominantly Christian while supporters of independence were predominantly Muslim. While this carried the inherent danger of developing into a religious conflict, specifically during violent clashes, relegating differences to the political level while affirming equality regardless of adherence to different denominations has to be considered his attempt to bring about unity. This appears of special importance in the face of the federation looming at the beginning of the 1950s,

³⁹ Woldeab Woldemariam, 'A nation', *Weekly Newspaper*, No. 75, 31.01.1944, as quoted in Hartmut Quehl (2005), p. 177/178.

⁴⁰ See Woldeab Woldemariam, 'Hageratn Hizbatatenin' (Countries and their people), *Weekly Newspaper*, No. 275, 18.12.1947, reproduced in: Teqabo Aresie (Ed.). (1995), p. 6-8.

⁴¹ Hartmut Quehl (2005), p. 178.

⁴² Woldeab Woldemariam, 'Me'edo n'men'eseyat Eritrawyan! B'za'eba fikri hager' (Advice to all Eritrean Youth! About love for the nation), *Hanti Eritra*, No. 78, 13.06.1951, reproduced in: Teqabo Aresie (ed.). (1995), p. 203-207.

within which the opposed camps were to live together in an autonomous unit congruent with the country shared under Italian colonial rule. Consequently, Woldemariam's description of the dual nature of the world and society did not refer to divisions based on religious, ethnic or linguistic lines but to the endless struggle between good and bad in the world. His examination of internal enemies, who he considered to be stronger and more dangerous due to their inherited nature, rather appeared to promote overcoming any differences with the help of God.⁴³ Reflecting on the early period of political organization in one of his later essays, he hints at peaceful coexistence between the religious communities in Eritrea before the political divisions seemingly alienated the Christians and Muslims:

Do you remember when we gathered in Saleh Kekiya's house in 1944 and ate a chicken slaughtered by a Muslim, then oathed [*sic*] on the Qur'an? Also we ate a chicken slaughtered by a Christian and oathed on the Bible? Then we promised each other to avoid any difference, religious or regional or racial?⁴⁴

The appearance of conflicts within Eritrea being based on religious affiliation was largely ascribed to Ethiopian politics of manipulating the Coptic Church and stirring dissent between Muslims and Christians in order to achieve its goal of annexation.⁴⁵ This went as far as exploiting the pro-independence attitude of the Italians to disregard the large number of Muslim pro-independence supporters to claim, as the pro-Ethiopian Haddis Teodros did, that '[...] the Muslim, for the simple fact that he is Muslim, can never conceive of a life in common with the Christian, having by now developed a self-perception of accepting an inferiority towards the White'.⁴⁶

This demonstrates, however, a disregard of the fact that the pro-independence

⁴³ Woldeab Woldemariam, 'Tsela'etinan fetewtinan' (Our friends and enemies), *Weekly Newspaper*, 06.03.1944, reproduced in: Teqabo Aresie (ed.). (1995), p. 248-252.

⁴⁴ Woldeab Woldemariam, 'Do you remember?', as quoted in Hartmut Quehl (2005), p.176/177. (The essay is undated but since it was addressed to Ibrahim Sultan after his death it must have been written in 1989/1990.)

⁴⁵ RDC, ETH/HIS/148/01, p. 3/4.

⁴⁶ *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 25.11.1947, p. 2.

movement was not solely Muslim, just as the pro-Ethiopia movement was not exclusively Christian. The spiritual Muslim leader and head of the Muslim League, Said Bakhri el-Morgani, confirmed in an interview that not all Muslims in the territory followed the League but noted that this did not create any problems since any Muslim was 'politically free to join the movement that most pleases him, as long as it is not contrary to the fundamental laws of our religion. [...] Politically, they are then free to profess ideas that are most in line with their opinions'.⁴⁷ Yet concerns were also raised about the way Muslims were treated in Ethiopia, noting that Muslims were regularly discriminated against, being blocked from high-level positions in the administration, and having difficulty accessing the education system.⁴⁸

The discussion on whether Eritreans and Ethiopians actually shared a common culture and traditions appeared more important than religious affiliations. According to the pro-Ethiopianists, there was a strong correlation between legends and stories in Eritrea and in Amhara culture. This would allude to an 'ethnic and historic unity' that could not be denied:

It is history consecrated by the blood in the age-long struggles for the defence of these rocks of the Ethiopian Highland, common heritage of the mother Ethiopia and its daughter Eritrea. We wanted to defend this history, our history. We stop here. The rest will soon show to be a construction of interests without historical foundation.⁴⁹

Proponents of the thesis of historical, ethnic and cultural links thought their claim to be the only real form of nationalism since 'ours is the legitimate love towards ourselves, towards the individuality of our nation, Ethiopia, and of our race'.⁵⁰ Such claims were refuted by Muslim and Christian supporters of independence alike. Referring back to European scholars such as Conti Rossini, it was affirmed that, in fact, the ancestors of the Eritreans came from the Arabian Peninsula and mingled with the indigenous

⁴⁷ 'Abbiamo intervistato il Capo Spirituale dei musulmani dell'Eritrea', *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 07.12.1947, p. 3.

⁴⁸ RDC, ETH/BIO/43.04, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Il Corriere Eritreo*, 26.06.1949, p. 2.

population. The result was the population of Eritrea with its own language and culture, named Habasha.⁵¹

Discourse during the struggle for independence

After the decision on federation, the discourse calmed down as the Eritrean political and intellectual elite was mainly concerned with the establishment of Eritrea's autonomous institutions. However, when it became obvious that Ethiopia was not going to abide by the rules of federation, the discourse on independence was revived. Not surprisingly, the *Voice of Eritrea* was quickly banned, and its editor imprisoned despite the right to free expression established through the Eritrean constitution.⁵² This move by the Imperial government followed harsh criticism voiced in the paper concerning the legality of the actions of Addis Ababa in Eritrea.⁵³ In fact, what was asked for by Eritrean nationalists in the early years of the federation was not the dismissal of the same, but rather the establishment of and adherence to a clear federal structure within which an autonomous Eritrea with its democratic government and constitution would exist. The employment of a repressive policy by the Ethiopian government and the focus on safeguarding Eritrea's autonomous institutions resulted in a lacuna in the discourse during the period of federation. The various memoranda sent to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments as well as to the UN by representatives of the Muslim League were concerned with the dismantlement of Eritrea's autonomous structure rather than with nationalist ideology.⁵⁴ The same is true for many of the early pamphlets produced by the ELF after the

⁵¹ RDC, ETH/HIS/148/01, supplement. See also RDC, ETH/BIO/43.04, Ibrahim Sultan, 'A letter to the Presidents of all the Islamic African States, and their foreign ministers, published by the Moslem Eritrean League', Cairo, 15.07.1963, p. 2.

⁵² See the Eritrean Constitution as Ratified 11th September 1952, Chapter IV, Section II, Art. 30, *Freedom to express opinions*, reproduced in: *Journal of Eritrean Studies* 1:1 (1986), p. 51.

⁵³ Yohannes Okbazghi (1997), p. 141.

⁵⁴ For selected examples of memoranda to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments see Tekeste Negash (1997), pp. 212-215.

annexation of Eritrea.⁵⁵

Reference to the colonial period as a basis for a unified Eritrean national identity did not develop immediately, but largely throughout the 1970s, notably the period when the movement witnessed a large influx of Christians. Hence, the arguments promoted constitute a common ideological basis of the previously opposed religious communities of Eritrea. Reconciliation was made possible by the assertion that under the Italians 'Eritrea was not formed as a nation-state but as a multi-nation state.'⁵⁶ Reference to earlier times was considered unnecessary as was noted in the earliest pamphlet ascribed to the EPLF:

If we remember ancient history, we find it almost unrelated to what we have in this modern age. If we were to re-establish actions and determine borders based on ancient history, we would have to create a new world consisting of few nations.⁵⁷

Consequently, a unified identity cannot be traced back to ancient times; it rather developed in the transformation period under Italian colonization. This has to be considered a valid argument since there was no benchmark of how 'old' a people has to be to consider itself a nation.⁵⁸

The discourse on Eritrean identity and Eritrea's right to self-determination found increasing support from outside sources. However, the same was true for support of the Ethiopian position. Ethiopian claims to the territory, supposedly based on historical grounding, were widely endorsed, in Ethiopia as well as internationally. As Reid notes,

the centralizing, unified Ethiopian state thesis from the direction of Addis Ababa [...] was an ideological edifice, effectively and cunningly built by authors both local and expatriate, and it was only destroyed – and then only partially – with the unexpected achievement of Eritrean independence toward the end of the twentieth century.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ For an example see TNA, FO 371/172820 (1963), The Eritrean Liberation Front introduces: Eritrea at the face of Ethiopian invasion, undated.

⁵⁶ EPLF, *Memorandum*, April 1978, as quoted in: Document, 'Richard Leonard's paper entitled: 'European Colonization and the Socio-Economic Integration of Eritrea', *Eritrea Information*, 2:11 (December 1980), p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Our Struggle and its Goals*, English translation, GS Private Archives.

⁵⁸ See for instance Sam Whimster (ed.). (2004), p. 148.

⁵⁹ Richard Reid, 'The challenge of the past: The quest for historical legitimacy in independent Eritrea', *History in Africa* 28 (2001), p. 258.

Specifically Western support for ‘Ethiocentrism’ appears of interest and is explained by Reid as Ethiopia always having been considered as somehow separated from the rest of black Africa and being closer to Europe.⁶⁰

In terms of scholarly support for the Eritrean position, the prolonged struggle saw the development of what Akinola called the *voix Érythrée*,

a uniform and Unitarian depiction of Eritrean identity and the nationalist agenda that has been predominant since c.1978. [...] *voix Érythrée* was not founded on free-flowing debate; it has thrived on discourses essentialized in either-or, we-they terms. Heterodoxy was not highly valued; hence, viewpoints contrary to the prevailing official thinking or arguments on its margins were consistently spurned, discounted, de-legitimized or demonized. [...], nearly all groups tended to keep away from debate on the constitution of the Eritrean national self.⁶¹

This seems to agree with Erlich’s early 1980s analysis, namely that the Eritrean nationalism that had developed during the first decades of the independence struggle was ‘based essentially on the negation of Ethiopianism’.⁶² This conclusion though, grossly disregarded the fact that there was an active ideological engagement with questions concerning Eritrean unity and identity, as clearly shown in the earliest pamphlet ascribed to the EPLF, *Nehna Elaman* (Our struggle and its goals), for instance.

It certainly cannot be denied though that Ethiopia continued to play a decisive role in the way the discourse was formed within Eritrea, especially after the Dergue regime had taken over. This is hardly surprising given the repressive politics against Eritreans even within Ethiopia, such as the *Association of Eritrean Students*.⁶³ Large numbers of Eritrean-born elites joined the independence forces after having become estranged from the Ethiopian regime. Others went into exile and started supporting the independence struggle from abroad. In fact, Akinola claims that some of the best known

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Olufemi A. Akinola, ‘Politics and Identity construction in Eritrean Studies, c. 1970-1991: The making of *Voix Érythrée*’, *African Studies Monographs* 28:2 (2007), p. 50.

⁶² Haggai Erlich (1983), p. 20.

⁶³ See Olufemi A. Akinola, ‘Politics and identity construction’, p. 62.

supporters of the *voix Érythrée* were from the Eritrean diaspora.⁶⁴ He names Araia Tseggai and Kassahun Checole, the former becoming editor of the *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, the latter founding the *Red Sea/Africa World Press* which published numerous books on Eritrea, authored by Eritrean and Western scholars alike. Probably best known to Western observers was Bereket Habte Selassie, who ‘became the preeminent elder statesman of Eritrean studies in the West and helped put Eritrea at the center of a new liberationist discourse on Africa and the world’.⁶⁵ A professor of Law and International Politics, former fighter and observer for the EPLF at the UN, he edited and co-edited numerous books on Eritrean history and the struggle for independence, most notably his 1989 collection of essays *Eritrea and the United Nations*.⁶⁶ It has to be noted though that Habte Selassie turned into a divisive figure after Eritrean independence, largely due to the mixed reception of his books published after 2000 in which he critically assesses Eritrea’s descent into dictatorship.⁶⁷

Commentaries by Eritrean exiles in the late 1970s largely promoted Eritrea’s right to self-determination based on historical and legal arguments. In fact, the right to self-determination had already been broached in the early stages of the struggle, in combination with references to the UN Charter’s paragraph on refraining from use of force against other states, a prohibition which had clearly been broken by Ethiopia.⁶⁸

1978 finally saw the coming ‘into its own’ of the *voix Érythrée* which was strongly linked to the political and military developments of the time, mainly the ‘strategic’ retreat of the EPLF and the huge blow the ELF had to deal with. In the intellectual sphere attempts were made to bring together the various discourses concerned with the wider Horn of Africa region in order to work towards reconciliation.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Bereket Habte Selassie, *Eritrea and the United Nations and other essays* (Trenton/NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1989).

⁶⁷ Bereket Habte Selassie, *Wounded Nation: How a Once Promising Eritrea Was Betrayed and Its Future Compromised* (Trenton/NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2011).

⁶⁸ See RDC, ETH/BIO/43.04, p. 3.

However, endeavours such as the journal *Horn of Africa* were quickly criticized for giving room and credence to biased accounts and for helping to reinforce ‘myths about the region’.⁶⁹ While the Ethiopians continued clinging to the argument of a supposed common history, the Eritreans under the EPLF had already developed a position of insisting on the international right of self-determination, and the will of all the Eritrean people in the territory to live together as an independent nation.

In order to be able to claim the right to self-determination, as enshrined in the UN Charter of 1945⁷⁰, the *Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal of the International League for the Rights to Liberation of Peoples* in its report on Eritrea of 1980 also referred back to the colonial period to root Eritrean nationalism:

A social entity endowed with a national conscience had evolved in the territory of the Italian colony during the colonial period, and was considerably reinforced during the period of struggle. This can be maintained despite a number of evident contradictions: the presence of a small number of Eritrean intellectuals in the Ethiopian administration, social contradictions of class in Eritrea which reveal the dialectical character of the struggle which is not only national but also social, and the existence of two fronts hampering the progress of the struggle. But all of this does not call into doubt the existence of a national consciousness.⁷¹

Only one year later the International Commission of Jurists came to a similar conclusion, noting that after 20 years of struggle it was about time that the issue was discussed on the international level, especially since the matter was ‘a source of embarrassment both to the United Nations itself and to almost all “interested parties”’.⁷² It noted that, regardless of what happened before the UN Resolution for federation, once the latter was unilaterally abrogated by Ethiopia that ‘was a fundamental breach of the agreement, which must lead to a revival of the people’s right to self-determination’.⁷³ This conclusion is based on the fact that, even if the Eritrean people had agreed to

⁶⁹ Olufemi A. Akinola, ‘Politics and identity construction’, p. 65.

⁷⁰ See Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Art.1(2), available at: <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/unchartr.html>, (last accessed on 27.05.2014).

⁷¹ ‘Eritrea and the Right to Self-Determination, Extract from the Report of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal of the International League for the Rights to Liberation of peoples’, Milan, 3 October 1980, *Review of African Political Economy* 25 (1982), p. 41.

⁷² International Commission of Jurists, ‘Eritrea: Eritrea’s Claim to Self-Determination’, *The Review* (Geneva) 26 (1981), p. 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

become part of a federation as an autonomous unit, integrating it into the Empire without their consent was not in compliance with the principal of equal rights and self-determination.

In fact, while nationalist sentiment was voiced by a limited number before the independence struggle took momentum, it clearly developed throughout the struggle. Hence, it does not really matter how strong it was before, the fact that it existed and gained strength made it impossible to simply dismiss it as Ethiopia often attempted to do. Nationalist sentiment existed, and was strengthened in opposition to Ethiopia.

LEBANON

Environment for open debate in Lebanon

The case of Lebanon has to be seen as unique in the Middle Eastern region, since a relatively open constitutional and intellectual debate had existed ever since independence.⁷⁴ In addition to that, a large number of independent newspapers were already being published during the French mandate and even more thereafter. However, ‘independent’ basically means that although they were not published by the government, they largely represented and supported certain groups or communities. Hence, they concentrated more ‘on the presentation of views and opinions than on news and facts’.⁷⁵ This became even more evident during the civil war when publications were used for the ‘manipulation of news for purposes of political or sectarian mobilization’.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the independent character of newspapers was often challenged by a number of regulations decisively limiting the freedom of the press.⁷⁷

The existing atmosphere of open and rich intellectual debate at the time of

⁷⁴ See Hanna Ziadeh (2006), p. 17 f.

⁷⁵ Nabil H. Dajani, *Disoriented Media in a Fragmented Society: The Lebanese Experiment* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), p. 44.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁷ For a detailed description of the limitation of press freedom throughout the relevant periods of Lebanese history, see Nabil H. Dajani (1992), p. 33 ff.

Lebanon's early independence allowed for an open discourse on matters concerning the state, its problems and identity. This discourse found expression in various forms, the most prominent being *Les Conférences du Cénacle* (The Conferences of the Cenacle, henceforth referred to as *Cénacle Libanais*) that took place from 1946 until 1968. The institution of the *Cénacle Libanais* has been rated as 'probably the most significant to a study of dominant currents of thought'⁷⁸ as it constituted a 'threshold that signaled [*sic*] the emergence of indigenous initiative for self-determination and national discourse.'⁷⁹ The conferences were, in fact, intended to serve as a forum for the expression and discussion of the various ideological views that existed in Lebanon's pluralistic society, with the objective of reaching consensus on the basics of a coherent Lebanese national identity. Michel Asmar, the founder of the *Cénacle Libanais*, described it as 'a committed platform which helped us to get to know ourselves, without prejudices and without preconceptions'.⁸⁰ He felt there was a need, especially by the Lebanese youth, 'to bring together every authentic Lebanese value, to make these values work together to rediscover the essence of our country that reaches back six millennia but whose identity has been hidden by long Ottoman rule and 25 years of mandate'.⁸¹

While the *Cénacle Libanais* could be viewed as a forum for Lebanese Christian nationalism in its early years, it was gradually taken more and more seriously by other groups and developed into an active forum discussing all the issues present in the young independent state.⁸² Its conferences became impatiently anticipated events that found dispersion amongst the population through radio broadcasts, as well as the publishing of

⁷⁸ Nadim Shehadi, *The idea of Lebanon: Economy and State in the Cénacle Libanais 1946-54* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1987), p. 3.

⁷⁹ Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 179.

⁸⁰ Michel Asmar, 'The Cénacle: an expression of Lebanese conscience: A talk at the Beirut Rotary Club', 10 December 1962, published in: *Ahd 'al-Nadwah 'al-Lubnānīyah: Hamsūn sanah min al-Muhāddarat/ Les années 'Cénacle'*, Beirut 1997, p. 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸² It is worth mentioning that the *Cénacle Libanais* also dealt with much more general topics and issues concerning world politics and featured some international speakers as well, such as the British historian Arnold Toynbee. The *Cénacle Libanais* also promoted national authors and poets by publishing their works in its publishing house.

a periodical, presenting selections of the 435 lectures given between 1946 and 1968.⁸³ Hence, while it was a discourse taking place at elite level, great emphasis was put on reaching a broad audience and the conferences ‘exercised great influence over the formulation of Lebanese nationalism and the development of political ideas in the First Republic’.⁸⁴

The analysis of the intellectual discourse in this chapter will mainly be based on a selection of these conferences. In addition, the analysis will be supplemented by a number of articles published between 1941 and 1970 in the Lebanese newspaper *L'Orient*, which Dajani describes as having ‘played a major role in early Lebanese politics’.⁸⁵ The person who played the lead role in this context was Georges Naccache, who authored a large number of articles and commentaries in *L'Orient* in the relevant time period. He was known to have been a supporter of the idea of a smaller, Christian Lebanon in the early 1930s. From the late 1930s on though, he dedicated himself to finding a viable solution for *Greater Lebanon* and supported the idea of the *Cénacle Libanais*, where he would become a frequent participant. He appeared on its stage in 1950 for the first time and affirmed the importance of the forum and its vocation as an invitation to Lebanese history. On the role of the *Cénacle Libanais* he said that ‘[i]f a Lebanese synthesis is feasible [...] then it is under the moral conditions brought together by an institution like this, that such project has the most chances to come about’.⁸⁶ While the discourse on Lebanese identity and unity in the 1920s and the early 1930s had been strongly marked by the opposing views of Lebanese nationalists and the supporters of Arab nationalism, a common interest in attaining independence from the Mandatory developed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. This development ‘brought the

⁸³ Fares Sassine, ‘Le Cénacle d’Asmar ou les Paradoxes de la maison Liban’, *L'Orient-Express* 13 (1996), p. 164.

⁸⁴ Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 45.

⁸⁵ Nabil H. Dajani (1992), p. 63.

⁸⁶ George Naccache, ‘Un temps a gagner ou le procès de l’Intelligence libanaise’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 12 Juni 1950, published in *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 5:7-8 (1950), p. 195.

inhabitants of Lebanon closer together politically than ever before.’⁸⁷ However, the discourse on the questions of identity, national unity and the future of the entity continued to be characterised by the dominant and recurring issue of Christian-Muslim coexistence and the multi-confessional nature of Lebanese society. In fact, the questions on the identity of the country and the institutionalised confessional system must be considered to be at the heart of a variety of other problems raised and discussed in the intellectual discourse in the following years. These problems, therefore, cannot always be separated easily.

The main issues addressed concerned the question of the identity of the Lebanese nation, socio-political problems - mainly related to the institutionalised confessionalism - and persisting feudal structures, as well as the role of the country in the regional context. The large number of conferences and articles would allow for a much more detailed portrayal and analysis than is attempted here. However, a selection has been taken for the scope of this presentation, and the focus will be kept to issues discussed on the ideological level.

Phoenician history vs. Arab history

The main problem of today’s Lebanon – our only problem at a moment when, after an alienation of six centuries, we are cast completely naked in history – is to recreate us a historical consciousness.⁸⁸

This statement, made by Georges Naccache during his first talk given at the *Cénacle Libanais* in June 1950, highlighted the continuous importance placed on the history of the country with regard to the necessity of defining the identity and vocation of the Lebanese state. In fact, the ‘invitation to history’⁸⁹ was considered an essential function

⁸⁷ Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic. Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 42. The two opposing extremist views continued to exist throughout Lebanon’s independent history. However, these views were not expressed in the ‘official’ intellectual discourse aimed at cooperation and co-existence.

⁸⁸ George Naccache, paper (1950), p. 195.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

of the *Cénacle Libanais* in its early years as it aimed to ultimately turn it into ‘the expression of Lebanese consciousness’.⁹⁰

The idea of most theories dealing with nationalism and national identity of a common history being one of the denominators that facilitate the identification of a nation was shared by a large number of speakers at the *Cénacle Libanais*. Most of them, such as former president Alfred Naccache, supported the idea that it was, in fact, the long common history that would qualify the Lebanese as a nation.⁹¹

While the questions discussed by the speakers at the conferences generally revolved around the problems the state encountered at the time, many of the elaborations were accompanied by investigations of Lebanese history. What was striking is the fact that most of these investigations clearly displayed an affiliation to a Lebanese Christian reading of history, tracing the history of the country back to the ancient Phoenicians. A large number of speakers made only indirect references to the Phoenician ancestry, others clearly expressed, and elaborated on, this view. The affiliation to such narrative has to be ascribed to the aforementioned predominance within the circle of a moderate Christian Lebanese nationalism that favoured dialogue with Islam ‘through which it is hoped Arabist ideologues can be convinced that Lebanon is also theirs and that it serves as a conduit for modernization and progress not only for Lebanon but for the whole Arab world’.⁹²

One of the representatives of a less extremist Lebanese Christian nationalism was Michel Chiha, whose contributions to the *Cénacle Libanais* were highly influential in the early years of the intellectual discourse.⁹³ He advanced the view that knowing the

⁹⁰ Michel Asmar, paper (1962), p. 36.

⁹¹ Alfred Naccache, ‘Le problème constitutionnel au Liban’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 16 December 1946, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 2 (1947).

⁹² David C. Gordon, *The Republic of Lebanon: Nation in Jeopardy* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 45.

⁹³ In fact, Shehadi notes that many conferences in the early period of the *Cénacle Libanais* are reiterations of Chiha’s ideas and themes and that ‘Chiha’s disciples had made extensive use of the *Cénacle* to work out their ideas’ (Nadim Shehadi (1987), p. 14).

roots of the country in history would be one of the prerequisites of stability. In that sense, he followed the argument of common history as a unifying factor for the Lebanese nation. In a speech given four years before the inauguration of the *Cénacle Libanais*, he stated that '[...] the *Lebanon of today* is practically the same as the original Lebanon-Phoenicia',⁹⁴ reiterating this position over the years. Confident in his conviction that the Lebanese people 'must accept an ancestry that goes much further back than the one adhered to arbitrarily by some people in the interests of a certain policy',⁹⁵ he clearly dismissed the Arab nationalist point of view that considered at least parts of the Lebanese state as belonging to a larger Arab entity.

While the ancient history of the country had the potential for many different interpretations, the discourse on more recent events also displayed discord. The discussion and assessment of the creation of *Greater Lebanon* by the French mandate authority in 1920 could be seen as one example of such varying interpretation. Referring to earlier history, Mobarak, in his paper given in January 1948, viewed its creation as a rightful, positive step as it constituted 'the reintegration of the regions torn away through the protocols of 1860-64 into the borders of the Lebanese state'.⁹⁶ In fact, according to him this act should be considered a positive contribution by the mandate authority as it represents 'the first step towards the realisation of the unity of the nation'.⁹⁷ Moreover, he indicated a number of additional positive effects of the mandate period for the country as it opened the doors to the Occident and helped the country's entry into the international arena.

Kamal Joumblatt, in March 1949, presented a less positive reading of the mandate authority and the creation of *Greater Lebanon*. He described the creation as an

⁹⁴ Michel Chiha, 'Lebanon today (1942)', lecture given at the Catholic Youth Centre, Beirut, in 1942, translated from the French by Leo Arnold and Jean Montegu, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 20:9-10 (1966), p. 18.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁶ Moussa Mobarak, 'Le Liban dans sa dernière étape', paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 26 January 1948, published in *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 2:2 (1948), p. 21.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

accident and ‘the unilateral will of General Gouroud’.⁹⁸ Furthermore, he pointed out the negative role that colonialism had played in creating national and religious discord. In fact, he dismissed all attempts to trace the roots of both Lebanese and Arab nationalism back to ancient times as useless, arguing that they have to be seen as recent and linked to the development of capitalism. In 1961, Saeb Salam presented an alternative interpretation of the events of 1920. He asserted that there had, in fact, been calls for the creation of *Greater Lebanon* by a number of Lebanese, but it is doubtful whether the actual creation was realized to answer these demands or rather to fulfil a specific self-interest of the mandate authority. He argued that the latter might have been the case, given the fact that the Muslim-Christian split within the newly created entity could be used by the French to strengthen their authority.⁹⁹

Muslim vs. Christian? Orient vs. Occident?

Disagreement over the foundations of the Lebanese nation was at the root of dissension over the identity of the nation. This was not only reflected in the ongoing intellectual discourse but also in growing inter-communal tensions. Yet, the lack of agreement on an ideological level and the ongoing contestations on a political level can be considered as being mutually dependent.

The disagreement over the identity of the country is best illustrated by two statements that represent the diverging views persisting throughout the years. The first was published in *L'Orient* in 1955 and affirmed that ‘[i]f we want it or not, we are from the Occident. We are so for our ideas, our morals, our tastes – for all the burden of our five millennia’.¹⁰⁰ With the question ‘Who are we?’ persisting, Saab gave the following

⁹⁸ Kamal Joumlat, ‘Le Liban et le monde arabe’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 30 March 1949, published in *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 3:5-6 (1949), p. 105.

⁹⁹ Saeb Salam, ‘Lubnān wāhad la lubnānain’ (One Lebanon, not two Lebanons), paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 17 April 1961, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 15:5 (1961), (reprinted in Ahd ‘al-Nadwah ‘al-Lubnāniyah (1997), p. 402.

¹⁰⁰ *L'Orient*, 20.03.1955, p. 1.

answer in his talk in 1968, the last year of the *Cénacle Libanais*:

We are Lebanese and we are Arabs. Our quality as Lebanese is not particularly worth anything if not in the quantity in which we are Arabs. Arabs for a community of fate, of language, of culture, of tolerance, and of interest.¹⁰¹

These different answers reveal the divergent orientations within the country towards two different poles. In an attempt to reconcile these antithetic orientations, definitions of the country as ‘link between the East and West’¹⁰² were brought forward, depicting it as a place ‘where two of the biggest religions of mankind are meeting at every step, without trying to mix up. Two religions, that is to say somehow also two civilisations and two cultures of core and of different tendencies’.¹⁰³ Describing Lebanon as the oldest place of peaceful cohabitation of Christianity and Islam has to be seen as an attempt to give a positive definition to the actual bipolarity of the country. At times this went as far as elevating the country to the level of a model of religious co-existence for the rest of the world as ‘Christianity and Islam are necessary for each other, because both are necessary for peace and unity of the world’.¹⁰⁴ In that sense, Lebanon is not only necessary to both religions but is itself the alternative to allegiance to Christianity or Islam, Occident or Orient.¹⁰⁵ In this context, the term ‘Mediterranean’ has become frequently used to somehow describe the position between the two poles. Chiha uses this term in an attempt to define the identity of the Lebanese, leaving the people concerned rather confused:

[...] we shall say that *the population of Lebanon is Lebanese, quite simply*, and that, with due reservations made in the case of those very recently naturalized, it is at present no more Phoenician than Egyptian, Aegean, Assyrian or Medic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine or Arab, with or without consanguinity, or European by alliance or Turk for that matter. At the very most we

¹⁰¹ Edouard Saab, ‘Un Liban solidaire des Arabes’, paper given at the *Conférences du Cénacle* on 7 March 1968, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 12:1 (1968), p. 64.

¹⁰² Michel Chiha, paper (1951), p. 162.

¹⁰³ Charles Ammoun, paper (1947), p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Youakim Moubarac, ‘Christianisme et Islam. Le dialogue islamo-chrétien au Liban et sa fécondité’, conference given at the *Conférences du Cénacle* on 31 May 1965, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 19:12 (1965), p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Ammoun, paper (1947), p. 8.

say that it is a Mediterranean type, probably the least easy to determine. It has a structure all its own, and no other.¹⁰⁶

Such a conclusion not only left the field wide open to various interpretations, but also was a negative identity, merely stating who the Lebanese are not. While differentiation from 'the others' actually constitutes a very important part of defining national identity, it cannot be sufficient alone and a void remains that has to be filled. If not, people might resort to other or maybe older allegiances which, in the case of Lebanon, not only related to the different communities within the country, but to the two poles of the world. However, the definition of the identity of the country in between these poles was officially enshrined through the formula of the unwritten National Pact of 1943. The Pact tried to accommodate both camps by emphasizing the Arab face of the country as well as its special bond to the Occident, while not really being part of either one of them. However, from the beginning there have been mixed opinions about this agreement with its formula of compromise both on the ideological and the political level. Criticism was soon voiced that the Pact, although providing some stability, did not unite the two camps on an ideological basis and thus create a commonly accepted identity. Rather it provided, once again, a negative description as criticised by Georges Naccache in his often-quoted article 'Deux Négations ne font pas une Nation' (Two Negations do not make a Nation) of 10 March 1949:

What kind of unity can be derived from such a formula? What one half of the Lebanese does not want can be seen clearly. And what the other half does not want can be seen equally clearly, But what both halves want in common cannot be seen. [...]

The folly is having elevated a compromise to the level of a state doctrine – having dealt with an accident as something stable – having believed, finally, that two «no» could, in politics, produce a «yes». For the fear of simply being what it is, and by force not wanting to be neither this nor that, it realizes that it now risks being nothing at all.[...]

A state is not the sum of two non-powers -and two negations never make a nation.¹⁰⁷

And time, in fact, proved that the 'two Lebanons' that have existed since the creation of

¹⁰⁶ Michel Chiha, paper (1942), p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ *L'Orient*, 10 March 1949, p. 1.

Greater Lebanon did not become ‘one Lebanon: one row, one heart, not Muslim or Christian, not negative or positive’¹⁰⁸ through the National Pact.

Tensions between the different camps were growing and commentaries in *L’Orient* urgently called on the people to learn to love all the diversities of the country and see them as its strength. In these diversities they should try ‘to find themselves on this territory where, unless negating Lebanon itself, no contestation between us is possible [...] if we are not able of such accomplishment than we do not deserve to be a nation anymore’.¹⁰⁹ The lack of recognition of the bipolarity of the country and failure to identify with this bipolarity was seen by Fouad Boutros as one of the main reasons for the failure of the unity the National Pact attempted to create. However, he ascribed this to the fact that the Pact was created by two individuals and its ideology has never been rooted in the population.¹¹⁰ Boutros’ observation, made in 1961, came after one consequence of this lack of identification, namely the escalation of political and sectarian tensions leading to the crisis of 1958.

These tensions had been building up since the Suez Crisis of 1956 and evoked by the fundamental problem of the Lebanese identity. Arising out of the disagreement over support for the Egyptian government in the crisis, *L’Orient* identified the bipolarity of the country as being at the heart of the problem:

Saying that the problem is not a Muslim-Christian problem means looking for a solution in an excuse. Our problem is exactly that -and there is no other. [...] We could say that there exists a primary adherence of the Lebanese Muslim to his Lebanese homeland: his interest, his habits, his culture itself and his sensitivity are linked to it. But at the bottom of his heart he keeps the dream of a second homeland – of this super-homeland that would be this magnificent and almighty Arab Empire – where moreover he knows that he would get lost...Saying that one wants to re-do Lebanese unity pretending to ignore this given thing, that would mean basing Lebanon on a lie. That is finally – in all ‘loyalism’ – refusing Lebanon...¹¹¹

To guarantee the continuity of Lebanon would thus require finding measures that could

¹⁰⁸ Saeb Salam, paper (1961), p. 403.

¹⁰⁹ *L’Orient*, 12 September 1951, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Fouad Boutros, ‘Les fondements de notre vie nationale’, paper given at the *Conférences du Cénacle* on 29 May 1961, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, XV, No. 12, 1961, (reprinted in: Ahd ‘al-Nadwah ‘al-Lubnāniyah (1997)), p. 433.

¹¹¹ *L’Orient*, 5 April 1958, p. 1.

accommodate Lebanese Arab nationalists within the preservation of the country. While such analysis clearly displays a moderate Lebanese Christian attitude, other views of the underlying problem have been advanced. Salam argues that the Arab face of Lebanon, as agreed upon in the National Pact, is often seen as an inflicted condition or even an obstacle. Such a position can lead to a loss of balance in the Lebanese structure and cause a crisis as in 1958. Hence, it has to be realized, that being Arab is not a condition but rather an unchangeable characteristic of the country.¹¹² While this claim might be considered by the Lebanese Christians as infringing upon their allegiance to the Occident, the assertion already made by Joumblatt in 1949 can certainly be considered valid: any building of the country without taking the Muslim population into account would be a 'folly' and a 'utopia'.¹¹³

Despite the continuous existence of different views, the events of 1958 and the tensions preceding the crisis seemed to have led to some general awareness that a positive definition of the identity would be needed:

Of the double renunciation of 1943 an adherence has to be born, that means a positive act without restrictions or reservation. We should leave aside the slogans such as "neither winner nor loser" or "one Lebanon and not two". [...] There can be no winners after 1958, but there has been more than one loser.¹¹⁴

Claims to define the true common will of the Lebanese people increased because without such definition, the very existence of the country would be in question. In fact, the Lebanese intelligentsia had already attempted to develop such a positive, commonly acceptable definition in its discourse.

A common will of the Lebanese nation?

The study of the different interpretations of historical events reveals the problems of

¹¹² Saeb Salam, paper (1961), p. 403.

¹¹³ Kamal Joumblatt, paper (1949), p. 122.

¹¹⁴ Fouad Boutros, paper (1961), p. 434.

using history as a fundamental and common denominator in the case of Lebanon. The awareness of this problem might have been the reason for a group of speakers to represent a more humanistic view, proposing an attachment to certain values as the common foundation of the nation. Representatives of this argument, such as Charles Helou or Georges Ammoun have been criticised by Georges Naccache for their ‘anti-historic’ attitude.¹¹⁵ The representatives of the humanistic point of view, however, did not dismiss the role of history out of hand: on the contrary, they pointed out its importance and affirmed that its negation would be ‘as criminal as stupid’.¹¹⁶ Still, they identified the *raison d’être* of the country as being a common respect for law built on a spiritual foundation, and the vocation of Lebanon as being a country of liberty, peace, justice and equality. The fact that the country was composed of associated minorities was seen as ‘an affirmation of the primacy of spirituality’.¹¹⁷ While the moral order was regarded as one of the basic factors on which the nation was built, the principal factor should be the will to live together.

There was disagreement, however, whether such common will really did exist. While the revolution of 1943, leading to the National Pact, could be interpreted as the expression of such common will, the question remained as to whether this expression was something deeply-rooted or rather a unique moment, born out of the common interest in bringing the mandate to an end. Mobarak asserted that, in fact, the unifying factor behind the revolution was such a common desire. Yet it was driven by ‘the will to live together of all the inhabitants of this country’¹¹⁸, a will based on the principles exhibited by the representatives of the humanistic view: equality and justice, as well as dignity and probity. He further claimed that this will had existed long before 1943,

¹¹⁵ Georges Naccache, paper (1950), p. 203.

¹¹⁶ Charles Ammoun, ‘Le Liban: Risques et Possibilités’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 28 April 1947, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 4 (1947).

¹¹⁷ Charles Helou, ‘La Maison Libanaise: Les Fondements Moraux’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 27 February 1950, published in: *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 4:1-2 (1950), p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Moussa Mobarak, paper (1948), p. 26.

‘throughout the centuries and the ages’,¹¹⁹ and that the revolution was just the consequence of a long evolution. This directly contradicted an observation that had been presented just one year earlier by Charles Issawi who remarked that still nothing could be said about a common will of the Lebanese people. A larger solidarity, necessary for the survival and the viability of the country could be seen emerging. However, the development of such solidarity into a genuine common will to live together would require some time.¹²⁰

This realisation touches on an aspect expressed by Salam some fourteen years later in 1961, namely that the combination of all the factors described as fundamentals of the Lebanese nation would bring about the identification with the country as a homeland:

Homelands are not gifts to be granted, neither taxes to be imposed. They grow in the land, strengthened by the bonds of values and interest as well as the common pains and hopes. Empowered by the unity and will of their children.¹²¹

In fact, the attributes offered by the representatives of the humanistic view remained rather universal. As such, they could possibly have served as the basis for a transcending national identity since they left enough space for identification for all the various Lebanese communities. Yet the institutionalized sectarian system ruled out the efficiency of such attributes, since the gaining of political goals and political representation would still always be linked to affiliation with a community.

Conclusion

The analysis of the discourse on the identity of the respective countries exposed remarkable similarities between Eritrea and Lebanon in its initial phase. Yet the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Charles Issawi, ‘Les fondements sociaux et économiques de la démocratie’, paper given at the *Cénacle Libanais*, 3 February 1947, published in *Les Conférences du Cénacle*, 7 (1947).

¹²¹ Saeb Salam, paper (1961), p. 403.

circumstances and the extent of the discourse, as well as its impact, have to be considered as being rather different.

In the case of Eritrea, open discourse only became possible during the BMA, yet was highly politicized due to the impending decision on the future of the country. After annexation, the discourse became very restricted due to suppressive Ethiopian politics in the territory which resulted in most accounts coming from outside the territory. Independent Lebanon, on the other hand, provided a relatively free environment for any sort of political discourse. Despite the difference in the setting, the tracking of the discourse in both countries reveals a move towards a civic understanding of national identity, which envisioned a transcending identity based around common values, the will to live together, and the realisation of self-determination.

The initial divide between proponents of an identity linked to a larger neighbouring country by history and religion and supporters of a narrative that argued for a separate identity was largely replaced by this new understanding in Eritrea. This was facilitated by the fact that shortly after federation Ethiopia became perceived as the enemy by proponents of both of the previously opposed views. In Lebanon the voluntaristic understanding was presented by a few members of the intellectual elite, largely influenced by growing civil unrest in the wake of the 1958 conflict. Open criticism and calls for reforms were proof of the awareness within the intelligentsia of the problems created by the lack of an integrated national identity which effectively divided the country in two, and the hampering effect of the institutionalised confessionalism. However, even when there was consensus on the core of problems, there was still disagreement over how to handle them. Moreover, despite the conciliatory nature of the *Cénacle Libanais*, the affiliations of most of the speakers, even though not expressed explicitly, revealed themselves most of the time through their portrayals of certain events or details. The fact that the rifts showing in and

hampering the politics of the country also appeared in the intellectual discourse illustrates how deeply-rooted they were in Lebanese society, especially with regard to the elite. The prospects of a voluntaristic understanding serving as the basis for a predominant, transcending national identity remained, therefore, rather bleak. Within the deeply-rooted sectarian system it could become a form of identity, but only one that would be superseded by communal identities whenever conflicts over power arose.

In Eritrea, on the other hand, despite continued Ethiopian efforts to manipulate the discourse from outside by maintaining claims to historical ties between both countries, the Eritrean nationalist movement was able to find consensus in an identity rooted in the common experience of Italian colonialism and strongly based on the common will to live together and the right to self-determination. Since the liberation movement was composed of members of all Eritrean communities, the developed consensus certainly had the potential to develop into a transcending national identity joining all communities. The splits and the civil conflict that the movement witnessed during the struggle for independence were political in nature and did not constitute negations concerning the will to live together in the aspired to independent Eritrea.

Chapter 4 – Unity, diversity, or unity in diversity: Political parties and movements

While the placement of representatives in government positions is generally identified as the major goal of political parties¹, they should first and foremost be considered ‘[f]ormal organizations for representing the aims and interests of different socio-economic forces in the political sphere.’² The emergence of ‘Westphalian’ nation-states with clearly demarcated boundaries and a certain level of socio-economic development that facilitated the transfer of traditional forms of representation to new centres predated the appearance of political parties.³ Yet, the societies of the nation-states were still marked by social divides based on various factors such as religion, region and education. Hanley reminds us that it was exactly these divides from which parties arose in the European context, reflecting ‘the social interests of groups polarised on to either side of these cleavages.’⁴ Usually cleavages were class or culture based, or represented splits such as between the centre and the periphery. States were thus never run by a single political class, but by coalitions and alliances of the representatives of existing segments or sub-entities.

Since political parties represent the ideologies and goals existing within a given society, their analysis is highly relevant to the understanding of national identity.

Exploring the divides through a part-whole framework relates to the question of

how to reconcile private existence and public coexistence, anarchy and order, differences and harmony. Whether the initial unit is the individual, primary or secondary group, or a national community, at each level the ultimate problem is: How does the smaller unit relate to, and integrate with, the larger unit? [...] How can it be made that a part does not endanger unity, and

¹ See e.g. Kenneth Janda, *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), p. 5.

² ‘Political party’ in: John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford University Press 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t88.e1741>, (last accessed on 14.12.2011).

³ David Hanley, *Beyond the Nation State: Parties in the Era of European Integration* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2008, p. 12/13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

how can a part be put to use for the benefit of the whole?⁵

These questions are of special relevance in post-colonial/post-mandate territories where the territorial entity and a new centre were created by the powerful colonial/mandate administration, and which are now striving to maintain themselves without relying on external force. The main issue is that such territories usually display a rather segmented society structure whether poly-ethnic or multi-confessional and persisting pre-colonial/mandate loyalties to family, clan, sectarian and regional communities are expected to be transferred to the territorial state. Usually political parties function as intermediaries; yet, as Hanf pointed out, in multi-communal states ‘the communities and their political organs are the most important intermediaries, at least as long as they have not been completely depoliticized’.⁶ The political parties that develop from the various segments automatically lead to a political party system that has to be labelled as segmented pluralism, in which parties form along the various existing divides. Lijphart suggests several factors necessary to make consociation work in a fragmented society, including the ability of elites to recognize the inherent dangers of a fragmented system as well as their commitment to its maintenance. Furthermore, elites have to be able to go beyond existing cleavages and create solutions to accommodate subcultures.⁷ This is especially important when political systems are based on communities and their political organs, or ethnic/sectarian parties, since one of their characteristics is their clientelistic mobilization and, often, also reliance on ‘a single charismatic leader’.⁸ In other words, the elites have to develop a concept of syncretistic nationalism which facilitates the co-existence of communities in the territorial state.

⁵ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: a framework for analysis*, (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2005), p. 58.

⁶ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 32.

⁷ See Arend Lijphart, ‘Typologies of democratic systems’, *Comparative Political Studies* 1/1 (1968), pp.22/23.

⁸ Benjamin Reilly, ‘Political Engineering and Party Politics in Conflict-Prone Societies’, *Democratization* 13:5 (December 2006), p.814.

This chapter will examine the development of political parties in Eritrea and Lebanon and show that although in both countries early political parties were largely based on ethnic/sectarian divisions, multi-ethnic parties also existed. With few exceptions, all parties accepted the territorial entity created during the colonial/mandate period; however, party formation mainly took place around members of the elites for whom the parties were instrumental in achieving their nationalist aspirations. It will be demonstrated that a more conciliatory approach towards coexistence and a shared identity developed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, in the face of war/civil war, a reorganization of parties took place and old divisions were revived. Nonetheless, I will argue that it was mainly the struggle over hegemony rather than opposed interpretations of national identity and/or religious divisions that account for this development. A more civic and multi-communal understanding of identity had already developed and could have facilitated the development of a true syncretistic nationalism.

ERITREA

The emergence of political parties

At the end of the Italian colonial period, most social groups and traditional institutions in Eritrea had survived the foreign domination. As the British rightfully noted, ‘[i]t was the policy of the Italian Administration to prevent the emergence or growth of any political consciousness’⁹ and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that no political or civil society movements, in the Western sense, had officially developed during the Italian colonial period. However, socio-economic developments together with the Italian racist policies in the territory had resulted in an anti-colonial sentiment which found expression in form of the *Mahber Feqri Hager* (Association for the Love of the

⁹ FO371/50791, Future of Eritrea, Enclosed copy of a letter from the Civil Affairs Branch, MEF, on the Future of Eritrea, 05.08.1945.

Country, MFH). The MFH was founded shortly after the beginning of British military occupation in May 1941, emerging out of a committee of twelve mediators, six Muslims and six Christians, who received Eritrea's first British military administrator.¹⁰ Members all shared the desire to end Italian domination and frequently complained to the BMA about the continued presence of Italian colonial administrators in the country. Iyob delivered one of the most detailed accounts on the MFH and pointed out that, aside from the religious balance, '[i]ts membership included old and new elites, those with ties to the pre-colonial ruling classes, and self-made individuals and intellectuals' and, therefore, the MFH 'served as a common arena where traditional resistance groups, syncretic movements, and economic interest groups interacted'.¹¹ While such an arena has indeed to be considered an important stepping stone towards national integration and the development of a transcending Eritrean national identity, the different motives behind the anti-colonialist sentiments of the old and the new elite, and the lack of a shared political agenda beyond the end of colonial rule, contributed to its rapid fragmentation.

The imminent threat of partition of the country as envisioned by the British, together with the more liberal political climate in Eritrea, fostered the emergence of various political parties out of the MFH centred around the mainstream ideological positions of pro-Unionists and pro-Independence supporters. An attempt was made to preserve the MFH and reconcile political differences, the Wa'la Bet Ghergish, a meeting organized by moderate leaders of the association in November 1946. It took place in anticipation of political parties being formally legalized, but was unsuccessful. At least five political parties were to emerge out of the MFH by the end of 1946/beginning of 1947, and they 'were essentially formed with a view to the arrival of the

¹⁰ Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 87.

¹¹ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 65.

Commission of Investigation.’¹² In fact, their function was primarily to present to the international powers a considerable number of supporters that would convince them of their aspirations for the future of the country. In the following the main parties emerging out of the divide of the MFH will be presented.

The Unionist Party

The creation of the UP, to a large part, has to be ascribed to the influence of Emperor Haile Selassie who had returned to Ethiopia in April 1941. Immediately after his return he started working towards creating ‘irredentists’ movements in both the former Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia to have them ‘return’ to the Empire.¹³ In Eritrea he started using the existing MFH from 1942 onwards with the help of the Eritrean Coptic Church. Playing on ‘religious and kinship ties between Ethiopia and the Christian Highlands’ he was able to attract pro-unionist elements in the MFH and ‘precipitated the resurgence of ethnic, religious, and provincial cleavages that had been subordinated to the more universal anti-colonial and nationalist sentiment.’¹⁴ In Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian government sponsored a bureau for ‘Free Eritrea’, founded by Ethiopian government officials, and which the British in Eritrea saw as ‘evidently intended as a centre for irredentist propaganda in Eritrea.’¹⁵ However, the British legation in Ethiopia noted that its propaganda was aimed at winning over Eritreans based in Addis Ababa, and its success had to be considered limited since a considerable number of the Eritreans in Ethiopia had ‘little confidence in the efficiency and justice of the Ethiopian Government’.¹⁶

¹² Commission of Investigation as quoted by John H. Spencer (1984), p. 197.

¹³ Lloyd Ellingson, ‘The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950’, *The Journal of African History* 18:2 (1977), p. 261.

¹⁴ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 66.

¹⁵ TNA, FO371/41499, From the Chief Administrator of the British Military Administration in Eritrea to the British Legation in Addis Ababa, 07.06.1944.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Inside Eritrea, the propaganda of the Ethiopian Government for the incorporation of Eritrea was ‘the only organised propaganda’ and proved to be rather more successful.¹⁷ Following the failed reconciliation at Wa’la Bet Ghergish, the pro-Ethiopian remnants of the MFH were reconstituted into a political party named *Mahber Hager Fiqri Ertra: Ertra ms Ethiopia* (Association for Love of the Country: Eritrea with Ethiopia), commonly known as the *Unionist Party* (UP). A new leadership was appointed by the head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in December 1946, and Tedla Bairu became the party’s first Secretary-General. Its political programme was simple: opposition to any form of foreign rule, whether Italian or a foreign trusteeship, and unconditional union of all of Eritrea with Ethiopia.¹⁸

While the party was dominated by Highland Christians and the Eritrean Coptic Church, its actual membership demonstrates that cleavages did not run strictly along religious lines. Almost half of the Central Committee were Muslims, mainly belonging to the nobility or merchant classes, and the party placed great importance on pointing out the number of Muslim adherents to emphasize that it stood for unity between religious groups and was not based solely on religious affiliations.¹⁹ Negash claims that it was the deep religiosity of leaders that united Muslim and Christian supporters in the belief ‘that the ultimate goal of union with Ethiopia would find support in the eyes of God.’²⁰ However, while this fits his thesis of depicting the later incorporation as the final achievement of a desire long-held by all Eritreans, it is hardly convincing. Bereketeab noted that the political identity of the party remained rather unclear and questioned ‘whether the UP represented Ethiopian nationalism – or was driven by a group of aristocrats who thought that their interests would be better served in union with

¹⁷ FO371/50791, Future of Eritrea, Enclosed copy of a letter from the Civil Affairs Branch, MEF, on the Future of Eritrea, 05.08.1945.

¹⁸ See e.g. *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 19.11.1947, p.2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 38.

Ethiopia.²¹ Indeed, the participation of Muslim elites can be explained by the fact that the party created its power-base around the traditional ruling class in Eritrea that was preoccupied with the restoration of its traditional privileges.²² Italian intervention in the social and political organization of the peasantry had resulted in the weakening of pre-colonial feudal structures. Under the British, the serfs of the lowlands sought to advance their emancipation and revolts spread over the Western lowland of Barka and the Northern highlands.²³ As Gebre-Medhin stated, the UP acknowledged these problems, yet Muslim aristocrats trusted that the Ethiopian Government would 'not be unfavourably disposed toward their feudal privileges.'²⁴ This does, indeed point to the party fulfilling a rather instrumental aspect.

As discussed earlier, the Eritrean Church played a decisive role in securing supporters amongst the ordinary Eritrean Christians for the Unionist movement, yet a certain extant pro-Ethiopian sentiment among the Christians of the plateau cannot be denied. The UN Commission for Eritrea acknowledged that '[t]he Coptic Church certainly wields considerable influence, but it must not be overlooked that the Unionist movement in the highlands has many of the characteristics of an expanding popular movement.'²⁵ Accusations of being behind the increased *shifita* activities from 1947-1952 were vehemently denied by the party.²⁶ Evidence showed though that the party, or at least some of its followers, resorted to violent means such as bombings and attempts on the lives of prominent leaders of the independence movement. The UP and its activities were, aside from conventional membership fees, also supported by the

²¹ Redie Bereketeab (2000), p. 151.

²² See Jordan Gebre-Medhin (1989), p. 118, Dan Connell (1993), p.55.

²³ Document, 'Third extract of Richard Leonard's paper entitled: "European Colonization and the Socio-Economic Integration of Eritrea', p. 10.

²⁴ Jordan Gebre-Medhin (1989), p. 98.

²⁵ A/1285, Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea (excerpt), 8 June 1950, reproduced in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 74.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

Ethiopian government through the Ethiopian liaison officer in Asmara.²⁷

The Moslem League

In December 1946, The *Moslem League* (ML, *Al Rabita Al Islamiya*) was established in Keren. The League was founded by Ibrahim Sultan, who had grown considerably uncomfortable with increasing unionist support in the MFH and drafted the League's programme after the failed Wa'la Bet Ghergish meeting. He was able to garner much support among the Muslim communities except, as he said in an interview, 'those who were blinded by the Christians' propaganda.'²⁸ Ibrahim Sultan was elected as secretary-general of the newly-established party, and Said Abubakr al-Migrani, Mufti of the Eritrean branch of the Khatimiyya Brotherhood, as president.

The new party was marked by strong opposition to any sort of association with Ethiopia, and its main aim was to preserve Eritrea within its colonial boundaries. Independence was to be achieved either immediately or after a ten year British or UN trusteeship. While the attitude towards the Italian community in the country was described as respectful and even affectionate in a way, Italian trusteeship was strongly rejected due to the overall rather negative experience of Italian colonialism.²⁹ Britain, on the other hand, was viewed as being a 'better' colonial power and seemingly considering the needs of the colonized people.³⁰ To counter allegations by the Unionists that the ML was a purely Muslim organization, the presence of Christian followers in the party was emphasized and it declared that all communities in Eritrea were to live together and all should become citizens with equal rights and duties.³¹

However, as Miran points out, the ML used the banner of Islam to rally Eritrean

²⁷ See TNA, FO371/46116, S.H. Longrigg to the Foreign Policy Council, March 1944.

²⁸ See RDC, Biogr/425/11681, Interview with Ibrahim Sultan, Cairo, 20-25.12.1982.

²⁹ *Il Quotidiano Eritreo*, 07.12.1947, p.3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *bid.*

Muslims that were ethnically and linguistically rather heterogeneous and, thereby, made 'religious identity an essential component of nationalist aspirations.'³² In fact, Ibrahim Sultan himself later claimed that he based the founding of the ML largely on 'the cause of Islam' to counter the Unionists essentially rallying around the Eritrean Orthodox Church.³³ The joining of the Muslim communities was also facilitated by developments under the British administration that resulted in the centralization of Eritrean Islamic institutions and the introduction of Arabic as a common language in the field of education.³⁴ Another important aspect of mobilization amongst the Muslim peasants was Ibrahim Sultan's role as a serf spokesman who were seeking freedom from feudal Muslim landowners, mainly in the Western plains and in the lowlands surrounding Massawa. His active promotion of more rights for serfs attracted large numbers of them into the League, especially so as the UP was very popular with the nobility and promoted their traditional rights.³⁵

The Liberal Progressive Party ('Eritrea for Eritreans')

This party was founded by the local notable Ras Tessema Asmeron and his son Abraha in Adi Keyh in February 1947. One of its most active members was the Protestant Woldeab Woldemariam who served as a representative for the party abroad after going into exile. Woldemariam had already left the MFH in 1944 and established a clandestine movement for independence from which the LPP descended to a certain extent. Negash asserts that this early movement had been instigated by British Chief Administrator Stephen Longrigg, to advocate for unity of the Eritrean highlands with the Ethiopian province of Tigray to bolster British plans of partition.³⁶ However, ceding

³² Jonathan Miran, 'A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea', p. 204.

³³ RDC, Biogr/425/11681.

³⁴ Jonathan Miran, 'A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea', pp. 204-206.

³⁵ RDC, Biogr/425/11681.

³⁶ Tekesete Negash (1997), p. 40.

territory was not an option for Woldemariam or the LPP; rather the party would have accepted the annexation of the Ethiopian province of Tigray, as a way of uniting regions that were perceived as being connected by ethnicity, language and religion and had been linked, even throughout the colonial period, through 'trans-frontier migration, trade between Tigray villages and Eritrean markets and intermarriages of influential families'.³⁷ The movement strongly opposed any dominance by the church and sought the support of traditional Christian elites that did not aspire to union with the Ethiopian state.

In March 1947 a communiqué was issued by the party in support of the principles established by the Muslim League, specifically the call for Eritrea's independence. Yet, any form of foreign trusteeship was categorically rejected by the LPP. The party attempted to promote a secular Eritrean identity which was to be based on the collective experience of Italian colonisation. Since that had been shared by Muslims and Christians alike, no distinction was to be made between adherents of the different faiths.³⁸ The party was said to have around 53,000 members and was financed through membership fees.³⁹ After a short participation in the *Independence Bloc*, the party disintegrated and dissolved by the end of 1950.

The Independence Bloc

During a session of the UN in the spring of 1949, a number of pro-independence parties amalgamated to form the *Independence Bloc* (IB) under the leadership of Ibrahim Sultan. This coalition was first formed by the *New Eritrea Pro-Italy Party*, the ML and the *Italo-Eritrean Association* before being joined by the LPP, the *National Party of Massawa*, the *Veterans' Association*, the *Independent Eritrea Party*, and the *Intellectual*

³⁷ FO371/50791, Future of Eritrea, Enclosed copy of a letter from the Civil Affairs Branch, MEF, on the Future of Eritrea, 05.08.1945

³⁸ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 57.

³⁹ Lloyd Ellingson, 'The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea', p. 274.

Association of Eritreans. In its programme, an inclusive approach was taken considering all communities in the territory and expressing the awareness ‘that independence, true freedom and progress, can only be achieved through cooperation, with respect, the protection of work and the honest initiatives of all the people.’⁴⁰ This statement also included the Italian community in the territory, and it was asserted that they and the indigenous population would indeed feel united ‘by a brotherly spirit of nationalism’.⁴¹ The IB sought complete independence without any economic dependency, a democratic government and territorial integrity.⁴² Essays attached to the programme argued that Eritrea was economically viable and self-sufficient and described the new nation of Eritrea in which any social, religious or racial differences would not matter but only ‘the life that one has lived together, the dangers one has faced together, the blood that one has shed together’ as well as the ‘deep sentiment of unity and the firm belief that all belong to the same family.’⁴³ The Bloc was not overly sympathetic towards the British, largely due to accusations that the British purposely instigated conflicts between Eritreans based on religious or racial differences in order to further their proposal of partition.⁴⁴

While the British considered the actual strength of the IB to be 75 percent of the population, the American envoy Arthur Paddock estimated it at around 65 percent.⁴⁵ Numbers produced by the final report of the UN Commission, however, seemed to support estimates showing a Unionist predominance. The Bloc was quickly attacked by pro-Unionists. Aside from the allegation that the parties calling for independence were only brought into existence for the Commission of Investigation, it was further claimed that their joining of forces was engineered and financed by the Italians in order to

⁴⁰ RDC, His/Br/108/01661, Dichiarazione del Blocco Eritreo per l’Indipendenza, letto nella visita fatta all’amministratore capo dell’Eritrea il 25 Luglio 1949, per la consegna dell’atto costitutivo del Blocco.

⁴¹ RDC, His/Fed/357, L’Erythrée est une unité indivisible, Asmara, September 1949.

⁴² *bid.*

⁴³ *bid.*

⁴⁴ RDC, His/Brit/278/06357.

⁴⁵ See Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 122.

promote their own interests.⁴⁶ On these allegations the UN Commission noted that

as far as the Independence Bloc is concerned, its close association with Italian political interests is apparent from its composition. [...] However, at most Independence Bloc meetings real enthusiasm was encountered and this invalidates any charge that the Bloc is entirely a creation, and under the direction, of the Italians and does not represent a substantial trend of opinion.⁴⁷

However, Ibrahim Sultan's decision to join with pro-Italian movements was not unanimously agreed upon within the Bloc. A large number of pro-independence Eritreans still mistrusted the Italian community in Eritrea and its links with the former colonial power. The repercussions of this started to show by the beginning of 1950 when declining support from Sultan's co-religionists became more and more obvious. The unity of the Bloc was further shattered during a string of violent *shifita* attacks in the winter of 1949/1950. The IB finally fragmented due to the external pressure and internal disunity. Specifically the ML witnessed the break-away of splinter groups, most notably the *Muslim League of the Western Province* (MLWP) under the leadership of Ali Radaï, and the *Independent Muslim League*, which joined the pro-Unionist camp after it was given guarantees concerning Unionist respect for Muslim institutions and the teaching of Arabic in schools.⁴⁸

The fact that the IB quickly disintegrated certainly weakened the independence movement in general and, as Bereketeab notes, the split was especially damaging since it occurred in the middle of the UN debate on the fate of the territory.⁴⁹ However, the very existence of the Bloc, albeit short, reflected that an Eritrean nationalist sentiment had developed across various religious and ethnic communities in the territory who defined their identity separately from the Ethiopian nation.

⁴⁶ See e.g. John H. Spencer (1984), p. 212/213.

⁴⁷ A/1285, Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea (excerpt), 8 June 1950, reproduced in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 75.

⁴⁸ Loyd Ellingson, 'The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea', p. 278.

⁴⁹ Redie Bereketeab (2000), p. 157.

Political representation during the federation and after annexation

The decline of political parties

Shortly after the UN adopted its resolution deciding the future of Eritrea, all the political parties in the territory held a 'Peace Congress' in Asmara on 31 December 1950. The result was a joint communiqué in which all parties, 'in view of the necessity to bring about general pacification', promised to respect the decision to create a federation with Ethiopia and to co-operate in all aspects.⁵⁰ It was also made clear that the aim of uniting forces was to ensure, 'at the earliest possible date, the progress and prosperity of the Eritrean people.'⁵¹ Both the Unionists and the pro-independence movements agreed to work together in the UN-mandated autonomous Eritrean institutions for the creation of a democratic Eritrean state. The remnants of the IB further decided to change its name to *Eritrean Democratic Front* (EDF) 'in order to adapt it to the new situation.'⁵²

The first elections took place in March under the British Administration Electoral Proclamation 121, which, it was envisioned, would be replaced by an Electoral Law to be passed by the first Eritrean Assembly.⁵³ Of all the parties in existence at the end of the 1940s only the UP, the EDF and the MLWP managed to garner sufficient electoral support and took thirty-two, eighteen and fifteen seats respectively in the first Assembly, evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The remaining three seats were filled by splinter groups.⁵⁴ Following the federation with Ethiopia, Eritrean political parties witnessed a decisive decline. As the former advisor to the Emperor admitted, 'there was nowhere a disposition to develop political parties at that juncture' mainly because 'the danger was too great that such parties might take on regional colorations' and that other regions of the state could follow the Eritrean

⁵⁰ A/1959, Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea during the year 1951 (excerpt), 16 November 1951, reproduced in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 107.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ TNA FO371/118744, Report on the Second Assembly of Eritrea, British Consulate-General, Asmara, 12.09.1956.

⁵⁴ See Edmond Keller (1991), p. 152.

example.⁵⁵ The renunciation of political parties can hardly be considered a surprise in an authoritarian, traditionally party-less country such as Ethiopia, where power was considered to be given by God, not the people. The Eritrean autonomous unit, with a constitution based on democratic principles and the existence of political parties, was a bizarre anomaly in the Ethiopian State from the first day of the federation.

Due to increasing Ethiopian interference and the dictatorial and pro-Unionist orientation of the Chief Executive of Eritrea Tafla Bairu and his successor Asfaha Woldemichael, the Electoral Law was never passed by the Eritrean Assembly and elections continued to be held under Proclamation 121. Together with repressive measures this allowed Woldemichael to place government-sponsored candidates in most constituencies for the 1956 elections.⁵⁶ The result was a predominantly pro-Ethiopian Assembly and the noticeable absence of affiliation with political parties of its members. A report on the results of the elections by the British Consulate-General in Asmara shows that while twenty-nine members were from the Unionist Party, eight were described as 'Anti-Unionist', and twenty-seven 'did not publicly express their political affiliation'.⁵⁷

After the elections in 1956, public meetings were prohibited and political parties banned. However, well into the late 1950s the ML tirelessly released memoranda urging the Emperor to adhere to the federation resolution and the Eritrean constitution.⁵⁸ The only exception to the party ban was the UP, which was reorganized and financed in order to promote the complete incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia. Consequently, together with ongoing repression against any form of opposition, the 1960 elections resulted in an Assembly packed with Unionists and largely obedient to Ethiopia. Yet,

⁵⁵ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 277.

⁵⁶ TNA FO371/118744, Report on the Second Assembly of Eritrea.

⁵⁷ TNA FO371/118744, Report on the elections for the Second Assembly of Eritrea, British Consulate-General, Asmara, 12.09.1956.

⁵⁸ See e.g. TNA, FO371/118744, Memorandum submitted by the Moslem League, 03.01.1956.

even within the UP discontent with the steady erosion of the autonomous structures had emerged and it collaborated with anti-Union elements in order to try and stop the attrition. As the British Commissioner of the Eritrean police noted: 'The 'union or death' attitude has changed and their cry is now 'federation or death'.'⁵⁹ Increasing numbers of Unionists also defected from the party and embraced Eritrean nationalism.

Nationalist mobilization through workers' and students' movements

Although political parties ceased to exist, the 1950s witnessed the development of a workers and student movement which kept nationalist mobilisation alive, and largely fed the new pro-independence organizations that were beginning to emerge by the end of the 1950s.

In 1949 strikes were organized by dockworkers in Massawa and Eritrean Railway workers prompted by inequalities and discrimination at their workplace, which led to the liberalization of the BMA's labour policy.⁶⁰ By early 1951, ten labour unions had emerged in Asmara alone.⁶¹ In January 1952, the British administration recognized a national confederation of trade unions, the *Syndicate of Free Eritrean Workers* which was established by Woldeab Woldemariam after he had been approached by trade union leaders for advice.⁶² As Woldemariam noted in a 1983 interview, there was no ethnic conflict within the syndicate, and it contained Muslim as well as Christian workers.⁶³ A labour code was also introduced by the British, first through proclamation and later by Article 33 of the Eritrean Constitution.⁶⁴ With a claimed membership of about 10,000

⁵⁹ As quoted in Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 146.

⁶⁰ See Mussie Tesfagioris (2011), p. 122.

⁶¹ Tom Killion, 'Eritrean Workers' Organization and Early Nationalist Mobilization: 1948-1958', *Eritrean Studies Review* 2:1 (1997), p. 14.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ RDC, Bio/265/06167, 'Transcripts: WoldeAb and Labor Movement, Interviews conducted at RICE, Rome, April 1983, by Tom Killion and Arefaine Berhane Interview 2, Part B.

⁶⁴ See Article 33 of the Constitution of Eritrea, adopted by the Eritrean Constituent Assembly on July 15, 1952, reproduced in: Tekeste Negash (1997), p. 194.

workers, the Syndicate represented a considerable social force in federated Eritrea.⁶⁵ However, just as with political parties, trade unions and labour movements were not viewed favourably by the Ethiopian Government, and the *Syndicate* soon faced repression, followed by its banning in 1954 which forced it to go underground. The extension of Ethiopian control over the port facilities in Massawa and the Eritrean railroad, together with the deteriorating economic situation, resulted in the first attempts to launch a general strike in 1956.⁶⁶ The passing of a new Labour Code by the Eritrean Assembly in October 1957, severely restricting workers' rights, was the last spark that ignited a nationwide general strike in early 1958. The strike 'was greeted with an outpouring of support' and about 80,000 residents of Asmara gathered and asked for the resignation of Asfaha Woldemichael.⁶⁷ While the strike was forcefully suppressed by the police and resulted in the destruction of the Eritrean labour movement, it had mobilized a large part of Asmara's population that had grown increasingly discontent with the Eritrean government and Ethiopian repressions. As Killion notes, the support of Asmara's Christian population was especially remarkable since it 'clearly demonstrated the sea-change in political attitudes that had taken place since Federation'.⁶⁸ In fact, while the defections of UP members from the party had shown that this change had taken place on the elite level, the support of the strike demonstrated the growing embracement of Eritrean nationalism on the grassroots level.

The strike also had a decisive impact on students in Asmara who, from the late 1950s onwards, had also expressed their general discontent through spontaneous action. Wolde-Yesus Ammar, himself a leader of the early 1960s Asmara Student Movement, detailed in an article about the latter how these spontaneous actions included individual

⁶⁵ See Tom Killion, 'Eritrean Workers' Organization', p. 19.

⁶⁶ TNA, FO371/125539, Visit of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Eritrea, between the 11th and 24th of November 1957, Addis Ababa, 07.12.1957.

⁶⁷ Tom Killion, 'Eritrean Workers' Organization', p. 30/31.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

actions like writing graffiti, or group actions such as strikes and damaging school furniture.⁶⁹ In the summer of 1956, the authorities intervened to clamp down on actions in Asmara's secondary schools.⁷⁰ In 1960, students of two high schools in Asmara marched in large numbers to protest Ethiopian policies in the territory and the increasing moves towards annexation. In May 1962, another demonstration was staged and spread from Asmara across the country. The authorities hastily subdued the demonstrations with brutal force; yet the suppressive measures failed to silence the students. The next demonstration in March 1965 resulted in the arrest and detention of over 2000 high school students. Many of the student leaders were to play an important role in the liberation movement that had already formed outside the territory, and the formerly rather unstructured student movement became more organized through its links with the liberation movement after 1965.

The Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM)

In November 1958, a group of young Muslim Eritrean nationalists in Port Sudan formed the *Eritrean Liberation Movement* (ELM). The movement was also known as the 'Seven-Organization' (*Mahber Shew'ate*) in the Eritrean Highlands because of its cell structure, or *Haraka* an abbreviation of its name in Arabic, *Ḥaraka Taḥrīr Irītrīa*.

While based abroad, the ELM quickly worked on spreading its influence into Asmara and other areas of the territory through a clandestine cell network using social organizations inside Eritrea. As Iyob stated, the movement appealed to a broad spectrum of society because it voiced 'a general sense of betrayal at the hands of traditional rulers' who had been co-opted by the Ethiopian regime.⁷¹ Members included a large number of students, workers and employees of mixed religious affiliations that had

⁶⁹ Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 'The role of Asmara students in the Eritrean nationalist movement: 1958 – 1968', *Eritrean Studies Review*, 2:1 (1997), pp. 66.

⁷⁰ TNA, FO371/125539, Visit of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Eritrea.

⁷¹ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 101.

already mobilized throughout the 1950 and for whom the party provided an outlet and a clandestine organizational structure. The ELM's link with the Sudanese Communist Party through one of its founders, Mohammed Seid Nawud, inspired its strategy of clandestine agitation and gave it a 'more left' orientation.⁷²

The ELM propagated a strategy of secularization in order to prevent differences based on religious affiliations. The founding principle of the party centred on the unity of Muslims and Christians which 'was what made Eritrea a nation.'⁷³ Woldeab Woldemariam, who strongly influenced the emergence of a secular Eritrean nationalist feeling through radio broadcasts from Cairo, joined the movement in 1960/61 after being approached by Eritrean students in Cairo. He summarized the main objectives of the party as follows: 'The Liberation of Eritrea, the establishment of an Independent and Democratic State of Eritrea and the Unity of the Eritrean people and integrity of territory, resolutely opposing factionalism, regionalism and organizations based on religious or tribal lines.'⁷⁴

The ELM planned to achieve independence through a revolutionary *coup d'état*. This distinguished it from the second movement emerging shortly after the ELM, the *Eritrean Liberation Front* (ELF), and seemed to make co-existence of the two possible; yet, the ELM's support base became decisively weakened by competition between the two. The pressure of this competition together with the decisive weakening of the party inside Eritrea after it was uncovered and many of its leaders arrested by Ethiopian security forces in 1962 prompted the decision of the ELM to turn to direct military action in September 1964.⁷⁵ After officially refusing to join forces with the ELF, a small guerrilla troop of 30 to 50 people was sent into Eritrea by the ELM but was quickly

⁷² RDC, Bio/265/06167.

⁷³ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 100.

⁷⁴ RDC, ETH/HIS/148/01, 'The truth about Eritrea', Lecture delivered by Mr. Woldeab Woldemariam, Head of the Eritrean Liberation Movement's Delegation Abroad, Khartoum, 20.01.1965.

⁷⁵ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 151.

stopped by ELF forces. This defeat signalled the official demise of the ELM. Despite its short-lived existence, Iyob asserts that it left behind a legacy that was an essential component in the later development of Eritrean national consciousness since its ideal of a 'secular Pan-Eritrean nationalism' had a decisive impact on the generation of Eritreans that would later 'construct the basis for modern Eritrean nationalism.'⁷⁶ In fact, since it had the characteristics of a grassroots movement, it has to be considered proof of the will to live together of the Christian and the Muslim communities and the possible foundation for a syncretistic nationalism to develop.

The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)

After prominent exiled Eritrean nationalists had experienced the futility of raising the case of Eritrea before the UN, the idea of an organization that would launch an armed struggle was developed. In 1960 the ELF was formed in Cairo by Muslim veterans of the pro-independence movement including Idris Mohamed Adem, Idris Osman Galadewos and Taha Mohamed Nur, largely spurred on by the support and encouragement of Eritrean students and workers in Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The founders were exclusively Muslim, and the founding document stated that the movement was formed 'in the name of Allah and in the name of the Eritrean people'.⁷⁷ With the leadership based in Cairo, the armed struggle inside Eritrea was launched with the help of Muhammad Sheikh Dawd in the Western lowlands and the initially rather small *Eritrean Liberation Army* (ELA) was led by Hamid Idris Awate. As both Iyob and Connell noted, the ELF had, at that point, not developed a long-term strategy since it expected the armed uprising would provoke a UN intervention.⁷⁸ While there was no reaction from the international community the ELF

⁷⁶ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 103/104.

⁷⁷ As quoted in Awet T. Weldemichael, thesis, p. 154.

⁷⁸ See Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 57 and Dan Connell (1993), p. 76.

was able to increase its support within the population, attracting large numbers of ELM supporters that had grown increasingly discontent with what was perceived as inaction by the ELM. Many simply supported an armed struggle; yet they did not really know the difference between the ELM and the ELF.⁷⁹ After the demise of the ELM, the ELF took on the role of the prime opposition movement.

While the movement grew in numbers, its organization remained ill-defined. Idris Mohamed Adem, Idris Osman Galadewos and Osman Saleh Sabbe (the latter joined in late 1961 and was crucial in soliciting support from Arab countries), formed the self-appointed Supreme Council (ELF-SC). To coordinate this outside leadership with the field, a Revolutionary Command (ELF-RC) was set up in Kassala. Due to the growing influx of fighters coming from various different, regional, religious and educational backgrounds, the ELF divided the field into four zones following its 1965 congress. This directly reintroduced earlier divisions since fighters ‘were required to join the zone that represented their ethnicity and place of origin.’⁸⁰ As Haile Woldensae, later founding member of the EPLF, notes, this division was ‘an excuse to create power bases’ for Idris Osman Galadewos and Osman Saleh Sabbe who were fighting over influence in the movement.⁸¹ In 1966, a fifth division was established on the plateau for the Christian fighters, largely as a result of the ongoing Ethiopian suppressions that forced the ELF leadership to accommodate Christians and urban political activists. In fact, the links sought by the ELF to the student movement in Asmara after the 1965 demonstration and the forming of cells supporting the ELF in Eritrean secondary schools and at the university of Addis Ababa, resulted in a large number of Christian

⁷⁹ Interview with Mohammed Ibrahim Bahdurai, How veterans told the story of the First 10 Years of ELA, available at: <http://www.nharnet.com/Editorials/TodayinEriHistory/TodayInHistory.htm>, (last accessed 23.05.2006), GS Private Archives

⁸⁰ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 153.

⁸¹ A conversation with Haile “Drue” Wold’ensae, March 13, 2000, in: Dan Connell, *Conversations with Eritrean Political Prisoners*, (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005), p. 30.

students joining the Front.⁸²

The division into zones based on ethnic and religious loyalties ‘in effect established a system of allied warlords, each autonomous, who lived off the people in their area by collecting taxes, levying fines and looting livestock and property.’⁸³ In addition, personal rivalry amongst the leaders of the divisions also prevented collaboration between the zones. This led to the emergence of a reform movement, known as *Eslah*, after the disastrous Ethiopian offensive in 1967, led ‘by younger, more politically sophisticated fighters and civilians from both Muslim and Christian communities.’⁸⁴ Many of them were former members of the student movement, including Issayas Afewerki and Haile Woldensae, who were appalled by the situation they found in the field when joining the Front.⁸⁵ A meeting of political commissioners from three zones resulted in the creation of a United Front that became known as the *Tripartite Unity* (TU). A letter of the progressives to the ELF-SC and the ELF-RC presented their demands for reform which not only included the abolition of the zonal structure, the unity of the fighters and a leadership based in the field, but also more democracy and equality, and clearly defined principles.⁸⁶ Even though some of the demands were met by the leadership in the resolutions passed in the Adobha conference of August 1969, they were quickly supplanted and internal dissent was harshly suppressed. Some of the reformist fighters were arrested, 500 were forced to give up their arms and expelled to Sudan, and others were killed in their units.⁸⁷ This resulted in the emergence of several break-away groups. Osman Saleh Sabbe, who had put his support behind the TU in order to assert his own leadership, moved to Jordan with some

⁸² On the links with the student movement see Wolde-Yesus Ammar, ‘The role of Asmara students’, pp. 72-74.

⁸³ Dan Connell (1993), p. 77.

⁸⁴ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 159.

⁸⁵ A conversation with Haile “Drue” Wold’ensae, p. 28.

⁸⁶ The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, 68016, The Jack Kramer Papers, Letter to the Supreme Council and the Revolutionary Command, *Eritrean Liberation Front, by the progressive forces*.

⁸⁷ Interview with Yemane Dawit, conducted by Kathrin Eikenberg, EPLF-Field, Solomuna Camp, 04.04.1983, GS Private Archives.

of his followers and established the *ELF-General Secretariat* (ELF-GS).

The ELF itself became increasingly influenced by the *Labour Party* that emerged during the reform movement. Young recruits ‘imported’ Marxist and Maoist ideas from China, Cuba and some Arab states and a leftist philosophy started developing in the mid-1970s.⁸⁸ The *First National Congress*, held in 1971, implemented some important reforms and Kibreab asserts that ‘the ELF was evolving as a broad church/mosque where all Eritreans who unquestioningly accepted its leadership and program could be part of it regardless of one’s identity.’⁸⁹ In fact, all the Christian and Muslim ELF fighters interviewed noted the freedom of expression within the ELF throughout the 1970s. However, the fact that the ELF upheld the principle that ‘there can be no more than one struggle, one organization, one organization and one leadership in our country’⁹⁰ made reconciliation with the break-away groups impossible. It became embroiled in two civil wars with the EPLF that emerged out of the break-away groups, and was expelled to Sudan in 1982.

The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF)

The EPLF developed out of the *Eslah* movement as the merger of three of the breakaway groups from the ELF. However, its creation was only officially announced during a conference under the leadership of Issayas Afewerki in January 1977.

In addition to the ELF-GC, the breakaway groups that formed out of the ELF were the *People’s Liberation Forces* (PLF, also known as Sduha Eyla) under the leadership of Romedan Mohamed Nur, the *Selfi Natsnet/Ala* group (also referred to as PLFII) under Issayas Afewerki, and the *Eritrean Liberation Forces* (also known as Obel group) around Adem Saleh. While all the breakaway groups that emerged in 1970/71 were convinced that change within the ELF was impossible, they were of different

⁸⁸ Interview with Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013.

⁸⁹ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 195.

⁹⁰ As quoted in Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 173.

ethnic compositions and their reasons for leaving differed to a certain degree. During a meeting in Beirut in early 1972, the PLF and *Selfi Natsnet* agreed to establish a united front, yet the actual merger took place in 1973 amidst the civil war with the ELF. The Obel group joined the new coalition, named *Eritrean People's Liberation Forces*, after it was attacked by the ELF and was 'pushed by the fighters to merge.'⁹¹

The first known pamphlet generally ascribed to the EPLF (though issued by the Selfi Natsnet) dates from 1971, *Nehna Elaman* (Our Struggle and its Goals), and its content is in many points similar to the principles and goals outlined in the letter that had been sent to the ELF-SC and the ELF-RC by the progressives. It emphasized that religious division should not be considered the major difference in Eritrean society but rather a major issue that had been used by foreign oppressors to exploit the Eritrean people through a policy of 'divide and rule'. Yet, all differences would not matter as 'through ages of a common colonial experience, the Eritrean people already related history, economy, political development, languages, culture and traditions have been so interfused [*sic*], interred and intertwined that today they stand on the same foundation.'⁹² According to the pamphlet, the mistake made by the ELF was that it lacked a clear political obstacle and used Islam as a supporting ground. This obscured the national struggle from the beginning since the national resistance of the 1950-61 'was devoid of religious antagonisms; it was a common struggle of Moslems and Christian highlanders and lowlanders. This experience unified the people and raised the level of their political awareness.'⁹³ The only difference within the Eritrean population that had to be overcome according to the movement was the difference of class, everything else was actually part of the Eritrean 'make-up', hence of the national identity of the country. Accordingly, the revolution had to follow two stages: liberation

⁹¹ Interview with Yemane Dawit.

⁹² *Our Struggle and its Goals*, p. 8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

from imperialist domination, and specifically from Ethiopian colonization, followed by liberation from any form of oppression through fighting the existing class system with the aim of forming the basis of a socialist society. It was stressed that the Eritrean revolution was not a socialist one, but a nationalist and democratic one intended to form the basis for a future socialist revolution.⁹⁴

In January 1977, the first organizational congress of the EPLF was held in the liberated areas. A number of resolutions were passed, including a Draft National Democratic Programme, a Draft Constitution, an elected Central Committee, and Insignia and Flag of the Organization. The name of the organization was also officially confirmed as the *Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. On a political level the most important point was the confirmation of the necessity of national unity in order to be successful in the struggle for independence. Great emphasis was put on political work done abroad and on raising the political consciousness and knowledge of the masses of combatants. The programme of the second EPLF congress in 1987 basically reaffirmed that adopted at the first congress but did make a few terminological changes in order to make it more acceptable to possible supporters from the international community. After independence it was found that a clandestine Marxist party, the *Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party*, had existed inside the EPLF, largely shaping the visions, programme and direction of the Front. It had emerged out of the same context as the *Labour Party* that dominated the ELF following the Adobha conference, yet never really functioned as a distinct political force and its leaders were more or less identical with those of the EPLF.⁹⁵

The EPLF took over the role of the sole front in the field after it had expelled the ELF to Sudan. The experience of civil war together with an internal crisis in 1973

⁹⁴ Eritrei per la Liberazione in Europa – Sez. Italia, Eritrea: *Alcuni Documento delle Forze Popolari di Liberazione Eritrea (E.P.L.F.)*, 1972, p. 17.

⁹⁵ For details see: Dan Connell (2005), Appendix 1, pp. 139-164.

convinced the leadership of the EPLF ‘of the need for brutal discipline.’⁹⁶ This resulted in the EPLF adopting a rigid authoritarian structure and ethos that would endure beyond the struggle into independent Eritrea.

LEBANON

Political tradition and parties in Lebanon

Unlike in Eritrea, political consciousness and organization developed early during the mandate period and was able to mature with few restrictions. Of course, this has to be ascribed to the difference between the mandate and the colonial regime. While France certainly attired to exert as much control over the territory as possible, its official mandate was to prepare the country for independence and, consequently, the country was given a constitution in 1926 and a Chamber of Deputies and Senate were set up ‘to represent sects and regions.’⁹⁷ In fact, the Lebanese electoral system was designed in a way that rather worked against political parties and saw most of the seats in the Lebanese Parliament taken by *Zu’ama* - patrons or prominent personalities recognized by their clients/community to speak for them and who passed this status on to their descendants.⁹⁸ The role of the *Zu’ama* and clientalism, how it developed from pre-mandate times and persisted throughout independent Lebanon has been widely studied.⁹⁹ While traditional forms of clientalism in Lebanon had been largely based on kinship and fealty, the enactment of the *Règlement* added sectarian allegiances as a mode of social organisation and enshrined it in the political system. New generations of politicians emerging from the late 19th century and during the mandate adapted to this form of political organization and, consequently, their legitimacy was largely based on

⁹⁶ Richard Reid (2011), p. 197.

⁹⁷ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 90.

⁹⁸ See Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 79ff.

⁹⁹ See e.g. Hottinger, Arnold, ‘Zu’ama in historical perspective’, in Binder, Leonard (Ed.), *Politics in Lebanon*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), pp. 85-105, A. Nizar Hamzeh, ‘Clientalism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends’, in: *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37/3 (July 2001), pp. 167 – 178.

sectarian allegiances. Furthermore, as the new elite became established, ‘some aspects of hereditary rule were maintained [...] within the framework of modern political institutions and under new labels.’¹⁰⁰ Modernization also resulted in a new form of political clientalism, labelled *party-directed clientalism* by Hamzeh.¹⁰¹ However, the role of political parties has to be seen as subordinate to most clan and sectarian organizations which largely fulfilled the role of recruiting political leaders. Hence, political parties in Lebanon often remained either tied to a traditional notable or confessionally-based. This was further facilitated by the fact that different nationalist aspirations were linked to religious affiliation. Ideology played a rather insignificant role with the notable exception of multi-communal, secular parties.

The years 1935 to 1937 saw the increasing ‘activity of political parties and paramilitary organizations of a novel type.’¹⁰² Inspired by forms of political organization in Germany and Italy at the time, these parties were based on protest against the existing government and older generations and, therefore, incorporated ‘the young and vigorous as distinct from the ‘old gang’ of local politicians.’¹⁰³ New also were the adoption of concrete programmes and the rather widespread organization of the new parties. Nonetheless, they remained based predominantly on sectarian affiliations; non-confessional parties were rare, the main exceptions being the *Syrian Social Nationalist Party*, the *Communist Party* (*Ḥizb al-Sha’b al-Lubnāni*) and the *Republican Party for Independence* (*Ḥizb al-Istiqlāl al-Jumhūrī*).

While non-sectarian political parties were the rare exception, religious organizations deserve a special mention as laymen often not only represented a cultural establishment but a political one as well, and representatives of the religious communities played a decisive role as political actors. This became quite obvious in the

¹⁰⁰ Farid El Khazen (2000), p. 51.

¹⁰¹ A. Nizar Hamzeh, ‘Clientalism, Lebanon’, p. 173.

¹⁰² Stephen H. Longrigg (1958), p. 225.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

run up to the civil war in 1975. The most significant amongst these religious groups were the *Maronite League*, the *Permanent Committee of General Superiors of Lebanese Religious Orders* (four Maronite and four Greek Catholic superiors), the *Supreme Islamic Shi'ites Council* (as of 1969), and the *Muslim Benevolent Society* (Maqāṣid), which was established by the Sunni Muslim community in the late 19th century. While the Christian and Sunni organizations and societies had been active for a long time, the Shi'a community only really started to organize itself during the 1960s.

In general, political parties in Lebanon could be categorized as follows: non pan-Arab transnational parties, Arab nationalist transnational parties, religious and ethnic organizations and exclusively Lebanese parties. The Lebanese parties, in turn, could be divided into Muslim-Druze or Christian majorities.¹⁰⁴ These classifications reveal that the huge variety of parties taking part in Lebanese politics closely mirrored the religious fragmentation of the country rather than representing political ideologies. In fact, this was true for most social organisations; for instance, there was both a Christian and a Muslim Boy Scout group. Political parties in Lebanon could also be classified according to the time of their emergence, with those formed during the mandate period belonging to the 'first generation', a 'second generation' after independence, and a 'third generation' during the civil war (1975-1990).¹⁰⁵

In the following, some of the early political parties in Lebanon, representing the different existing strands, will be examined.

Les Phalanges Libanaises/Lebanese Kata'ib Party

The *Phalanges Libanaises*, originally an offshoot of the *Party of Lebanese Unity*, represented purely Lebanese and mainly Maronite interests. Inspired in its style by para-

¹⁰⁴ Michael W. Suleiman, *Political Parties in Lebanon: The Challenge of a Fragmented Political Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. xxi.

¹⁰⁵ Farid El-Khazen, "Political Parties in Postwar Lebanon: Parties in Search of Partisans", *The Middle East Journal* 57/4 (2003), p. 605.

military and fascist movements, the *Munazzamat al-Kata'ib al-Lubnānīya* (the Lebanese Phalange Organization) was founded on 21 November 1936 and started as 'a school of integrated citizenship and unlimited nationalism'.¹⁰⁶ While it initially professed to be non-political, it soon evolved into a considerable force in the social and political arena. Pierre Gemayel, who founded the organization together with others such as Charles Helou and George Naccache, was elected Chief Superior of the *Phalange* in April 1937. Worried by its increasing membership (22,000 by 1939)¹⁰⁷, the French authorities dissolved the organization a number of times, and it was only after its engagement in the struggle for independence that the *Phalange* was recognized as a legal organization in December 1943. After having focused largely on social issues in the first decade of its existence, the party decided to enter the political arena and presented its own candidates for the first time in the 1947 elections.¹⁰⁸ In May 1952 the organization began to operate as 'a real political party' under the name of *Phalanges Libanaises (al-Kata'ib al-Lubnānīya)*,¹⁰⁹ and after the events of 1958 it became an influential participant in the Lebanese political system.

The organization did not have a strong ideological basis in the beginning but was engaged in fighting any non-Lebanese or trans-Lebanese nationalism. Despite officially denouncing sectarian action and propounding a brand of Lebanese nationalism including all inhabitants of the country within the 1920 boundaries, the *Phalange* often served as a spokesperson for the Maronite community. With regard to the Arab world, certain common aims and sentiments were admitted, but Lebanon's 'unique cultural mission' and its difference in 'thought, civilization, and race [...] from any other

¹⁰⁶ Archives diplomatique, Serie Afrique-Levant, Liban, file 949, LA-5-6, letter by the French ambassador in Lebanon to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 20.12.1961, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Michael W. Suleiman (1967), p. 234.

¹⁰⁸ Government Apprehensive Role of Phalange in Elections. Airgram from American Legation, May 13, 1947, published in: Walter L. Browne (1977), Vol. 4, p. 201.

¹⁰⁹ Michael W. Suleiman (1967), p. 235.

country or people, including the Arabs' were continuously emphasized.¹¹⁰ The French General Paul Beynet described the *Phalange* in 1944 as 'the most important political group of the Lebanon', and its leader, Pierre Gemayel, as a pious Christian who was disturbed by the political views of the Muslim elements in the country.¹¹¹ In fact, Richani asserts that the *Phalange* initially very much played the role of 'the defender of the political system and protector of the prevailing power structure.'¹¹² Following the 1958 crisis, the *Phalange* developed their militia, extant since the 1940s, into one of the biggest and most active in the country as it was convinced that the Lebanese army was not able to defend the Government and, most importantly, the Maronite elite.¹¹³ While the protection of the status of the Maronite community was indeed an important goal, the party was not satisfied with the system of clientalism prevailing in the Lebanese political system and protested it together with the *an-Najjada* in a memorandum in 1946,¹¹⁴ and by briefly joining the *Patriotic Socialist Front* (PSF) which was largely dominated by secular leftist parties in early 1950.¹¹⁵ Gemayel himself did not belong to the Lebanese traditional elite but to the generation of young politicians that entered the political scene during the mandate. This was reflected in the modern and bureaucratic structure of the *Phalange*. Yet, the party organized itself by adapting to the Lebanese system and, as Khalaf noted, 'by supplanting the local notables, kept on fulfilling his traditional functions, but at a much higher level of efficiency and organization.'¹¹⁶

From the late 1960s on, the party moved away from its nationalist ideology of 'Lebanonism' towards a new, quite secular ideology and 'overtly accepted

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 247.

¹¹¹ Archives diplomatique, serie afrique-levant, Liban 1953-1959, file 296, carton 7, dossier 9, letter from General Beynet to Foreign Minister Bidault, Beirut, 24.11.1944.

¹¹² Nazih Richani (1998), p. 124.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See Youth Organizations attack Lebanese Government. Airgram from American Legation, March 21, 1946, published in: Walter L. Browne (1977), Vol. 4, p. 59.

¹¹⁵ See Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 124/125.

¹¹⁶ Tewfik Khalaf, 'The Phalange and the Maronite Community: From Lebanonism to Maronitism', in: Owen, Roger (ed.), *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 45.

interconfessionalism as an integral part of the Lebanese nationalist concept.¹¹⁷ In a memorandum to the President of the Republic and the Patriarch of the Maronites on the eve of the civil war in 1975, the party reaffirmed its belief in dialogue between all groups and parties and the necessity of consensus among the Lebanese:

The characteristic of Lebanon is that the multiplicity and variety of its confessional communities do not diminish its capacity to gather them together in a nation. If some of us are Muslims, some Christians, other Jews, others atheists, this does not prevent us all from being Lebanese. Accordingly, a distinction must be made between confessional affiliation and national representation.¹¹⁸

In the same statement the temporary character of the power-sharing formula in the constitution and the guarantee of religious freedom in the country were emphasized.

an-Najjada Party

Like the *Phalange*, *an-Najjada* started out as a para-military youth movement but was far less efficient than the *Phalange*, and the fact that it represented purely Arab nationalism led to frequent clashes with the former. Founded in 1936, the movement was reorganized with a party-like structure on 10 November 1937 by Adnan al-Hakim. The two movements did, in fact, mirror very clearly the classification of Lebanese political parties into those with a Muslim majority versus those with a Christian preponderance. Yet, they cooperated in the struggle for the abolishment of the French mandate, and after independence in criticizing the government for nepotism and clientalism in a common manifesto and both joined the PSF.

As a party, *an-Najjada* claimed to be non-sectarian and did, in fact have a number of Greek Orthodox members running for the party in elections. However, its programme was tailored to attract mainly Sunni Muslims, and its understanding of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum of the Kata'ib Party to the President of the Republic and the Patriarch of the Maronites, published in *an-Nahar* newspaper on 24.08.1975, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University, *Religion, State & Ideology, CEMAM Reports, Vol. 3*, (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1975), p. 53.

Arabism was 'closely linked with Islam'.¹¹⁹ The pro-Arab identification of the movement specifically appealed to lower Sunni classes who blamed their low social and economic status on the Western-backed Maronite Christian groups.¹²⁰ While its first years were marked by periods of dissolution and internal disagreements it was decisively revived through the struggle for independence. However, the dissolution of all paramilitary organizations by the Lebanese government in 1949 also included *an-Najjada*. Only its reshaping as a political party allowed the movement to return to the political arena. This happened in 1951, when the movement became *Hizb an-Najjada*, only to be dissolved again during the civil war of 1958. Its contradictory ideology was a matter of contention, especially its consistent call for federation with other Arab countries while at the same time strongly defending Lebanese independence and sovereignty. Since the party drew its support largely from Beirut where al-Hakim was based, El Khazen labelled it a 'provincial party'.¹²¹

The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)

Founded in Beirut in 1949 by Kamal Jumblatt, the leader of one of the main Druze factions, the *Hizb at-Taqaddumi al-Ishtirāki* based its ideology and programme mainly on the ideas of socialism. By the mid-1950s, the party started to adopt a more Arab nationalist view which was clearly revealed during the civil war in 1958 when Jumblatt was one of the fiercest opponents of the Sham'un government. Since 1951, the party has consistently had members in the Lebanese Parliament, claimed to be non-sectarian and to have members from all religions in its leadership. Yet, the party was tailored very much towards Jumblatt and hence a large number of supporters were Druze peasants who supported the party out of loyalty to their leader. In fact, with the appearance of

¹¹⁹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 78.

¹²⁰ See Michael W. Suleiman (1967), p. 204.

¹²¹ Farid El Khazen (2000), p. 54.

‘other socialistic as well as more Arab parties [...], the PSP began to look more and more like a vehicle for Jumblatt’s ambitions and those of office-seekers interested in furthering their personal interests.’¹²²

The ideology of the party was also based on Jumblatt’s personal and very philosophical interpretation of socialism. One of his main concerns was the elimination of all sorts of divisive elements in society, including the confessional system in Lebanon.¹²³ In terms of practical politics, Jumblatt was known to swiftly change his alliances according to what served him best. His assassination in March 1977 was a turning point; as the party was strongly shaped by his personality, it never recovered from his death. His son, Walid Jumblatt, was elected his successor, mainly to satisfy the traditional Druze support base of the party.¹²⁴ This election seemed to contradict the leftist, secular ideology and programme of the party and revealed how deeply entrenched traditional elite politics had become in Lebanese society. Richani asserted that ‘Kamal Jumblatt’s original intention behind the establishment of the PSP [... was] to transcend the same power base that acted as a constraining social force even after his death.’¹²⁵ In fact, to preserve the interests of the Druze community in the Lebanese political arena, it had to compete by the rules of sectarian representation. As the Druze community lacked a church or mosque hierarchy from which the traditional elite could emerge, therefore, the party could possibly serve as a substitute. The fact that the party was not exclusively Druze and actually promoted an anti-sectarian policy might make Jumblatt’s supposed intention look peculiar, yet it was the only way within the Lebanese political system to extend the power-base of his family beyond the Druze community.

¹²² Michael W. Suleiman (1967), p. 218.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 226/227.

¹²⁴ Nazih Richani (1998), p. 62.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Re-organization and formation of new alliances in the wake of the Civil War

A study conducted by Ilyas Harik on voting participation revealed ‘a growing tendency toward sectarian accommodation and moderation of communal attitudes among voters’ by the mid-1970s.¹²⁶ This does, in fact, seem to reflect the move of previously hard-line communal parties such as the *Phalange* towards a more inter-confessional approach as well as the expansions of leftist parties since the late 1960s. Political divisions, such as over reforms of the Lebanese sectarian system, did, indeed, not run along sectarian lines and El Khazen concludes that ‘[p]olitical parties and leaders of all political and ideological persuasions saw in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1976 a possibility for altering the political balance in their favour.’¹²⁷ Yet, it has to be noted that, in general, political parties in Parliament and membership of the electorate in political parties still did not play a significant role in the early 1970s.¹²⁸

When the continued and increasing presence of armed Palestinian fighters on Lebanese territory, and the fact that they were outside the control of the Lebanese state and army, turned into a serious issue of contention, political parties re-aligned along the different approaches on how to deal with it. These, in turn, were strongly linked to differing perceptions of the identity of the country and divided the Lebanese in two opposed camps. Most parties also started developing military wings throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. The SSNP, for instance, had a ‘thoroughly trained and disciplined militia’ at the outbreak of conflict in 1975.¹²⁹ The formation of these militias was justified by the army’s lack of capacity and also as a defence against already existing militias. Since this preoccupation was not only felt by political parties, the country witnessed an increasing amount of not only political militia forces but also of

¹²⁶ Iliya Harik, ‘Voting Participation and Political Integration in Lebanon 1943-1974’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16:1 (January 1989), p. 44.

¹²⁷ Farid El Khazen (2000), p. 239.

¹²⁸ See Naomi Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-76 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 93.

¹²⁹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 187.

religious and private ones which are, however, beyond the scope of this study.¹³⁰

The early phases of the civil war were marked by the main opposing coalitions, the LNM and the PLO on the one hand, and the *Lebanese Front/Lebanese Forces*, on the other. Traboulsi called this '[a] duel [...] between two 'modern' populist forces that sprang from the country's social crisis'.¹³¹ The two coalition forces will be analysed below with a focus on their ideological programme and their concept of Lebanese identity. The rise of the Shi'a community and the development of parties representing it will also be addressed.

The Progressive and Nationalist Forces and Parties

This coalition would become known as the LNM and had started to organise itself around the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt by the end of the 1960s. In addition to Jumblatt's *Progressive Socialist Party* (PSP), the coalition was joined by a number of parties of the Lebanese left as well as secular Arab nationalist parties, most notably the *SSNP*, the *Lebanese Communist Party*, and the *Independent Nasserites – al-Murābitūn*.

The coalition followed a pro-Arab orientation with a special emphasis on the importance of supporting the Palestinian struggle, viewing it as 'an Arab force fighting not only for the liberation of its homeland and in self-defence but also in defence of Lebanon'.¹³² This orientation was reflected in the military wings of a large number of LNM parties which became 'largely integrated into their respective allied Palestinian organization', with the al-Murābitūn and its sponsorship by *Fatah* being the most striking example.¹³³

The movement aspired to create a Lebanon that was to be both progressive,

¹³⁰ For an account of some of the militias in 1975 see: Eric Rouleau, 'Crisis in Lebanon', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 5:1/2 (1975/1976), pp. 233-236.

¹³¹ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 187.

¹³² The Interim Program for Reform of the Political System, proposed by the Progressive and National Forces and Parties, published in an-Nahar newspaper of 18.08.1975, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), Vol. 3, p. 40.

¹³³ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 187/188.

democratic and Arab nationalist. The political system was the main target since it was considered the primary obstacle to the establishment of a democratic system. Consequently, the abolition of political confessionalism was the first and most important point of the reform programme presented in 1975.¹³⁴ Yet, the LNM was an extremely heterogeneous coalition that only came together and gained relevance thanks to Jumblatt who moulded it 'into a politico-military force to be reckoned with.'¹³⁵ Despite having adopted a common reform programme, the movement was quite divided concerning most of the relevant political and ideological issues. El-Khazen described it as lacking a well-defined structure and being a rather 'loose grouping of political allies'.¹³⁶ Some of the coalition parties, such as the Baath parties of Lebanon, did not even follow purely Lebanese agendas since they affiliated themselves with the regimes in Syria and Iraq, and consequently their identities as Lebanese parties were called into question.¹³⁷

In fact, the secular agenda of the majority of the parties in the LNM soon turned into a major problem for the coalition which was trying to operate in Lebanon's extreme sectarianism. Not only were secular parties marginalized, the assassination of the LNM's leader, Kamal Jumblatt, in 1977 combined with the Syrian policy of co-opting the movement strongly restrained its development. The movement had tried to use the military strength gained through its alliance with the PLO to change the balance of power inside the country. Yet it was this alignment with the PLO which resulted in deeper sectarian divisions in Lebanon and cost the LNM much popular support.¹³⁸ After Jumblatt's assassination, the movement lacked a strong leader to hold it together and since differences were too deep to preserve unity, the LNM went into an inactive period.

¹³⁴ The Interim Program for Reform of the Political System, p. 43.

¹³⁵ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 188.

¹³⁶ Farid El-Khazen (2000), p. 312.

¹³⁷ Archives diplomatique, Serie Afrique-Levant, Liban, file 949, LA-5-6, letter by the French ambassador in Lebanon to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 10.10.1963, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 202.

The coalition was finally disbanded by Jumblatt's successor in the PSP, his son Walid Jumblatt, in the first half of the 1980s.

The Lebanese Front/Lebanese Forces (LF)

Created in 1976, the *Lebanese Front* united a number of political, mainly Christian, parties under its umbrella to counter the LNM and as a 'response of the Lebanese people to the Syrian-Palestinian aggression'.¹³⁹ Within this coalition, each party and personality placed great importance on preserving its own political identity. It was headed by the leaders of its two largest member parties, the *Phalange* and the *National Liberal Party (NLP)*, Pierre Gemayel and Camille Sham'un, and described itself as 'a Directory Council for Christian Leaderships'.¹⁴⁰ It coordinated the Christian militias, mainly the *Phalange's* paramilitary wing and the NLP's *Tiger* militia, in order to avoid intra-Christian strife. This became especially necessary following the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 1978, and when clashes between Christian militias became frequent.

The Front formed the *United Leadership of the Lebanese Forces* and Bashir Gemayel was elected president of the Council of Leadership. As Traboulsi noted, a deeper social subtext can be seen when looking at the constituents of the LF since '[t]hey represented the rise of new social forces [...] all opposed in one way or another to the traditional Christian leaders'¹⁴¹; yet they shared the same idea of a Christian Lebanese identity. In 1980, following an attack by Gemayel on the *Tiger* militias, the Council of Leadership underwent a formal restructuring and became the executive organ of the Front, controlling its administration as well as the armed forces. It managed to dominate a large part of the Christian areas of the country and established a form of

¹³⁹ UMAM, Lebanese Forces Command/ Foreign Relations Department, *The Issue of Lebanon: Elements for an analytical approach*, April 1982, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 208/209.

civil administration during the war.¹⁴²

The basis of the political programme of the LF was a strong commitment to the 6000 year old unique history of Lebanon which implied the negation of the 'Arabness' of the country. The unity of the territory within its internationally recognized borders was considered untouchable. The most important principles were independence, sovereignty and freedom.¹⁴³ Relations with any other state were to be based on sovereign equality. Yet the traditional and essential relations with the West, based on adhering to the same values, were underlined and reaffirmed.¹⁴⁴ The modification of the formula of 1943 was considered a necessary step. The Front favoured 'some kind of decentralization, federation, or confederation, within a comprehensive framework of a single unified Lebanon.'¹⁴⁵ Such a system would help in what was considered by the Front as one of the most important issues, the protection of religious minorities and religious freedom, but it was propagated mainly to protect the Christian minority. The Front's stated aim was the coexistence of all minorities on equal terms and the creation of a 'new society' that would be based on a number of general virtues such as truthfulness, freedom, respect, community spirit, rule of law, etc.¹⁴⁶ Hence, what was envisioned was a syncretistic nationalism with an overarching civil national identity. The early 1980s saw the LF establishing its political autonomy from the *Phalange*, turning it into the 'most decisive political force within the Maronite community'.¹⁴⁷

The Shi'a 'awakening': From Ḥarakat al-Mahrumīn to Hizb'allah

Even though the Shi'a were recognized as the third largest confessional group in the census of 1932, its community remained surprisingly inactive and hence more or less

¹⁴² Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 334.

¹⁴³ See UMAM, al-Ġabha al-Lubnāniya (The Lebanese Front), *Lubnān allaṭī nurīd an nabbnī* (*The Lebanon we want to build*), p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 12. Despite this the Front later also put the responsibility for events in Lebanon upon the Western countries since they were 'spectators and unconcerned'. (See p. 14ff.)

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 5 & p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ See al-Ġabha al-Lubnāniya, *Lubnān allaṭī nurīd an nabbnī*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Nazih Richani (1998), p. 122.

irrelevant on the Lebanese political scene up until the late 1960s.

However, as the community with the highest birth rate in Lebanon and also suffering the most from social deprivation, the Shi'a started developing a collective sense of being 'the deprived of the country'. This strongly related to the sectarian system since, over the years, it had kept the Shi'a numerically underrepresented, especially in comparison to the traditional Maronite and Sunni elites of the country. Yet, the main reason for what looked like a 'sudden' appearance of the Shi'a on the political scene was the process of modernization and profound change that was affecting all of Lebanon during the 1960s.¹⁴⁸ In addition to the increasing infrastructure and mobility of the Shi'a population, the modernization of the political leadership has to be seen as the most crucial development. The growing dislocation of a large number of Shi'a due to the overall economic developments of the country led to the loosening of ties to the traditional *Zu'ama*. In looking for re-orientation, many Shi'a initially turned towards the *Communist Party* since it was non-sectarian, or towards the Palestinian fighters as the Shi'a community identified with their plight. Turning towards these groups was largely caused by the fact that no other movement or organization existed that could appeal to the Shi'a as a community. That, however, changed with the appearance of Imam Musa Sadr.¹⁴⁹ He was not only able to attract a large number of supporters and profit from the growing political consciousness of the community, he viewed the community as a whole and 'succeeded in giving many Shi'is an inclusive communal identity.'¹⁵⁰

In 1967, the first independent, representative body for the Shi'a, the *Supreme Shi'a Council*, was established, and on 18 May 1969 Sadr was elected its first chairman. In March of 1974, he launched his popular movement *Harakat al-Mahrumin*

¹⁴⁸ See e.g. August R. Norton (1987), pp. 13-36; Michael Hudson (1968), p. 31 ff.

¹⁴⁹ Born in Qum, Iran, in 1928, he first came to Lebanon in 1957. In 1958 he replaced the deceased Mufti of the town of Tyre before he was granted Lebanese citizenship by President Shihab in 1963.

¹⁵⁰ August R. Norton (1987), p. 40.

(Movement of the Deprived) during a rally addressing the social grievances of the Shi'a community in Lebanon. As Kippenberg notes, Sadr has to be credited with changing 'the ideal of passive endurance of injustice' to a rather activist view.¹⁵¹ He blamed the establishment running the country for their grievances and demanded equal rights for all citizens. He further blamed the state for not being able to protect the south from Israeli attacks and vowed to start arming and training his own Shi'a militia.¹⁵² However, Norton asserts that the majority of the Shi'a still remained with the multi-confessional parties they had joined before the emergence of Imam Musa's movement.¹⁵³ The *Ḥarakat* was initially a member of the LNM, but left the coalition after the start of the civil war in 1975 because it wanted to remain neutral.¹⁵⁴ However, the movement would soon become embroiled in the ongoing war as well.

The political influence of the Shi'a was decisively consolidated in a revitalized form by the beginning of 1979. The first major Israeli invasion in Lebanon, the disappearance of Imam Musa during a visit to Libya, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran all contributed to internal consolidation of the Shi'a. The disappearance of the Imam boosted his importance since it seemed to mirror the Shi'a dogma of the hidden Imam (*al-Imam al-Gha'ib*). In its 1974 Charter the movement stated that '[p]olitical sectarianism in the Lebanese system prevents political development, divides citizens, and upsets national unity. For that reason, our movement rejects it and considers it a manifestation of political backwardness in our country.'¹⁵⁵ Consequently, the movement did not consider itself sectarian but rather representing all deprived people while

¹⁵¹ Hans G. Kippenberg, *Violence as Worship: Religious Wars in the Age of Globalization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 79.

¹⁵² Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 78.

¹⁵³ August R. Norton (1987), p. 48/49.

¹⁵⁴ See Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 189.

¹⁵⁵ UMAM, *Mīṭāq Ḥarakat 'Amal* (Charter of the Amal Movement), p. 5.

promoting ‘true religious spirit’.¹⁵⁶ This attempt to brand itself a political reform movement rather than a religious movement was also reflected in the new leaders emerging towards the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s who were members of the middle class and not clerics. They traced the roots of the sectarian system back to the mandate period when the French enshrined privileges for the Maronites of the country and claimed that as a result of the continuation of the system, the building of a ‘unified and cohesive society’ was prevented, and the state remained highly vulnerable.¹⁵⁷ The Shi‘a community had been an integral part of the country since the establishment of Greater Lebanon and fulfilled all its ‘national duties’; yet it was deprived of adequate participation and representation.¹⁵⁸ The origins of the movement were further explained by increasing Arab pressure towards the end of the 1960s/early 1970s. The problem was not only with a possible lack of Arab identity amongst the Shi‘a (because they considered their roots to be in Iran) but mainly with the perception amongst the Sunni Muslims that the Shi‘a community was not committed to a ‘real’ Islam.¹⁵⁹

The movement was not only devoted to Lebanese national sovereignty, but also to the indivisibility and integrity of the motherland, and the defence of the South was considered of utmost importance since it formed an integral part of the country. The acceptance of the special character of the country was considered essential for the national integrity as emphasized in the Charter:

National sovereignty is influenced directly or indirectly by the mutual attraction between the various civilizations that are founded on the cultural components of the divine messages. This reinforces Lebanon’s status as a cultural window at which the West, with its practical experiences, meets the East, with its faith and spiritualism. National sovereignty is therefore an essential requirement in preserving the motherland’s special cultural role.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.68; and UMAM, *Ḥaraka ‘Amal (Amal Movement), Ḥaraka al-Maḥrūmīn: al-wilāda, Ḥaraka al-niṣ‘ahu* (Movement of the Deprived: the Birth and Circumstances of its Creation), Maktab al-‘aḳīda wa al-ṭaḳāfa, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ UMAM, *Ḥaraka ‘Amal, Ḥaraka al-Maḥrūmīn*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 44-46.

¹⁶⁰ As quoted in: August R. Norton (1987), p. 54.

Despite its increasing influence, *Harakat*'s militia '*Amal*' never developed a firm hierarchy; and despite the existing programme, it embraced a variety of ideological lines.¹⁶¹ Yet, the Shi'a movement developed 'the social institutions that [they] would actually have expected the state to provide' and when Israel first invaded in 1978, it was the '*Amal*' that 'took on the task of protecting the villages.'¹⁶²

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 had a crucial impact on the further development of the Shi'a community. With its youth eager to follow the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Israeli invasion and the occupation 'pushed the Shi'a further in this direction' and facilitated the emergence and flourishing of a second party, *Hizb'allah*.¹⁶³ Usually the year of the invasion, 1982, is referred to as its founding year; yet, it was only in the mid-1980s that *Hizb'allah* achieved a structured and organized form. Both its attitude towards an Islamic state and Israel were important factors in making this new movement popular among the Shi'a. It was fashioned mainly after the Iranian model and inspiration from Iran was clearly stated in the 1985 'Open letter addressed by *Hizb'allah* to the downtrodden in Lebanon and the world', the document that officially presented the ideology of the movement for the first time.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, while claiming that the new movement would not exclude anybody, it described its identity as belonging to the Islamic '*umma*' in the world.¹⁶⁵ Islam was considered a worldwide political bond and the new movement could hardly be described as non-sectarian. While cooperation with groups whose ideas did not stem from Islam was considered acceptable, the document included an invitation to the Christians of Lebanon

¹⁶¹ See August R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A short history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 29.

¹⁶² Hans G. Kippenberg (2011), p. 81.

¹⁶³ August R. Norton (2007), p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ UMAM, *Naş al-risāla al-maftūḥa allatī wağāhahā Hizb 'allah 'ilā al-mustaḍāfīn fī lubnān wa al-ālam* (Text of the open letter addressed by Hizb'allah to the downtrodden in Lebanon and the world), p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

to free themselves from sectarianism and join Islam.¹⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, Israel and Zionism were considered the main enemies, and the US was described as the ‘mother of evil’.¹⁶⁷ Consequently it was the elimination of these forces from Lebanese territory and the end of foreign influences and domination that formed the party’s first objectives. Furthermore, *Hizb’allah* asked for more than just political reforms; it sought a change to the entire Lebanese political system, from its very roots, and the adoption of a new system, one that ‘the people establish, of their own free choice and freedom’.¹⁶⁸

Hizb’allah evolved into a serious rival to *’Amal*, establishing itself in both the South and the suburbs of Beirut. It also started a ‘social offensive’, providing social, medical and educational services to the population, thus winning over large numbers of the Shi’a community. It was the competition with this new and more militant movement that saw *’Amal* ‘driven into a corner’ throughout the 1980s.¹⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of European administration, political parties had emerged in Eritrea and Lebanon and, as common in segmented colonial/mandate societies, they largely formed along existing cleavages. In both cases, these were predominantly based on religious affiliation which correlated with different nationalist aspirations linked to the region. While pro-unionist aspirations in both countries included the incorporation of the colonial/mandate territory into a larger neighbouring entity, partition essentially was not an option for either side. Political party formation took place around members of the new and old elites whose primary interest was not the bridging of cleavages but the enforcement of the nationalist aspiration that would further their own interests. In mandate Lebanon a sectarian system was in place that based access to office on

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 16/17 and p. 25

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 282.

religious affiliation and enforced the formation of parties according to these affiliations but kept them subordinate to clan and sectarian organisations. In Eritrea, the parties initially only had the function to present nationalist aspirations to the international committees of investigation. It has to be acknowledged that support of opposing nationalist aspirations was not completely clear-cut along sectarian lines and, therefore, multi-communal and secular parties also emerged in both countries; yet, the strong correlation of religious affiliation and opposed interpretations of the identity of the country made it almost impossible for them to sustain themselves.

Despite this rather fragmented political system, communal attitudes became more conciliatory in both countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In Eritrea, the previously opposed political parties, accommodated with the compromise solution of federation, were set to compete over power in the autonomous institutions established by the UN. As in the case of Lebanon, these institutions were based on a political system of sectarian representation and, consequently, religious communities would have remained the primary intermediaries. However, ruthless suppression and the process of dismantling the federation by Ethiopia resulted in political parties being banned as well as civil society organizations. Therefore, from the mid-1950s onwards political mobilization took place clandestinely on a grassroots level and largely contributed to the emergence of new, multi-communal movements dedicated to the common struggle for self-determination. The first official movement, the ELM reflected this approach of accommodation and moderation of communal attitudes. In Lebanon, a more accommodating attitude developed starting from the 1960s and could be seen not only in the increasing support for multi-communal, secular, leftist parties but also in the movement of sectarian parties such as the *Phalange* towards a more civic and secular understanding of Lebanese national identity that would allow the bridging of communal cleavages and for a syncretistic nationalism to evolve.

This momentum seemed lost when political parties and movements formally reorganized in the face of armed conflict: In Eritrea, the ELF took over the role of prime liberation movement and introduced a zonal division based on old regional, religious and sectarian divisions. This soon caused a rift within the movement and the breakaway groups and the emerging EPLF became embroiled in civil war with the ELF. In Lebanon, conflict over the Palestinian presence led to the outbreak of the first round of civil war and political parties aligned themselves in two opposed camps representing the old Muslim/Christian division. However, for both sides of the divide in both Eritrea and Lebanon, accommodation and co-existence were at the heart of their political programmes, even though this was aspired to be achieved through different means and under different leadership. As such, the reorganization of political parties and movements reflected the struggle over power rather than a relapse into deeply rooted sectarian and ethnic divisions which, nonetheless, had remained an important factor in mobilization.

The following chapter will show that the civil conflict in both countries was not so much over communal differences or different interpretations of the identity of the country but rather over hegemony and control, in Lebanon within the established system and in Eritrea within the system aspired to for the freed and independent country.

Chapter 5 – Civil War and Violence: Whither the nation?

War and violence often play a key role in the process of identity formation as the experience of common suffering can build ‘bonds of solidarity’ and establish ‘group boundaries’.¹ However, while national identity can be strengthened by this experience of solidarity in case of interstate wars; the inter-communal violence of civil wars can have a rather detrimental and divisive effect on national identity.

A large number of explanations for the causes of civil war have been presented by political theorist, anthropologists and economists alike and it has been pointed out that, in general, fragmented or multi-communal societies are more likely to experience civil war in the first place.² Kalyvas cautioned that civil wars are difficult to characterize and, while they are often described as binary conflicts based on the perceived overarching issue dimension or what he calls ‘master cleavage’, they are largely ‘the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives’.³ In fact the causes of civil war have for a long time been explained by the juxtaposed interpretative frames of ‘grievances’ vs. ‘greed’. However, as it is ‘impossible to entangle political, cultural, and economic elements, as each is embedded in the other’, it does indeed appear difficult to classify a civil war into one or the other category.⁴ A convincing concept has been developed by Frances Stewart, namely that of ‘horizontal inequalities’, which postulates that ‘vulnerability arises where there are severe horizontal inequalities, that is inequality in political, economic, and/or social conditions

¹ Yusuf Bangura, *The search for identity: ethnicity, religion and political violence*, (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1994), p. 22.

² See Marta Reynal-Querol, ‘Ethnicity, Political Systems and Civil War’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 26:1 (February 2002), p. 30.

³ Stathis N. Kalyvas, ‘The Ontology of “Political Violence”: Action and Identity in Civil Wars’, *Perspectives on Politics* 1:3 (2003), pp. 475.

⁴ Frances Stewart, ‘Horizontal Inequalities as a Source of Conflict’, in: Hampson, Fen O./ David M. Malone (eds.), *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 106.

among culturally and/or geographically distinct groups.’⁵ This concept seems, indeed, most apt for most cases of domestic conflict in multi-communal states.

This chapter will look at the periods of civil war in Eritrea and Lebanon, analyse the cleavages underlying the conflicts and the impact of civil war on the development and perception of national identity. It will argue that in both cases the ‘master cleavage’ - the differing perceptions of identity and nationalist aspirations largely correlating with religious affiliations – while the underlying motivation for civil conflict, was not the sole cause. Rather this cleavage was linked to and aggravated by economic grievances and power interests and/or hegemonic claims by the elites of certain communities/groups, which took predominance with the protraction of the conflict. Furthermore, the chapter will show that despite the conflict, the sense of collective national identity that had started to develop prior to its outbreak among the population of the territories was not shattered, but rather strengthened by the shared experience of prolonged periods of conflict and violence in both cases.

ERITREA

From reform movement to descent into civil war

Despite the existence of a common enemy that should have facilitated the establishment of a united front, Eritrea twice witnessed civil war during the early stages of the independence struggle. This has often been accredited by scholars to the Muslim/Christian divisions within the former Italian colony that had found expression in the opposed nationalist aspirations in the late 1940s. Pateman traced the division directly back to the Italian colonial period and asserted that the policies during that period ‘led to separate development of Muslims and Christians, leading to divisions

⁵ Ibid.

within the liberation ranks'.⁶ Thus, he considered the internal conflict during the struggle for independence as caused by the deep entrenchment of these divisions. Quehl, on the other hand, argued that the Eritrean independence struggle was not simply the result of a growing independence movement but was rather part of a modernisation process gone wrong, which would also explain the outbreak of civil war. He viewed the emergence of conflict between identities as a natural result of the process of decolonisation, 'whose targeted result is the attainment of national statehood', and explained the accumulation of existing differences and disagreements within and between the various groups in the territory as due to structural changes that had taken place after the departure of the European colonial powers.⁷

In fact, the causes of the civil conflict within the Eritrean liberation movement have to be traced back to the period of ELF hegemony and the occurrence of splits within the movement. While the emergence of the first centralised pan-Eritrean nationalist organization with a secularist orientation, the ELM, was facilitated by the growing inter-communal grassroots movement inside Eritrea, the establishment of the Muslim-dominated ELF quickly resurrected old divisions and disagreements. In a 1983 interview, Woldemariam claimed that the Muslim elites in Egyptian exile actually refused to form a united front with the Christians, and initially even felt inclined towards partition since 'they said the Christians exploited the federation and the Muslims suffered'.⁸ However, while the Muslim veterans who founded the ELF in Cairo were certainly influenced by the wave of pan-Arabism sweeping through the Middle East and northeast Africa by the late 1950s to some extent, and the ELF membership was very much based on the rural communities of the Western lowlands

⁶ Roy Pateman (1998), p. 16.

⁷ Hartmut Quehl, *Kämpferinnen und Kämpfer im eritreischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg 1961 – 1991. Faktoren der Diversität und der Koheränz. Eine historische Untersuchung zur Alltags- und Sozialgeschichte des Krieges, Band I* (Felsberg: Edition Eins, 2005), p. 29.

⁸ RDC, Bio/265/06167, 'Transcripts: WoldeAb and Labor Movement, Interviews, Interview 2 part B.

and profoundly influenced by Islam, religious division was not the prime cause that led to the establishment of the ELF. It was rather dissatisfaction with the ELM's non-military strategy and the irresponsiveness of the UN to Eritrean calls for intervention amidst Ethiopian dismantlement of the federation. While multi-communal efforts by exiled Eritrean elites to gain support from Western countries and the UN continued well into 1963 under the leadership of Ibrahim Sultan and Woldeab Woldemariam in the form of the *Political Committee of the Eritrean People's Legal Representatives Abroad*,⁹ the ELF leadership shifted its search for international support to the Arab states after even the armed uprising failed to gain a UN reaction. Iyob asserted that 'the choice of Arab supporters was more a matter of necessity than a reflection of enduring Arab identity', and that there were not really any other options left.¹⁰ In fact, all efforts with the UN and Western countries were to no avail, and Ethiopia enjoyed wide support from within Africa due to its role as a champion of African unity.

However, as Quehl noted, the inscription of the Eritrean struggle within the pan-Arab framework prevented the development of a single national movement and also resulted in a weakening of the legitimacy of the Front both domestically and externally.¹¹ Due to its strong Muslim membership and its link with pan-Arabism and Arab countries, the ELF became perceived, and depicted, as a foreign-instigated, Arab movement by Ethiopia and international scholars alike. Yet, as the ELF constituted the sole liberation movement after the demise of the ELM, Eritrean Christians who wanted to support the independence struggle continued to join the Front to fight Ethiopian suppression. In an attempt to weaken the growing independence struggle, religious divisions were deliberately targeted by the Ethiopian counter-insurgency strategy, which

⁹ See e.g. FO371/172820, Letter from the British Embassy Cairo to the North and East African Department, Foreign Office, 28.08.1963; FO371/172820, The Political Committee of the Eritrean People's Legal Representatives Abroad to His Excellency the U.N. Secretary General U Thant, New York, Cairo, 22.8.1963.

¹⁰ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 110.

¹¹ Hartmut Quehl (2005), p. 108.

tried to endow the conflict with an ethnic tone and thereby exacerbate religious and ethnic affiliations. Measures taken by the Ethiopian government, such as infiltrating Christian ‘spies’ into the ELF, generated deep mistrust of the highland Christians among the Muslim parts of the population and aggravated cleavages along religious lines.¹² It should be noted though that this mistrust was not based on religious differences, but on the fact that the Christian highlanders had largely supported union with Ethiopia prior to the UN decision on federation, and the sincerity of their changed attitude when joining the Front was questioned.¹³ The mistrust was felt by Christian fighters in the ELF and, as Haile Woldensae recounted in a conversation, ‘any Christian at that time had no guarantee. [...] Even in battles, you prefer to guard yourself mainly from bullets that come through behind, rather than from the front.’¹⁴

While Ethiopian policies contributed to the disunity within the Eritrean liberation movement to a certain extent, it was largely the ELF’s strategic decision to divide the territory into military zones and the general reorganisation of the Front along regional and tribal lines at the ELF congress in Khartoum in 1965 that decisively exacerbated divisions as this worked directly against unifying the struggle and the development of any inclusive national identity that would reflect the diversity of Eritrean society. In addition, the ELF was specifically characterized by the absence of a clear ideological line or programme and its leadership seemed to be more concerned with matters relating to the military organization of the armed struggle than with building a strong ideological base for Eritrean nationalism. ELF documents and pamphlets from the 1960s predominantly reaffirmed its aim to liberate the territory, yet shed little light on what was actually meant by the concept of an Eritrean nation, and

¹² Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013. See also Hartmut Quehl (2005), p. 67.

¹³ Interview with Almaz Z. (by phone), Heidelberg/München, 03.01.2014.

¹⁴ ‘A conversation with Haile “Drue” Wold’ensae’, March 13, 2000, in: Dan Connell (2005), p. 33.

how the various ethno-linguistic and religious groups would fit into this category.¹⁵

The original leaders of the ELF, who had already been criticised by Woldemariam for their leadership style and patronage system in one of his radio broadcasts in June 1962, remained in control of the Supreme Council in Khartoum and the newly established Revolutionary Command in Kassala following the first congress of the ELF in 1965.¹⁶ The organization of the territory into military zones, based on the model of the *Algerian National Liberation Front*, largely followed ethnic lines which invoked old kinship and clan loyalties and basically reflected related power divisions. Furthermore, the various zones also constituted power bases for the ELF leadership, especially Osman Saleh Sabbe and Idris Osman Galadewos who were competing for control of the ELF-SC. The fifth zone, established to accommodate the increasing number of recruits from the highlands, and generally referred to as the 'Christian zone' even though the fighters within this zone were not purely Christian, was continuously exposed to attempts by both Sabbe and Galadewos to extend their patronage to it. As a result of the divisions of the zones along ethnic lines and the ongoing competition, the ELF-RC based in Kassala was often side-lined by the members of the ELF-SC who favoured their own constituencies in terms of religious and ethnic affiliations. The military divisions all worked separately from each other and, as Woldensae recalled, to such an extent 'that every division would not allow fighters from the other division to go around their area.'¹⁷ Yohannes noted that the fact that there was no support but rather competition between the zones meant 'that the dual preoccupations of the divisions with mutual rivalry and with battling the Ethiopian troops corroded the organization, operational effectiveness, and overall coordination of the national army.'¹⁸

The ELF policy not only exacerbated competition between zone commanders

¹⁵ See e.g. RDC, His/ELF/9808, ELF: The renaissance of Eritrea, 01.09.1967.

¹⁶ As referred to in: Nicole D. Saulsberry, thesis, p. 247/248.

¹⁷ 'A conversation with Haile "Drue" Wold'ensae', March 13, 2000, p. 31.

¹⁸ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 161.

and revived tribal conflicts but also alienated the increasing number of Christians joining the liberation movement in the second half of the 1960s, as well as a number of Muslim fighters and the general population. As a veteran Muslim fighter recounted, due to the zonal divisions ‘many fighters were left in between and went back home or migrated to the Sudan. Tribal and regional rivalries bedevilled the army and we started to hate the so-called Algerian model.’¹⁹ After the devastating effect of the first major offensive by Ethiopia in 1967, and the continuous ‘individual and systematic discrimination’ within the *Eritrean Liberation Army* (ELA) against Christian recruits,²⁰ a number of them turned themselves over to Ethiopian authorities in Kassala. The ELF-SC reacted with a purification campaign which resulted in the massacre of several hundred Christian recruits and critical elements. A general amnesty was issued by Haile Selassie and the Christian leadership of the fifth zone under Woldai Kahsai defected with over 100 Christian fighters.²¹ Within the field, the reform movement *Eslah* formed around concerned Muslim fighters and Christian recruits. Aside from the abolition of the zonal divisions and the basing of the leadership in the field, the demands of the movement also included the respect of human rights and the rights of the Eritrean people.²² The latter point referred to food raids constantly carried out by commanders of the various zones in order to obtain supplies for the fighters, which contributed to the alienation of the people from the independence struggle. Reforms were openly directed against the ELF-SC which was ‘criticized and rejected in all levels’.²³ The discriminatory policy of the ELF and its pan-Arab orientation was a further issue for Christian members of the reform movement. Kidane Kiflu, one of its Christian organizers, in a letter to the American journalist Jack Kramer, criticised the ELF leaders

¹⁹ Interview with Mohammed Ibrahim Bahdurai, ‘How Veterans Told the Story of the First 10 Years of ELA’, available at: <http://www.nharnet.com/Editorials/TodayinEriHistory/TodayInHistory.htm>, GS Private Archives.

²⁰ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 154.

²¹ See Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 162.

²² See ‘A conversation with Haile “Drue” Wold’ensae’, March 13, 2000, p. 48/49.

²³ Interview with Mohammed Ibrahim Bahdurai.

for identifying ‘themselves as Moslems and not as Eritreans’ and ‘the Front as a Moslem and Arab movement’, which not only presented the independence struggle as a religious movement but also ignored the fact that half of the Eritrean population was Christian and thus could not support the struggle whole-heartedly because of this identification.²⁴ In a later letter he further claimed that because of their better education, the Christians would be ‘the capable ones, who if [they] wholeheartedly join the Front [...] could be the real liberators of Eritrea.’²⁵ In fact, the main figures of *Eslah* were recruits that had either been active in the student movements abroad, or fighters that had been sent by the ELF for training to countries such as China, Cuba or Syria where they were exposed to different forms of revolutionary and Marxist ideas which they brought back to the field. Hence, the more politically sophisticated fighters that led the reform movement were not solely Christians, even though the Christian highlanders at that time generally had a higher level of education.²⁶ Romadan Mohamed Nur, who would become one of the leading figures of the EPLF together with Issayas Afewerki, is probably the most prominent example of a young Muslim fighter who was trained abroad and later influenced the movement through the revolutionary ideas he was exposed to during his training in China at the time of the Cultural Revolution.

The *Eslah* conferences in Aredaib and Anseba in June and September 1968 resulted in the formation of the *Tripartite Unity* (TU) by the leadership of zones 3-5. As Mahmoud Sherifo, himself a member of the TU noted, at that point it was ‘just a general hatred of what was happening, a general opposition that created the unity of the three forces’.²⁷ A link was even maintained with Osman Saleh Sabbe, despite him being a member of the criticised ELF-SC and having adopted a system of patronage, for

²⁴ The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, 68016, The Jack Kramer Papers, ‘Letter from Kidane Kiflu to Jack Kramer’, 27.11.1968.

²⁵ The Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, 68016, The Jack Kramer Papers, ‘Letter from Kidane Kiflu to Jack Kramer’, 03.04.1969.

²⁶ Interview with Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013.

²⁷ ‘Conversation with Mahmoud Sherifo’, 01.08.2001, in: Dan Connell (2005), p. 71.

logistical reasons. In an attempt to resolve the crisis, the ELF-SC started negotiations with the TU and, at the conference in Adobha in August 1969, a number of concessions were made and resolutions passed in reaction to the criticism voiced by the reform movement. A provisional General Command (ELF-GC) based in Eritrea and consisting of elected members from all zones, replaced both the ELF-SC and the ELF-RC and preparations began for a national congress that was envisioned to take place within one year. However, conflict between Sabbe who announced the formation of his own new body to replace the ELF-SC, *the General Secretariat* (ELF-GS), and the ELF-GC established at the conference quickly resulted not only in Sabbe's departure to Jordan but in violent reactions by the ELF-GC.²⁸

Kibreab notes that the following liquidations of fighters of the ELA, among them Kidane Kiflu, was largely based on 'their religion and ethnicity', and aside from supporters of Sabbe targeted mainly fighters from the Christian highlands.²⁹ This development not only resulted in the supplanting of the resolutions of the Adobha Conference but, most importantly, the sectarian violence reinforced suspicions and mistrust and resulted in a number of groups splitting from the ELF. The impetus for the defections came from the conviction that that change was not possible within the ELF, yet the underlying reasons differed between the groups. While the *Selfi Natsnet* was certainly motivated by the ongoing religious discrimination within the ELF, the split of the other groups was spurred by regional clan and personal loyalties as well personal power struggles. The ELF tried to solve the crisis by inviting the breakaway groups to what became known as the Awate Conference, with the aim of setting up a preparatory committee for a National Congress as stipulated at the Adhoba Conference. However, with the exception of some members of the Obel group none of the defectors attended and the following First National Congress of the ELF took place without their

²⁸ See Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 114.

²⁹ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 162.

participation. The Awate Conference had already been accused of being ‘intended to start civil war’³⁰ by members of the dissident groups, and this seemed to be confirmed by the First National Congress of the ELF which took place from 14 October -13 November 1971. Not only did the congress affirm that ‘there can be no more than one struggle, one organization, one organization and one leadership in our country’ it also established a deadline for the dissidents to return and authorized the leadership ‘to take military measures’ against those who failed to do so.³¹ The refusal of the dissidents to re-join the ELF ultimately resulted in the outbreak of civil war that lasted from 1972 to 1976.

From civil war to uneasy coexistence

Many scholars, as well as the later EPFL, argued that ‘[t]here was no option left for these elements, but to separate from the older leadership (ELF) and form a new front’.³² Kibreab questions this argument that he calls ‘the “Lack of Alternative” Hypothesis’ and argues that many resolutions adopted at the ELF congress had addressed the issues raised by the reform movement and ‘had they been embraced by the breakaway groups [they] would have definitely laid the foundation stone for national unity and democratic change.’³³ However, the premise set by the ELF that the Eritrean field could accommodate only one movement as well as the threatening of the dissident groups with military punishment leaves this assumption questionable at least. In fact, it was horizontal inequalities – both real and perceived – that prompted the actions of the breakaway groups and ultimately resulted in civil war. Furthermore, events prior to the congress had created deep mistrust and there was little reason for the breakaway groups

³⁰ Interview with Yemane Dawit, conducted by Kathrin Eikenberg, 04.04.1983.

³¹ As quoted in Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 173.

³² ‘Interview: the present situation’ (with an unnamed representative of the EPLF), *Eritrea Information*, 1 (June 1979), p. 13.

³³ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 196.

to believe the congress would change things decisively.

A more convincing argument made by Kibreab is that the breakaway groups did not really represent non-sectarian alternatives.³⁴ In fact, while the civil war and concurrent attacks by Ethiopia spurred the merger of the breakaway groups in September 1973, the newly established EPLF immediately faced criticism from within its ranks. While the official ideology of the movement was based on an inclusive approach across ethnic and religious lines, the internal opposition that became to be known as *Menkaa'e* (Tigrinya for bat) not only criticised the 'feudal' leadership-style and asked for more democracy and participation in decision-making, it also denounced the prevailing regionalism and ethnic discrimination.³⁵ The internal dissent was quelled by arresting its proponents and executing the most rigid of them. This early experience of internal opposition had a decisive impact on the EPLF; it prompted the leadership to adopt a heavy-handed and strict leadership style and to create an internal security unit to prevent any further internal opposition.

The military presence of the EPF in the field was initially rather limited, but the link with Sabbe, who had strong relations with a number of Arab governments, helped the movement to get access to arms and funding.³⁶ Confrontations with the ELF initially largely took place along the Red Sea Coast and in Sahel. It was only in 1974 that fighting also spread to the highlands.

The overthrow of Haile Selassie in September, 1974 momentarily raised hopes on the Eritrean side since General Aman Andum, of Eritrean origin, was appointed President of Ethiopia. He did actually 'raise the slogan of "a peaceful solution" of the Eritrean problem'³⁷ but was quickly executed in November of the same year and

³⁴ Ibid., p. 203.

³⁵ 'The PLF leadership crisis 1973', Interview with ex ambassador Haile Menkerios, 24.10.04, GS Private Archives. On the *Menkaa'e* see also David Pool (2001), pp. 76-87.

³⁶ David Pool (2001), p. 72.

³⁷ Osman Saleh Sabbe, *The roots of the Eritrean disagreements and how to solve them*, 20.02.1978, unpublished pamphlet, GS private archives, p. 37.

followed by Mengistu Haile Mariam whose stance towards Eritrea was even more hard-line than that of Haile Selassie. Yet in the wake of the regime change in Addis Ababa there was a short period in which people were able to move freely in the territories which had been liberated by independence movements. Eritreans from all communities, amongst them many religious leaders, used this time to intervene in the ongoing civil war, pressing for a ceasefire between the ELF and the EPLF. Large numbers came from different cities, as well as from Ethiopia-occupied Asmara, to pledge with the two Fronts.³⁸ While the interventions were not always successful and could not prevent all the clashes and attacks, they finally resulted in the liberation fronts at least agreeing to coordinate their activities against the Ethiopian armed forces. In January 1975 they formally declared the end of the civil war.

However, competition regarding new recruits flocking to the liberation forces continued. Ex-fighters interviewed all confirmed that the choice of which Front to join was not linked to support of either one of them in the civil confrontation or specific knowledge of the actual programme of the Front.³⁹ However, once they had joined the movement they were extensively indoctrinated and brainwashed through political education not only to submit themselves wholeheartedly to the movement but also ‘to inculcate a sense of superiority vis-à-vis all the other national, civil and political organizations.’⁴⁰ Kibreab noted that this was true for both the ELF and the EPLF; however, the latter was far more efficient and successful in its indoctrination.⁴¹ In fact, former ELF fighters all praised the freedom of expression they enjoyed within the ELF while the EPLF was said to be known as very strict, disciplined and uncompromising

³⁸ See e.g. Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013, Interview with EPLF fighter carried out by Dan Connell, Khartoum, unknown date, GS Private archives.

³⁹ See e.g. Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013, Interview with Almaz Z., Heidelberg/Munich (by phone), 03.01.2014.

⁴⁰ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 341. See also Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehiwet (by Skype), London/Munich, 15.10.2013.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 340.

when it came to any form of opposition.⁴² This was also observed by Connell during his stay in the Eritrean field:

The ELF fighters were a happy-go-lucky bunch, far less stiff and somber than the earnest comrades of the EPLF, but also considerably less efficient. Things seemed to happen more by chance than design, discipline was loose, and the guerrillas within the ELF appeared to have more diversity of outlook than those in the EPLF.⁴³

In fact, the EPLF demonstrated its organizational efficiency by establishing learning and medical centres to cater for the needs of the population and engaging in land reform during its struggle against both Ethiopia and the EPLF. Specifically the active land reform not only constituted a cornerstone in its policy of social transformation, but also resulted in the EPLF membership coming largely from the peasantry. The ELF, in contrast, was described by an eye-witness as ‘a loose alliance of traditional regional, tribal and religious segments of Eritrean society, relying heavily on traditional leadership and a merchant class.’⁴⁴ This probably explains why the ELF wanted to postpone social transformation until after independence. Other than this, the programmes of both Fronts had become strikingly similar following the First and Second National Congresses (1975) of the ELF committing the movement not only to the liberation of the country but also to social transformation in order to overcome ethnic and religious differences.

This also formed the core of the 1977 *National Democratic Programme* of the EPLF that emphasized ‘Eritrean citizens equality before the law without distinction as to nationality, tribe, region, sex, cultural level, occupation, position, wealth, faith, etc’, and also dedicated a special section to the respect of freedom of religion and faith. While religion was to be completely separated from the state and from politics, citizens’

⁴² Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013, Interview with Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013.

⁴³ Dan Connell (1993), p. 85.

⁴⁴ ‘Eye-witness report: With the EPLF in Barka’, by Frits Eisenloeffel, *Eritrea Information* 3:2 (February 1981), p. 3.

freedom of faith and belief were to be protected by the state.⁴⁵ Despite the proclaimed goal of overcoming ethnic and religious differences, both Fronts had large constituencies on one side of the religious divide. While the EPLF was regarded as ‘an organization that ostensibly promoted the interests of Christian highlanders’, the ELF was regarded ‘as representing the interests of the Muslim lowlanders.’⁴⁶ This decisively hampered the building of trust and the uniting of forces. Furthermore, the fact that Sabbe, officially the Head of the EPLF Foreign Mission, signed an agreement with the ELF on 9 September 1975 that would have merged the EPLF with the ELF without consulting or informing the EPLF leadership in the field further contributed to revive mistrust. Following the failure to push through the agreement, Sabbe left the EPLF and formed his own movement, the *Eritrean Liberation Front – People’s Liberation Forces* (ELF-PLF) in Khartoum in March 1976. However, this new Front was not recognized by either the ELF or the EPLF who were involved in an attempt to coordinate their forces.

By mid-1976, the end of the civil war and the resulting coordination of campaigns strengthened the whole movement vis-à-vis the Ethiopians. Together the ELF and the EPLF even outnumbered Ethiopian troops in Eritrea at this time.⁴⁷ Yet attempts at uniting proved to be rather difficult, mainly because the EPLF, by then already the stronger organisation, did not want a complete merger on equal terms but sought to maintain its own political autonomy. Nevertheless, negotiations were initiated by the socialist *German Democratic Republic*.⁴⁸ An agreement outlining the principles

⁴⁵ National Democratic Programme of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, 1977, Section 7, A&B. However, religious tolerance did not extend to a number of ‘new’ religious sects, such as the Bahais, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostals, who were considered ‘imperialist-created’ and ‘counterrevolutionary’ and were thus forbidden. (Section 7, D.)

⁴⁶ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 304.

⁴⁷ The EPL was said to have around 25,000 men and the ELF 20,000, facing 25,000 Ethiopian troops. See Marina Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 112.

⁴⁸ The engagement of the GDR was supported by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the People’s Republic of Yemen. The socialist countries were worried about the increasingly deteriorating situation in the Horn of

for a joint political leadership of a single national democratic front in Eritrea was finally signed in Khartoum on 20 October 1977. It was followed by a more detailed agreement on 15 March 1978, laying down the political principles of the political union and detailing the practical steps to be taken. The ‘Osman Sabbe clique’ was deliberately left out of the agreement which the EPLF described in its official organ as ‘the death warrant’ to his ELF-PLF, since its non-recognition as a ‘legitimate’ independence movement was made official.⁴⁹ Yet it also demonstrated that the unity agreement was, in fact, not inclusive of all movements fighting for Eritrean independence and consequently rather diluted the establishment of a single, strong national movement. Furthermore, the fact that unity was not possible despite the strikingly similar programmes of the Fronts and that hegemonic claims were given precedence over national unity reflected the fact that a conflict based on grievances was still simmering.

In fact, the ineffectiveness of the agreements became quickly apparent. The ongoing distrust between the two movements was too strong and undermined the relationship decisively. Connell asserts that ELF documents that would surface later on even suggest that the movement intended to subvert the agreement ‘from the moment it was signed.’⁵⁰ By the end of what Iyob describes as a period of ‘uneasy coexistence’ from 1975 to 1977, the movement appeared as divided as ever.⁵¹ This has been interpreted by Erlich as being caused by the ‘rootlessness’ of Eritrean nationalism, asserting that Eritrea was lacking a ‘unifying nationalist tradition’ and that Eritrean nationalism was merely ‘the negation of Ethiopianism.’⁵² Yet it was mainly infighting over the leadership that prevented any genuine agreement on unity. In fact, the ELF

Africa and saw their geostrategic position in the Horn threatened. For details on the negotiations see Hartmut Quehl (2005), pp. 241-246.

⁴⁹ EPLF, *Vanguard, The Official Monthly Organ of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front*, 3:1 (May 1978), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Dan Connell, ‘Eritrean Groups Turn On Each Other’, *The Irish Times*, 25.10.1980, published in: Dan Connell, *Taking On the Superpowers: Collected Articles on the Eritrean Revolution (1976-1982)*, Vol. 1, (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2003), p. 479.

⁵¹ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 121.

⁵² Haggai Erlich (1983), p. 18/19.

repeatedly stalled the implementation of the programme hoping for a weakening of its rival, the EPLF, in its fight against Ethiopia.⁵³ In any case, the lack of unity proved to be detrimental in 1977, since from a military point of view, the liberation was highly successful and the defeat of the Ethiopian forces seemed at hand. After having previously lost large parts of the countryside to the liberation movement, the Ethiopians started losing towns and garrisons from January 1977 onwards, to such an extent that '[b]y the early summer the Derg controlled little more than Asmara and the ports of Massawa and Assab.'⁵⁴ Yet, the liberation movements were unable to unite even in the face of imminent victory and subsequently increased military aid to the Ethiopians resulted in the Ethiopian army regaining a considerable amount of territory. In 1981 a stalemate was reached, yet any prospects of a negotiated peaceful Ethiopian-Eritrean settlement were out of reach.

The return to civil war and the expulsion of the ELF

The EPLF had reacted to the increased strength of the Ethiopian army through Soviet assistance with a strategic retreat whereas the ELF engaged in positional warfare which left it heavily decimated and defeated. As a result of its strategic retreat, the EPLF had not only conserved its forces but even improved them and gained more supporters.⁵⁵ Yohannes claims that this situation of weakness was considered by the EPLF as a 'propitious moment to establish a unipolar liberation order in Eritrea by permanently disabling the ELF'⁵⁶ and, in fact, a second round of civil war was initiated by the EPLF in August 1980.

The Sudanese government offered to mediate between the two warring liberation

⁵³ Dan Connell, 'Eritrean Groups Turn On Each Other', 479.

⁵⁴ Marina Ottaway (1982), p. 113.

⁵⁵ On the strategic retreat see David Pool (2001), pp. 143-147.

⁵⁶ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 183. Okbazghi also states that while there are differing reports, the most credible ones hint at the EPLF as the initiator of this second civil war between the ELF and the EPLF. The first one in the early 1970s had clearly been started by the ELF.

movements but the offer was rejected by the EPLF who seemed to prefer an ‘all-out showdown’.⁵⁷ Connell reported that the ELF on the other hand even considered collaboration with Ethiopia and was ready to ‘accept compromise short of independence.’⁵⁸ He suggests that there was no hard evidence for such collaboration; yet there were reports of simultaneous attacks by the ELF and Ethiopia against EPLF forces, and a meeting of ELF officials with Ethiopian and Soviet representatives in Damascus was said to be planned.⁵⁹ This move has to be understood in the light of ELF alliances with Soviet-backed Arab countries and the newly established Soviet-Ethiopian relationship. An alliance with the ELF could have decisively weakened the Eritrean liberation struggle and perhaps contributed to the end of the conflict that had lasted almost twenty years, a costly business for Ethiopia and its allies. However, the fact that the ELF had been considerably weakened enabled the EPLF to push the majority of ELF units from Eritrean territory into Sudan between August and November 1980.

Pressure from the Arab League on all Eritrean liberation movements resulted in the Tunis Agreement negotiated from 20 to 23 of March 1981. The EPLF, the ELF, the ELF-PLF, and the ELF-RC (Revolutionary Council) agreed to set up a working committee to coordinate the fight for independence among the forces. However, the agreement left many, mainly practical, questions unanswered. At the same time, ‘the EPLF’s substantial expansion into both the coastal and Barka lowlands [stroke] a powerful blow at efforts by the minor nationalist groups.’⁶⁰ In fact, only few months after the negotiations the EPLF, with considerable support from the *Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front* (TPLF), drove the last remaining ELF units into Sudan and established

⁵⁷ Dan Connell, ‘Eritrean Groups Turn On Each Other’, 479.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dan Connell, ‘Eritrean Allies at War With Each Other’, *The Guardian*, 28.10.1980, published in: Dan Connell (2003), p. 481-483.

⁶⁰ Dan Connell, ‘Eritrea: Unity Move’, in: *The Guardian*, 22.04.1981, published in: Dan Connell (2003), p. 519.

its supremacy over the field.⁶¹

Despite more than thirty years of armed struggle, including internal strife and civil war, this particular period is crucial to understanding Eritrean national identity. Not just because, as Renan said, common suffering can help bind communities together,⁶² but because the EPLF, due to its large territorial success and integrative policies in the liberated areas, provided political structures and initiated a process of social and economic development that pulled all the various communities in the territory together. At the same time though, the internal struggle created political cleavages that endure beyond the struggle for independence and that, in absence of a democratic system and dialogue, put the cohesiveness of the Eritrean nation in question.

LEBANON

The descent into civil conflict

Despite the fact that the Lebanon of the early 1970s had been described by scholars as witnessing an increasing tendency toward sectarian accommodation and moderation of communal attitudes,⁶³ the country not only saw the outbreak of civil war in 1975 but the conflict extended over fifteen years, going through different phases. The first phase lasted from 1975 to 1976 and ended with Syrian intervention. The second phase, often described as the interwar period, lasted from 1977 to 1982, and the third, marked by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the battles of Beirut, from 1982 to 1983. Finally the last phase, from 1984 to 1990, saw a worsening internal political crisis and was marked by inter-as well as intra-communal warfare as well as the ‘War of the Camps’ between the Shi‘ite Amal and guerrillas in the Palestinian refugee camps, before the conflict finally

⁶¹ On the EPLF-TPLF relationship see John Young, ‘The Tigray and Eritrean Liberation Fronts: A History of Tension and Pragmatism’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34:1 (March 1996), pp. 105-120

⁶² See Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, p. 19.

⁶³ See e.g. Iliya Harik, ‘Voting Participation and Political Integration’, p. 44, Farid El Khazen (pp. 237-240.

came to an end with the Ta'if Agreement.⁶⁴ Regardless of phase, the conflict was inextricably connected to a number of regional conflicts that were fought on Lebanese territory and that often either dragged Lebanese communities into the conflict or stirred up inter-communal conflicts. As Hanf noted, 'Lebanese shot at Lebanese in every year of the war' and 'there were always sufficient grounds for Lebanese strife within a wider war that was not pre-eminently Lebanese'.⁶⁵

While the outbreak of hostilities has generally been linked to dissent over the PLO presence on Lebanese territory and was specifically triggered by the 'Ain ar-Rummaneh bus shooting on 13 April 1975, the underlying reasons were horizontal inequalities that had been building up over the past decades. Demographic changes were not reflected in the inflexible Lebanese sectarian system, and uneven development had resulted in a widening of the socio-economic gap. While the political system had provided the basis for peaceful coexistence in times of political and economic stability, the increasing instability resulted in many Lebanese returning their loyalty to their communal identity. This was reinforced by the fact that class and community structures largely overlapped. While the underlying reasons for the outbreak of the hostilities were predominantly of a domestic nature, divisions between communities and Lebanon's geographic position made the country vulnerable to external interventions which contributed to the prolongation of the conflict.

In fact, the first event that has to be considered as leading up to the civil war was one addressing socio-economic grievances: the Sidon disturbances of 27 February 1975. Clashes started when the fishermen of Sidon took to the streets to demonstrate against the Protein Company which was about to gain a monopoly control over the Lebanese

⁶⁴ For various ways the civil war has been divided into phases see e.g. Helena Cobban (1985), pp. 125-208; Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), pp. 187-239; Theodor Hanf (1993), pp. 179-322.

⁶⁵ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 553/554.

fishing industry thanks to authorisation granted by presidential decree.⁶⁶ Despite ongoing negotiations with the company over the rights of the fishermen, the latter started protesting and were quickly joined by Palestinian guerrillas from the nearby camps which escalated into clashes with the Lebanese army. The PLO involvement did not sit well with Lebanese Christians who considered this an attempt to weaken the army and consequently the state. The events set in motion what El Khazen called 'the built-in domino effect of Lebanese politics in the mid-1970s' as the dispute aggravated tensions between the Lebanese communities and 'was transformed into a complex political crisis having overlapping layers'.⁶⁷

In this context, the presence of the PLO was enough of an issue to internally divide the Lebanese into two distinctive camps; it also added a military dimension to this division, for a large part because, as Hanf noted, the Palestinian issue 'concerned in a very immediate way the Lebanese peoples' understanding of themselves'.⁶⁸ Those Lebanese who considered their country an Arab-Muslim one saw the support of the Palestinian cause as almost an obligation, while those who believed in a more distinct non-Arab Lebanon regarded the case of the PLO as more of a foreign issue. Once again, as with the crisis of 1958, a foreign policy issue – even though played out inside the country – escalated existing internal tensions over the identity of the country. While Lebanon was facing numerous problems on many levels, the basic tension between the Christian and Muslim communities had never been properly resolved; this, in turn, left the state weak and disposed to slip into conflict in the face of uneven integration of communities. In the end, it was the overly-vague National Pact that prevented the country from having a rational national policy that was able to satisfy all members of Lebanese society on both social and economic, level. Consequently, with the outbreak

⁶⁶ Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon*, p. 270.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁶⁸ Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence*, p. 112.

of hostilities in 1975, the National Pact collapsed as well.

In his resignation statement of 15 May 1975, then Prime Minister Rashid al-Sulh claimed that the clear goal of the ‘massacre’ committed by the *Phalange* party in ‘Ain ar-Rummaneh was not only to ‘destroy our national unity and strike at the Lebanese-Palestinian brotherlines.’⁶⁹ Rather, in a situation where the army could not interfere due to its precarious state, the party was trying to stir up unrest and exploit a sectarian system that was already severely out of balance since:

The confessional distinctions which form the basis of the Lebanese political regime have been transformed by the changing conditions of Lebanon and its ties with its Arab environment, into an obstacle which not only prevents any kind of progress but also threatens to push backwards and destroy all that has been built up since independence.⁷⁰

Therefore, al-Sulh considered the only solution to the crisis involved reforms of the political system and a corresponding move towards secularized state institutions, as well as reform of the army that would place it under the formal control of the government and also ensure more equality within its ranks. After his resignation, and following a number of skirmishes, the country saw some halt to the violence over the summer when various Muslim and Christian organizations re-started the dialogue. Yet, the attempt at reconciliation through *National Dialogue* meetings in September and October 1975 only seemed to highlight the divergent opinions, especially with regard to a reform of the constitution and the sectarian system. While most Muslims supported al-Sulh’s desire to abolish the sectarian system, the Maronite community believed that it was precisely this system that gave both sides enough ‘confidence’, and unless a new system was going to ‘supply this confidence in full’ it would only lead ‘to dissension and the destruction of the foundations of the nation.’⁷¹ Yet reform of the sectarian system as

⁶⁹ Resignation Statement of Prime Minister Rashīd al-Ṣulḥ - before the Parliament, May 15 1975, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph’s University (1975), p. 26.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷¹ Declaration of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon, 1975, p. 38. The need to adhere to the National Pact “in its true form”, was also affirmed in the Memorandum Concerning Reform, prepared by the Lebanese Committee for Research (The Kaslik Group), adopted by the Permanent Congress of

envisaged by the Muslim community did not exclude the possibility of co-existence.⁷² A formula of co-existence was what the Muslims wanted; what they rejected was the system of political equilibrium since '[f]ormula means fusion and unification; equilibrium appropriation and division.'⁷³ Such a formula had to be different from what was implied in the National Pact, since it should aim at real co-existence where the citizen's 'allegiance will be to his nation, not to his confessional community.'⁷⁴

Late 1975 and early 1976 was marked by sectarian violence and massacres and although Syria considered the events in Lebanon as threatening its own security, nevertheless the regime continued to supply the PLO and its Lebanese allies with weapons.⁷⁵ In January 1976, Syria intervened directly in the conflict for the first time 'under the name of the PLA [Palestinian Liberation Army]', following heavy fighting including the Karantina and Damour massacres, to save the National Movement and the PLO from defeat.⁷⁶

In February 1976, Syria initiated another attempt at national reconciliation, this time backed by the US. The so-called *Constitutional Document*, often also referred to as the *Damascus Agreement*, was basically a revised, and written, version of the 1943 National Pact.⁷⁷ While the sovereignty of the country was emphasized, it was also

Superiors General of the Lebanese Monastic Orders and the Maronite League, published in al-Anwar newspaper on 23.12.1975, p. 3, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), p. 96.

⁷² In fact, in a joint declaration of Christian and Muslim leaders in October 1975, "partition in every sense of the word" was firmly rejected. See Declaration of Summit of Muslim and Christian Religious Leaders, published in an-Nahar newspaper on 05.10.1975, p. 3, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), p. 66/67.

⁷³ Sermon of Mufti, 5.10.1975, published in al-Hayat newspaper on 05.10.1975, p. 5, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), p. 73.

⁷⁴ Declaration of the Islamic Association of Maqāsid Graduates on the Causes of the Bloody Events in Lebanon, published in an-Nahar newspaper on 27.11.1975, p. 3, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), p. 82.

⁷⁵ According to Khaddam's own words as quoted in Naomi J. Weinberger (1986), p. 167/168. Asad in his speech on 20.07.1976 also mentioned the problem caused by refugees coming from Lebanon to Syria due to the conflict. See Speech by Hafiz al-Asad, 20.07.1976, in: Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon, 1970-1983*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 206.

⁷⁶ Speech by Hafiz al-Asad, 20.07.1976, p. 211. The PLA had originally been set up as the military wing of the PLO in 1964, but was mainly used by its host governments (especially Egypt and Syria) as a proxy force. In his speech, Asad gave a detailed account of Syrian intervention in Lebanon under the guise of the PLA.

⁷⁷ Naomi J. Weinberger (1986), p. 185.

clearly labelled as an Arab nation.⁷⁸ The Syrian President Asad underscored the fact that no secular programme had been agreed upon due to the intransigence of the Lebanese Muslim communities (with exception of the Druze under Kamal Jumblatt) who considered a secular state to be against the principles of Islam.⁷⁹ The document was supported by the majority of the Lebanese except for Jumblatt, who considered it 'ambiguous' and prevented it from ever being enacted by the Lebanese Parliament.⁸⁰ Jumblatt's attitude towards the Syrians also led to the weakening of the LNM because some members of the movement embraced the Syrian document. Moreover, it affected relations between the PLO and Syria, with Asad even accusing the Palestinians of turning into a tool of forces inside Lebanon and 'fighting for the accomplishment of the objectives of others' instead of focusing on the liberation of Palestine.⁸¹ In reality, the PLO and their Lebanese supporters viewed the agreement with a sense of 'being cheated of their success', since it accepted the conditions of both the Cairo Agreement and the Melkart Protocol, which effectively limited the freedom the PLO.⁸²

In June 1976, Syria intervened again in the ongoing conflict, this time in support of the Christian communities, or rather to prevent a victory of the PLO that, together with the LNM and the newly formed *Lebanese Arab Army* (LAA),⁸³ had started attacking Christian East Beirut and the presidential palace at Baabda. While the PLO was now also hostile towards Syria, attacking and detaining Syrian soldiers in Lebanon, Asad officially maintained that the purpose of the Syrian presence was to protect the

⁷⁸ See Lebanese President Suleiman Franjeh's Message to the Lebanese People, Beirut, 14 February 1976: The Constitutional Document (Excerpts), in: Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1979), p. 189.

⁷⁹ Speech by Hafiz al-Asad, 20.07.1976, p. 218.

⁸⁰ Naomi J. Weinberger (1986), p. 190.

⁸¹ Speech by Hafiz al-Asad, 20.07.1976, p. 213.

⁸² Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 213.

⁸³ Founded by the Sunni lieutenant Ahmed Khatib in January 1976, the LAA was a small split-off from the Lebanese Armed Forces, consisting of a few hundred recruits, all Sunni Muslims who felt that the official Lebanese army was too 'Christian'.

Palestinian refugee camps from possible Israeli attacks.⁸⁴ However, the invasion was rather guided by the aim of reinforcing Syria's influence in the country and especially over both the LNM and the PLO, or as Weinberger put it, 'to force them to stop contesting Syria's will in Lebanon.'⁸⁵ In June 1976, the Arab League decided in an emergency meeting to establish a 2000-man inter-Arab peace-keeping force and about four months later, it decided to transform this force into the 3000-man *Arab Deterrence Force* (ADF) under the command of the Lebanese President.⁸⁶ No precise guidelines were given for the composition of this force and it soon became a purely Syrian force and basically served to legitimise Syrian military presence in the country and confirmed its predominance.

From uneasy quiet to the Israeli invasions of Lebanon

While support of the PLO had been the issue of disagreement that triggered the conflict and divided the two sides during the early stages, the issue had already moved to the background by the end of the 1970s. In fact, there was increasing agreement amongst all the different groups and parties regarding their lack of support for any sort of foreign military forces on Lebanese soil, in the wake of a possible Israeli invasion and the presence of Syrian military personnel since 1976. While it was Syrian intervention that ultimately ended the first phase of the war, Israel had also quite decisively intervened in the conflict by supporting the Maronite militias with financial and military aid during the 'battles of Beirut' that saw the LF embroiled in battles with the ADF over control of Christian East Beirut. However, it was only in 1978 that Lebanon witnessed the first direct military intervention by Israel on Lebanese territory. This first intervention was followed four years later by the invasion of South Lebanon up to Beirut by the *Israeli*

⁸⁴ Speech by Hafiz al-Asad, 20.07.1976, p. 226/227.

⁸⁵ Naomi J. Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-76 Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 213.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Defence Forces (IDF), named ‘Operation Peace for Galilee’, unprevented by the presence of a UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon; the *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* (UNIFIL) had been stationed following the 1978 attacks by Israel and as a result of UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426. Yet the mandate of the UNIFIL did not include active involvement in possible attacks but was rather aimed at restoring peace and security by its mere presence, and in assisting the Lebanese government to regain effective authority in Southern Lebanon.⁸⁷

The 1982 invasion would have decisive repercussions for the future political landscape in Lebanon. It took place after a ceasefire with the PLO had been in place for almost a year and the *National Salvation Committee*, established by then Lebanese President Elias Sarki, had brought together various militia leaders to foster dialogue. The Israelis used the attempted assassination of their ambassador in the UK as a pretext to start the invasion even though the group responsible was led by Abu Nidal, an arch enemy of Arafat and the PLO. The invasion not only aspired to end the PLO presence in Lebanon, considered a pre-requisite for creating a solution to the West Bank, but was also meant to realize old plans to establish a pro-Israeli government in Lebanon. The plan was to bring a government under Bashir Gemayel to power, and thereby create an environment favourable to a possible peace agreement with neighbouring Israel. However, as Schulze analysed, despite Israeli intelligence based on covert relations with the Phalanges, the invasion plan was flawed because it was based on a false perception of the Maronites as a ‘junior ally’ and a fundamental misunderstanding of the communal balances in Lebanon.⁸⁸ In addition, cooperation between the *Phalange* and the Israelis did not go unnoticed and certainly contributed to revive or even deepen sectarian resentments. In their opening letter of 1985, Hizb’allah dedicated an entire

⁸⁷ On the role and activities of UNIFIL see Bjørn Skogmo, *International Peacekeeping in Lebanon, 1978-1988*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989).

⁸⁸ Kirsten E. Schulze, *Israel’s Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 124.

chapter to the discussion of Zionist-*Phalange* relations and accused the *Phalange* of having invited the Israeli invasion in order for Gemayel to attain the presidency by walking over an 'American-Israeli bridge'⁸⁹.

In fact, the deteriorating situation in the country, and the entanglement of external forces in the conflict which had resulted increasingly in internal chaos, fuelled American fears of the conflict igniting a wider regional conflict. In reaction to the invasion, the Americans participated in a *Multi-National Force* (MNF)⁹⁰ in the territory which aimed to serve as a buffer between the Israeli and the Syrian forces, who were both present on Lebanese territory, in order to find a solution to the Palestinian issue without further bloodshed. After the deployment of the first MNF succeeded in removing the PLO from Lebanon to exile in Tunis, Washington dedicated itself to supporting an agreement between the warring parties, mainly to secure Israel's interests and its northern border. The MNF was withdrawn from Lebanon only to be redeployed less than two weeks later following the assassination of President Bashir Gemayel on 14 September 1982, and the Sabra and Shatila massacres on 17 and 18 September.⁹¹

Amin Gemayel, who was elected as successor to his brother Bashir, hoped that with the help of the American administration, the Lebanese Government would be able to get the most out of the stalemate between Israel and Syria. In his speeches, Gemayel regularly reaffirmed the importance of maintaining the unity of Lebanese territory as

⁸⁹ UMAM, Naṣ al-risāla al-maftūḥa allatī wağahahā Ḥizb 'allah 'Ilā al-mustaḍāfīn fī lubnān wa al-^cālam, p. 13.

⁹⁰ The Multi-National Force consisted of American, French and Italian soldiers, and from January 1983 some British observers joined the second MNF in Lebanon.

⁹¹ This massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon was initiated by Israeli commanders who wanted to make sure every PLO military presence in Lebanon was completely eradicated. They suspected some guerillas of having remained in Lebanon and hiding in the camps, but did not want their own soldiers to go into the camps. They found Christian militiamen from the Lebanese Forces that went in for them, committing a cold-blooded massacre. Estimates of the number of people killed during the massacre, mainly Palestinians but also Lebanese Shi'ites, range from 750 to 3,500. For a detailed account see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, 3rd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 359-400.

well as its sovereignty and independence.⁹² US mediation efforts finally led to the signing of the 17 May Agreement in 1983. Proving his seriousness concerning the unity of the country, Gemayel made sure that representatives of the Sunni and the Shi'a communities were included in the negotiations for the agreement. However, the agreement was aimed solely at ending the war between Israel and Lebanon on Lebanese soil to Israel's advantage, while completely ignoring Syria. The existence of an Israeli 'side letter' which was accepted by Secretary of State Shultz but probably not disclosed to Gemayel, further jeopardized the success of the agreement.⁹³ During this stalemate, the MNF was essentially without a mission and it became the target of attacks by Lebanese militia forces, mainly the *National Salvation Front* that had been organized by Syria in opposition to the Lebanese-Israeli agreement.⁹⁴ The worst of these attacks took place on 23 October 1983 and resulted in the deaths of 241 American servicemen. It took another four months until the failure of the 17 May Agreement and the mission of the MNF were both finally recognised and the MNF withdrawn from Lebanon. At the same time as these international forces left, the *Lebanese Armed Forces* (LAF) collapsed due to ongoing confrontations with Muslim militias, reflecting the conflict between supporters of the government and the agreement, and those vehemently opposing it.⁹⁵

Two years later another attempt to reach an agreement was made, again initiated by Syria but this time supported by Saudi Arabia. The aim of this new attempt was to bring together the three main militia leaders – Elie Hobeika of the LF, Walid Jumblatt

⁹² See e.g. Amine Gemayel, Welcoming address in honour of the visit to Lebanon of U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, Beirut, 28.04.1983, in: Amine Gemayel, *Peace and Unity: Major Speeches 1982-1984*, (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1984), p. 91/92.

⁹³ Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years at the Pentagon*, (London: Michael Joseph LTD, 1990), p. 108/109. The side letter basically stipulated a number of preconditions that had to be met before Israel would withdraw. This included a simultaneous withdrawal of Israel and Syria, an interesting demand since Syria was not even included in the agreement. Yet this added demand basically gave Syria some sort of 'veto power'.

⁹⁴ See Itamar Rabinovich (1984), p. 174/175.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

of the PSP and Nabih Berri of the ‘*Amal* – in order to reach an agreement between them. The Lebanese government was deliberately left out, as was the Sunni community as it lacked sufficient militia power.⁹⁶ In addition, the rise of the Shi‘a community and its movements had decisively shifted political influence away from the Sunni community. While the new agreement seemed to meet more demands of most of the militias since it embraced a certain level of ‘deconfessionalisation’, it was only signed by the leaders on 28 December 1985 because ‘no one was challenging Syria in Lebanon at that time and it controlled the balance of forces in the war.’⁹⁷ Hence, it was an agreement enforced by Syria in order to strengthen the distinctive relationship between the two countries, granting Syria more than mere influence. The agreement seemed to force Lebanon into adopting the same foreign policy as Syria and it would have placed the LAF under Syrian supreme command which would have seriously put the sovereignty of Lebanon in question.⁹⁸ However, the agreement did not have any national legitimisation since it bypassed the Lebanese government completely and lacked international support. In addition, ‘militiamen, militia commanders and militant politicians had an interest in maintaining at least some tension between the conflicting parties’⁹⁹, since each only had the support of a minority in their respective community. As a result, a peaceful settlement of the conflict would have also seen their influence diminish. All these factors ultimately led to the failure of yet another initiative to end the fighting.

The experience of violence and grassroots movements

Aside from the political impact of shifting alliances, inter-sectarian conflicts and elite attempts at reconciliation, the sheer level of violence experienced also affected the

⁹⁶ The only organized Sunni militia power, the al-Murabitun, was defeated by the ‘*Amal* and the Druze militia in April 1985. See Itamar Rabinovich (1984), p. 181.

⁹⁷ Michael Kerr (2005), p. 150.

⁹⁸ For the full text of the agreement see Mina Toksöz, *The Lebanon Conflict: Political shifts, regional impact and economic outlook*, (London: Economist Publications Limited, 1986), pp. 82-93 .

⁹⁹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 562.

whole of the Lebanese population, regardless of religious affiliation, on a psychological level and profoundly influenced people's perception of unity and identity. The increasingly inter-communal violence began to impact on the demographic distribution of the Lebanese population. Not only did Beirut become divided into a Christian-dominated East and a Muslim-dominated West, confessionally mixed areas, especially in the capital, increasingly vanished. Many people relocated several times in the course of the conflict, often moving into areas occupied solely by members of their own sectarian community. As a Sunni woman reported during the siege of Beirut in 1982:

Our neighbourhood is a mixture of Sunnis and Shiites. It contains some people who are very poor and some who are very rich. A fortnight ago, all the Shiites moved out – all of them. Newspaper vendors, dustmen, labourers, porters, domestics, etc. all loaded supplies into their cars and set off at 4 a.m. for occupied south Lebanon. Not a single one stayed behind. Partly they went to escape the bombardments, but partly they felt that their homeland in the south was slipping through their fingers. They preferred to be down there.¹⁰⁰

However, neighbourhoods such as *Ras Beirut*, which had always been a place of 'real coexistence' remained open to all communities even during the prolonged civil war. It was also largely because of its multi-communal nature that it was spared the experience of serious wrangles or even massacres endured by other neighbourhoods.¹⁰¹ Such massacres in neighbourhoods were often answered by retaliatory massacres in neighbourhoods inhabited by the rival community, and were, in fact, often based on old rivalries rather than related to the issue that had pushed the country into civil war in the first place. The earliest massacre took place on 18 January 1976 in the Karantina district of Beirut which was mainly inhabited by Palestinians, Syrians and Kurds and under the control of the PLO. It was overrun by Christian militias resulting in the death of 1000-1500 people. In response, the PLO entered the Christian town of Damour, a *Phalange* militia base, two days later and killed an estimated 600 people.¹⁰² Yet this type of

¹⁰⁰ Selim Nassib, 'The Siege of Beirut – A Sunni family', Beirut, 14.07.1982, published in: Selim Nassib with Caroline Tisdall, *Beirut: Frontline Story*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1983), p. 84.

¹⁰¹ See Mahmoud Hojeij, 'Wish you were here - Memories of Ras Beirut', DVD, 2006.

¹⁰² On these massacres see Farid El-Khazen (2000), pp.325-327.

excessive violence did not remain confined to the inter-communal level and, as Tersakian noted, ‘some of the most despicable, unpredictable and yet highly significant violence in Lebanon occurred within the “Christian” camp.’¹⁰³ Specifically, the brutal killing of the son of ex-president Suleiman Franjeh, Tony, together with his wife, two-year old daughter, other family members and staff in Ehden on 13 June 1978 shocked the Maronite community and was widely condemned.¹⁰⁴ The massacre had been carried out by the *Phalange* under the command of Bashir Gemayel who also ordered the slaughter of the ‘Tiger’ militia, by then under the command of Camille Sham’un’s son, Dany. This had been preceded by a ‘mutual hate campaign between the two militias’, and the killing of Bashir Gemayel’s baby daughter by a car bomb on 23 February 1980.¹⁰⁵ The elimination of the ‘Tiger’ militia has been linked to the killing of Gemayel’s daughter, as well as to the fact that Gemayel was said to have become tired of sharing power with Sham’un since both militias had been operating under the umbrella of the LF. The Ehden massacre, in contrast, ‘had its roots in [...] a century-old blood-feud’ between the town of Ehden and the hometown of one of the leaders of the *Phalange* forces, Samir Geagea.¹⁰⁶

Despite the high level of violence and cruelty experienced during the civil war, the majority of the population appeared to be able to view this as a experience shared with its co-nationalists, and as something that brought the communities closer together instead of tearing them apart. As an Orthodox Christian woman recounted in June 1982:

Five days ago we decided to leave for East Beirut. We took our Shiite neighbours with us. At the Phalangist barricade, just past the Museum, they told us that they were willing to let us through, but that our Shiite neighbours would have to turn back. I said that either we all went through, or nobody would go. They gave in. [...] Here, this is our neighbourhood, this is where we grew up. Our neighbours are closer to us than our relations. The war itself has bound us together. Here

¹⁰³ Krikor Tersakian, ‘*The intra-Christian violence during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1989)*’, available at: <http://www.ktersakian.com/2011/05/intra-christian-violence-during.html> (last accessed on 09.05.2011).

¹⁰⁴ See for instance Robert Fisk (2001), p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Edgar O’Balance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975-1992*, (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 95.

¹⁰⁶ See William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), p. 253.

people understand each other.¹⁰⁷

In fact, such accounts of inter-communal bonds and relationships described as ‘closer [...] than the closest of family’¹⁰⁸ did not represent isolated emotions but were part of a much larger sentiment amongst the Lebanese population. Hanf’s comprehensive surveys conducted during the civil war revealed that ‘the majority of Lebanese have little difficulty in reconciling communal identity and national identity. [...] Lebanese do have a strong sense of communal affiliation. But only a small minority feel that this is more important than their Lebanese nationality. [...] all want to live in peace with each other in the same country.’¹⁰⁹ Hanf’s findings confirmed Salibi’s earlier assertion that there was a ‘consensus among all but the more committed extremists today that they are Lebanese, sharing the same national identity, regardless of other, secondary, group affiliations and loyalties.’¹¹⁰

The desire for peace was also openly expressed through demonstrations staged throughout the war. The first one which took place in November 1975 saw tens of thousands Lebanese from both East and West Beirut taking to the streets. It managed, for a moment, to interrupt the fighting but the ‘fighters prevented further demonstrations by staging heavy artillery duels hours before the announced time of any demonstration’.¹¹¹ Yet organized protests continued, including peace movements such as ‘Women Against War’ and professional associations and societies. An important role was also played by the *Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Libanais* (CGTL), the umbrella organization of the Lebanese trade unions, which had adopted a non-confessional position and preserved it throughout the war.¹¹² After the first strike called

¹⁰⁷ Selim Nassib, ‘Cross-section of the war – five stories of a Beirut apartment block’, 21.06.1982, published in: Selim Nassib with Caroline Tisdall (1983), p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Selim Nassib, ‘In the Palestinian camps the day after the bombing, 29.07.1982, published in: Selim Nassib with Caroline Tisdall (1983), p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 641.

¹¹⁰ Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 3.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 638.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 639.

by the CGTL, the union managed to mobilize people outside of their membership and organized a number of mass political demonstrations. Non-violent activities protesting the ongoing violence also included sit-ins, placing flowers in the muzzle of guns and the prevention of kidnappings; these actions were performed by members of all Lebanese communities.¹¹³

However, as Salibi rightfully cautioned, the will to live together peacefully and the emerging consciousness of common identity that he detected among the Lebanese population had to be 'translated into a new national order'.¹¹⁴ This would necessitate overcoming the struggle between the Lebanese elites, especially the leaders of the various militias, since it was up to them to translate this sentiment into an agreement and into support for a political system of coexistence that would not be conducive to communal affiliations taking predominance once again.

From two governments to agreement

The prolonged Lebanese civil war finally came to an end through an agreement negotiated in 1989. Preceding this, Asad was still trying to establish Syrian hegemony in Lebanon and intended to use the presidential elections of 1988 for that purpose.

After many attempts at electing a new president remained unsuccessful, largely because of a lack of Syrian support, the American and the Syrian governments jointly nominated a candidate.¹¹⁵ However, disagreement over the nomination led to a split between those supporting the US-Syrian proposal and those opposing it, and eventually resulted in the existence of two governments. Both the cabinet of General Michel Aoun and that of Salim Hoss claimed to be the legitimate one. The split also extended to the

¹¹³ See Kirsten E. Schulze, 'Communal violence, civil war and foreign occupation: Women in Lebanon', in: Miller, Robert E. and Rick Wilford (eds.) *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Politics of Transition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 158.

¹¹⁴ Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 3.

¹¹⁵ American support has to be understood in the light of the existence of American hostages in Lebanon. The US government, aware of the power situation in Lebanon, was trying to muster Syrian support to free these hostages.

administration and institutions such as the armed forces.¹¹⁶ Aoun had actually been embroiled in a struggle over power in the Christian community with Samir Geagea, despite ideologically following very similar lines. Moreover, Aoun was trying to restore the authority of the state which was constantly undermined by the existence of militia forces, mainly the LF under the leadership of Geagea. After heavy fighting between the LF and the LAF, a ceasefire was agreed, a decisive victory for Aoun. Following this success, Aoun started challenging other militias in areas where his government was not actually recognized. This provoked the Syrians to intervene militarily once again. Heavy bombardments and fighting broke out between Syria and the supporters of Aoun. The latter had hoped for foreign support in what he considered was a war to liberate Lebanon from Syrian dominance, but such support never came.¹¹⁷ Finally, the Arab League called for a ceasefire and during the Arab summit conference on 23 May 1989 they set up a troika to restore Lebanon's sovereignty and elaborate on reforms of the political system. It would take two more attempts until a breakthrough could be reached and the Syrians acceded to international pressure to agree to the proposal of 13 September 1989.

The warring parties finally came together for negotiations due to a variety of causes, internal as well as external. Just as the war itself was marked by external influences, so was its settlement. To reach an accord, not only the agreement of the internal forces was needed but also a regional environment conducive to peace. What certainly contributed to an agreement being more likely was the fact that one of the issues that had created the most dissent at the outbreak of the conflict was now lacking, namely the Palestinian issue. The key issue remaining was the issue of internal political reforms.

Yet, the Ta'if Agreement that marked the end of the civil war would not resolve

¹¹⁶ For a detailed account see Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 570ff.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

one core problem: the system of institutionalised sectarianism. In fact, the situation in 1989 seemed to have been conducive to the introduction of a new system due to the positive attitude within the Lebanese population of all denominations, as described by both Hanf and Salibi. However, while co-existence was indeed desired by the majority of the Lebanese by the end of the civil war, and a large number of Lebanese politicians believed that it was the only way for Lebanon to survive, there remained the continuing desire of the traditional elites to keep their positions of power.

As Maila noted, the Ta'if Agreement 'determines the nature of Lebanese society as a society of communities welded by their desire to live together.'¹¹⁸ In terms of the system for living together, the accord basically reorganized the elements of the National Pact of 1943, which meant a return to the confessional formula with very few alterations. Yet, the Accord also reemphasized the temporality of the system by stating that equal and proportional distribution should be the basis for the distribution of parliamentary seats '[u]ntil the Chamber of Deputies passes an election law free of sectarian restriction'.¹¹⁹ The document includes a phased plan for the abolition of the sectarian system, but no precise time frame, and even declares it 'a fundamental national objective'.¹²⁰ Thus, all the Ta'if Accord did in this respect was to postpone the modification of a sectarian system that, when integrated into the constitution after the unwritten National Pact of 1943, was already considered 'a provisional measure'.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, in both Eritrea and Lebanon the underlying reasons for the descent into civil war were linked to divisions along religious lines and the correlating

¹¹⁸ Joseph Maila (1992), p. 17.

¹¹⁹ Ta'if Accord, II.A.5., <http://www.mideastinfo.com/documents/taif.htm>.

¹²⁰ Ibid., II.G.

¹²¹ Article 95 of the Lebanese constitution, see: Department of Political Studies and Public Administration, *The Lebanese Constitution: A reference edition in English Translation*, (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1960), p. 33.

different nationalist aspirations and perceptions of the identity of the countries. Yet, while these cleavages were the underlying factors for civil conflict, the impetus for the outbreak came from structural changes that aggravated grievances and resulted in horizontal inequalities. In Lebanon, demographic changes accompanied by the widening socio-economic gap exacerbated sectarian divisions and dissatisfaction with the institutionalized sectarian system, while in Eritrea the organizational structure applied by the ELF accounts for the emergence of horizontal inequalities. In both cases, these inequalities exacerbated the major-cleavage and, therefore, the outbreak of hostilities was to a large part also motivated by the question of the identity of the country and the independence movement respectively. However, this issue moved into the background as the fighting prolonged and rather disagreement and struggle over the distribution of power became the predominant bone of contention.

In fact, in Lebanon internal problems became intertwined with regional conflicts and international interests. This made the conflict much more complex and complicated than was the case in Eritrea. Consequently, it also made formation or preservation of national unity and identity much more complicated, almost impossible. The fact that external forces were able to extort internal divisions and play communities off against each other certainly contributed to the length of the conflict. Yet, since in the later stages it was mainly a fight over dominance and political power, the civil war did, in fact, instil in the Lebanese population some sense of common suffering that would bind them together as a nation. However, the Ta'if Agreement simply reaffirmed the old sectarian system and left the impression that the desire to co-exist peacefully on an equal basis existed mainly on a grassroots level. For the elites, keeping a system that left, again, the question of national identity in limbo to a certain degree, appeared to leave enough space for the interests of all community leaders.

The same dynamic was at work in the case of Eritrea, although here it was much

stronger since the liberation movements did not experience the massive interference and attempts at being played off against each other as was the case in Lebanon. The experience of civil conflict was rather limited and predominantly stimulated by power interests and disagreements over strategic issues. The common suffering under the Ethiopians helped to bind the Eritreans together from the very beginning of the independence struggle. The civilian intervention in the first war between the ELF and the EPLF, when grassroots pressure was strong enough to push the warring liberation movements to a ceasefire, was proof of the existence and the strength of a common bond based on the shared experience of atrocities and suppression. The people were not willing to endure more suffering because of disagreements over military strategies and leadership.

Chapter 6 – A nation in a world of nations?: External influences

While the process of national identity formation is often considered an internal process, taking place between the members of a population imagining each other as belonging to the same nation, it has also been widely recognised that an ‘outward- looking element’ is part of nationalism and, therefore, plays an important role in the formation of national identity.¹ As Prizel notes, this is due to the fact that ‘national identity serves not only as the primary link between the individual and society, but between a society and the world’.² Therefore, international relations and national identity have to be considered as intertwined phenomena with the ability to mutually influence each other. Of special relevance in this context appears the aspect of recognition, the legitimacy of a nation being recognized by another based on ‘[t]he assumption of sovereign nation-states existing in mutual recognition.’³

This chapter will look at external influences on the formation and formulation of national identity in Eritrea and Lebanon after the departure of the respective colonial/mandate power. Due to their geostrategic positions, both countries were of interest not only to regional but also international actors, yet the fact that they did not receive the same international recognition as self-determining nation-states led to these external actors and conflicts shaping their national identity in different ways. This chapter focuses on the two broader conflicts which influenced both countries, the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and argues that in both cases the policies of other countries towards the state or its communities played a certain role in the development of national identity. In the case of Eritrea, the absence of international recognition of its right to self-determination and the active support of Ethiopia by the majority of the international community contributed positively to the development of a cohesive

¹ Michael Billing (1995), p. 61.

²² Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 19.

³ Michael Billing (1995), p. 83.

national identity. Lebanon, in contrast, had been recognised as a sovereign nation state, yet the lack of a coherent foreign policy grounded in a commonly accepted national identity resulted in the country being dogged by regional conflicts. This, in turn, had a negative impact on the development of a cohesive national identity.

ERITREA

The geostrategic position of Eritrea

Eritrea's strategic position at the 'crossroads' between continents brought about not only numerous waves of immigration but also turned it into 'the object of a long series of foreign invasions'⁴ long before it became an actual territorial entity. Immigration and invasions resulted in the population of the territory ethnically mirroring 'a crossroads between the Middle East and Africa',⁵ and its geostrategic position rendered it an object of constant interest to external actors on a regional as well as on an international level.

While the Italians considered their first-born colony mainly a springboard to gaining control over the Ethiopian hinterland, Eritrea's wider strategic importance was confirmed after the British occupation of the territory and the beginning of the BMA. After occupying the Italian colony in 1941, the British authorities and their American allies quickly started using the territory for important war projects.⁶ American interest in the territory remained strong after the Second World War because of the strategic value of the coastline for America's main ally Ethiopia on the one hand, and for their own interest in the Middle East, North Africa, and the region of the Indian Ocean, on the other. The Eritrean ports of Massawa and Assab provide the closest and most accessible links for trade with Ethiopia while the Red Sea, in general, is an important gateway to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean in the north as well as the Gulf of Aden and the

⁴ Dan Connell, 'The Birth of the Eritrean nation', p. 15.

⁵ Tekle M. Woldemikael, 'Eritrea's Identity as a Cultural Crossroads', in: Spickard, Paul R. (ed.), *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World* (New York; London: Routledge, 2005), p. 340.

⁶ Stephen H. Longrigg (1945), pp. 150-151.

Indian Ocean in the south. Therefore, as Haile pointed out, the importance of Eritrea for international powers stems from its position 'on the crossroads between indispensable Middle East oil and the economies of the industrialized countries.'⁷

The Eritrean 'non-relationship' with the superpowers

The relationship of Eritrea with both the USA and the USSR was always intrinsically linked to the relationship of the two superpowers with Ethiopia as well as to the Ethiopian-Israeli relationship. The latter was of special relevance due to the strong Israeli-American partnership in the region, and the fact that American policy in the Horn of Africa was always oriented toward the protection of Israeli interests. American and Russian interests in the Horn have to be understood within the Cold War context and seen as competing attempts to acquire a foothold in this strategically important region. Consequently, Ethiopia's relationship with both the US and the USSR, as well as with Israel, must be considered in order to fully appreciate superpower interests and politics with regard to Eritrea.

For the US, the Eritrean territory was deemed essential to creating effective defence perimeters in the region and Yohannes claimed that it would be 'an understatement to argue that Eritrea constituted the touchstone in the beginnings of U.S.-Ethiopian relations in the 1940s and retained a key role in future dealings.'⁸ In fact, the Americans had started to build up facilities in the strategically important highlands and ports of Eritrea during the BMA, and the maintenance of these established facilities was the major concern of the US when it came to decide on the future of the former Italian colonies. The communications base in Asmara was of special importance due to its specific location that left the facility practically unaffected by electrical and magnetic disturbances and, therefore, made it an important

⁷ Semere Haile, 'Historical Background', p.11.

⁸ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 133.

communications component of the US network, especially the NATO area in Western Europe. This explains the initial American support of a British trusteeship, specifically over the important areas of Asmara and the ports, in order to best protect US interests at the established facilities. However, when it became clear by mid-1948 that the British were to relinquish all control over the territory, the American attitude quickly changed.

Ethiopian control of the territory was now considered to best serve US interests in keeping its communications facilities. Furthermore, American support for Ethiopia also reflected the concern that the Soviet Union might exploit Ethiopia for its own strategic purposes. A concern not unfounded, as Spencer noted, because by the end of 1947, 'the Soviet Union had already embarked on a programme of assistance to Ethiopia.'⁹ Therefore, the US position with regard to the future of Eritrea also has to be considered linked to Cold War considerations. Speaking before the UN Security Council in 1952, John Foster Dulles made it clear that

[f]rom the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.¹⁰

In fact, the US sought a whole package of diplomatic privileges from Ethiopia in exchange for pushing through the UN resolution on federation. A number of declassified documents published by the *Journal of Eritrean Studies* in 1987 and 1988 showed how guarantees for the use of strategic facilities were traded against securing access to the sea.¹¹

It was only in 1955 that the US communications base at Radio Marina was re-established outside Asmara and renamed Kagnew. Additionally, the US was granted use of the naval facilities at Massawa as well as extensive over-flight privileges throughout

⁹ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 193.

¹⁰ As quoted in Dan Connell, 'The birth of the Eritrean nation', p. 20.

¹¹ See *Journal of Eritrean Studies* 2:1 (1987), pp. 37-52 and 2:2 (1988), pp. 25-40.

the whole of Ethiopia. Following a strategy of *quid pro quo* the Ethiopians only entered the agreement in exchange for military assistance and became the main recipient of US military and economic aid in Africa for the next two decades; Ethiopia quickly assembled the strongest military on the African continent. This very special relationship contributed decisively to the UN decision to make Eritrea a unit of a federation within Ethiopia and also the silence of the international community ‘over the undermining of Eritrea’s autonomy.’¹² There was essentially no international reaction when Ethiopia, step by step, reduced Eritrea’s autonomy and ultimately annexed the territory. The Eritrean issue was considered an internal Ethiopian affair and Spencer noted that America did not want to become engaged in ‘any political or military involvement in Ethiopia beyond what was required to assure continued use of that facility [Kagnew].’¹³

With the US-Ethiopian relationship developing, the Soviet Union emerged as an advocate of Eritrean independence in 1950, supporting the self-determination of the former colony in line with the Soviet Marxist state doctrine. During the deliberations on the future of Eritrea at the UN, the Soviet representative claimed that ‘[t]he USSR has consistently supported the proposal that Eritrea should be granted independence’ and that ‘[t]he USSR delegation cannot [...] support the proposal for federation, which is the outcome of the struggle among the colonial powers for a new partition of the former Italian colonies’.¹⁴ In fact, that this support was guided by Soviet strategic interests rather than concern for ‘the longing of the Eritrean people for independence and freedom from national oppression’¹⁵ had already been revealed at the beginning of the debate at the UN in April 1949 when the Soviet envoy claimed that the French and British were collaborating with the US in order to present a ‘united front’ to the General Assembly of the UN as ‘[t]he three western Powers sought to maintain their hold on the

¹² David Pool (1997), p. 11.

¹³ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 264.

¹⁴ ‘USSR representative to the United Nations’, as quoted in: David Pool (1997), p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

former Italian colonies at any cost in order that they might be utilized as strategic bases for any possible military action against the Soviet Union and People's democracies.'¹⁶

After the decision on federation, the USSR was keen to procure a foothold in the strategically important region and the US-Ethiopian agreements on military aid only intensified Soviet interests. While Ethiopia tried to prevent any sort of infiltration by the Soviet Union, the latter considered Ethiopia an ideal location from which to penetrate into the rest of Africa, and accordingly the USSR steadily increased its activities in the Horn. Somalia was used as a base for military build-up and 'the Soviet Union was utilizing Eritrea as the northern half of a clamp being constructed to close on Ethiopia against the southern half in the Ogaden: the Soviets supported Syria and Iraq with money and arms destined for the so-called liberation movement in Eritrea.'¹⁷ While the Soviet Union consistently refused to give any direct or official support to the developing nationalist movement in Eritrea, weapons were supplied indirectly through Soviet allies such as Sudan, Somalia and Syria, and ELF fighters were trained in socialist countries with strong links to the Soviet Union such as Cuba, China and Algeria; Mordechai asserts that by 1970 the military aid channelled to Ethiopia's neighbours 'had completely changed the balance of power in the area.'¹⁸

For Ethiopia, US military assistance was vital in maintaining the struggle against the liberation movement in Eritrea (and the Ogaden) and hence relations with the US were considered the 'antibiotic for the infections of regionalism'.¹⁹ However, a number of developments were to bring about a shifting of alliances in the region in the mid-1970s. While Ethiopia had received 73 billion USD in military assistance from the US

¹⁶ 'Statement by Andrei A. Gromyko (The position of the U.S.S.R. at the beginning of the debate at the U.N.) at the third Session of the General Assembly', Part II, 240th Meeting, Plenary Meeting, 09.04.1949. in: Habtu Ghebre.Ab (1993), p. 133.

¹⁷ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 267.

¹⁸ Mordechai Abir, 'The Contentious Horn of Africa', *Conflict Studies* 24 (June 1972), p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

by 1963²⁰, Spencer suggests that US-Ethiopian relations were beginning to cool as early as 1959.²¹ He linked this to American policy on the Suez Canal, as well as the Greater Somaliland issue, and asserted that pressure from the non-aligned camp on Ethiopia resulted in a drift towards the Soviet Union. This put Ethiopia in a position where it could play off the two superpowers against each other; American awareness of the possibility of losing their ally to its Cold War rival led to the US acquiescing to growing Ethiopian demands for military assistance, mainly to finance the fight against the Eritrean liberation movement in the north.²² Lefebvre argues that the US also considered the Eritrean struggle an ideal testing field for the counterinsurgency doctrine introduced by the Kennedy administration,²³ especially as the Eritrean liberation movement was perceived as being extremely vulnerable due to its internal divisions and consequently easy to overcome. Operations such as 'Plan Delta', which involved sending an advisory team of 164 men in 1966 to increase the skills of the Ethiopian army, and other training measures were all part of the American counterinsurgency plan. Yet, this policy also placed American nationals in danger as the US involvement did not go unnoticed by the Liberation Front and was answered with kidnappings such as that of the American Consul General in Asmara, Murrey Jackson, in 1969.²⁴ In an attempt to avoid any visible US interference, most of the operational responsibility lay with America's ally Israel; in turn Israel 'was assigned to recruit mostly from among Eritrean and Ethiopian Christians, most likely intended to aggravate the vertical

²⁰ Marina Ottaway (1982), p. 27.

²¹ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 26.

²² See e.g. TNA, FO371/172820, From Addis Ababa to Foreign Office, telegram No. 544, 23.11.1963, TNA, FO371/172820, From Addis Ababa to Foreign Office, telegram No. 7, 18.11.1963.

²³ The doctrine was based on the conviction that using external sustained manipulation could help to break any national movement. On the doctrine see e.g.: Charles Jr. Maechling, 'Counterinsurgency: The first ordeal by fire', in: Michael T. Klare/Peter Kornbluh (eds.), *Low-Intensity Warfare: counterinsurgency, proinsurgency, and antiterrorism in the eighties* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), pp.21 – 48.

²⁴ See Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), p. 145/146.

divisions of Eritrean society.²⁵ However, America's political and military support for Ethiopia as well as its complete disregard of Eritrea's right to self-determination provided grounds for agreement between the different communities as well as between the liberation Fronts. The ELF's depiction of the US as Ethiopia's 'imperialist master(s)', and the independence struggle as a fight against 'the imperialist forces',²⁶ was also followed by the breakaway groups and by the EPLF.²⁷

A combination of factors such as American economic problems, the *détente* policy introduced by the Nixon administration and the decision to move American military facilities from Eritrea to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean contributed directly to the erosion of relations between the US and Ethiopian.²⁸ There was no American support for Haile Selassie on the ground in Ethiopia during the mounting crisis and then revolution of 1974. Initially, the US continued its economic and military assistance to the new regime, the Dergue, until mass executions carried out by the latter caused immense public relations problems. The US announced that 'its future economic and military aid to Addis Ababa would be subject to review'²⁹ as it tried to preserve the traditional relationship between the two countries. In Ethiopia, following the introduction of 'Ethiopian socialism' and the continuous repression of moderate elements 'by the summer of 1976, state propaganda apparati had become overtly anti-American and pro-Soviet'.³⁰ From early 1975 onwards, published reports about Ethiopian atrocities became more widespread in the international media, as did numerous eyewitness reports by the large number of Eritrean refugees, some of whom had fled to Western countries. The political establishment in the US began to examine the issue more closely and realized that the US and its international reputation were

²⁵ Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 165.

²⁶ TNA, FO1043/78, Eritrean Liberation Front, 'The struggle for Eritrean National Liberation', no date (probably 1967).

²⁷ See, e.g., 'Our struggle and its goals'.

²⁸ See Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p.68/69.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 76

becoming too embroiled in the conflict.³¹ Continuing support for the Ethiopian regime and its cruelties was difficult to justify to the American public, especially after the recent disaster in Vietnam. After Mengistu took over control of the Dergue in February 1977, the US finally ended its assistance; the last American troops left the bases in Asmara, the American ambassador departed from Addis in 1981, and ‘during the Reagan administration Ethiopia [...] remained on the list of pariah Marxist states publicly condemned by the president and other senior officials.’³²

In contrast, the Soviet Union began its direct involvement with Ethiopia at the end of 1976 by signing an arms deal worth 200 million USD.³³ Two points make this change in allies especially important: first, once the Soviet Union created an alliance with Ethiopia, the rest of the Socialist block followed, despite the fact that the EPLF had itself taken up a programme of social revolution combined with a revolutionary movement for national independence by the late 1970s.³⁴ Second, Eritrea would become the only nation that, throughout its ongoing struggle for independence, was indirectly yet successfully fighting against both superpowers, a point often stressed by Eritreans. The Second National Congress of the EPLF actually claimed that ‘US economic and diplomatic support aimed at winning over the Dergue has supplemented Soviet military aid and enabled the regime to continue its military adventures’ and, therefore, ‘both superpowers have created complications and obstructed a just peaceful resolution of the Eritrean case’.³⁵ The lack of international support for the Eritrean cause and the fact that all appeals to the US and the Soviet Union were ignored left the Eritrean population with the strongly held perception of being abandoned by the entire world. This was, and

³¹ ELF-PLF, Foreign Mission, *Congressional Document: American Military Aid to Ethiopia*, from U.S. Congress Minutes of July 19, 1976.

³² Herman J. Cohen, *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent* (Basingstoke Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), p.6.

³³ Marina Ottaway (1982), p. 103.

³⁴ Most notable are here probably Cuba and Eastern Germany, that both sent a considerable number of soldiers and military advisors to Ethiopia as well.

³⁵ RDC, E.P.L.F./Arm/Str/147 03255, Concluding declaration of the 2nd orgganzational [sic] congress of the E.P.L.F., 19.03.1987,

still is, often used as an argument for a policy of austerity and self-reliance and became an important part of Eritrean national identity during the struggle for independence and beyond. It was, furthermore, considered a continuation of Western disrespect for the wishes of the Eritrean population and fostered the strengthening of a cohesive identity by adding another 'them' layer to the already existing one represented by the Ethiopian State.

A change in American and Soviet policy towards Eritrea only occurred under the Bush administration (1989-1993) and was strongly related to the end of the Cold War and American attempts to achieve closer cooperation with the new Soviet regime under Gorbachev. Furthermore, the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia (and Eritrea) as well as the issue of the Ethiopian Jewry constituted hot topics that required the US to engage with the regime in Addis Ababa. From the Soviet perspective, cooperation with America was welcomed from a very practical point of view. After supporting both Ethiopia and Angola for years, 'the Soviets could no longer afford these costly burdens in Africa and did not believe either conflict could be resolved through military means.'³⁶

Due to the prolonged conflict with Eritrean guerrilla forces, morale amongst the Ethiopians was low, especially as the country was in the midst of a famine more devastating than any previous; it had become impossible to explain to the public why more than half of the national budget was spent on weaponry. It was also embarrassing for the Soviets, who supplied Ethiopia with weapons and other military support, that all of the considerable international humanitarian relief effort was coming from Western aid.³⁷ Hence, the Soviet Union was trying to phase out assistance to Ethiopia without losing face by decisively reducing its military presence and supply. Ethiopia then had to look for support elsewhere which worked in favour of the US. The American government's former Senior Advisor on Africa (1987-89) and Assistant Secretary of

³⁶ Herman J. Cohen (2000), p. 5.

³⁷ See Michela Wrong (2005), p. 323.

State for African Affairs (1989-1993), Herman Cohen, noted that due to Ethiopian attempts to replace Soviet military support with Israeli arms and technical assistance through the US, the latter was 'able to take advantage of this scenario to exercise considerable influence on the protagonists.'³⁸

While Ethiopia attempted to use the Falasha Jews as a bargaining chip, linking their emigration to Israel to military assistance,³⁹ the US actually tried to use its influence as mediator to work towards ending the war between Ethiopia and Eritrean nationalists. American policy makers generally considered Eritrea an integral part of Ethiopia and supported territorial integrity. Consequently, the 'secessionist' Eritreans fighting for independence could not be assisted even though EPLF awareness campaigns started to reach even high-profile officials like Cohen, as his speaking engagements were protested by Eritrean-Americans who 'were relentless picketers.'⁴⁰ Interestingly, Cohen displayed a much more understanding attitude towards the TPLF and the *Oromo Liberation Front* (OLF); the former was simply branded 'Marxist-Leninist Albanians' while the latter were actually deemed to have objectives that were 'understandable',⁴¹ despite the fact that both, unlike Eritrea, had never existed as separate territorial entities.

Cohen's August 1989 visit was the first by an American Assistant Secretary of State to Ethiopia for fifteen years. Prepared with a checklist of demands, he was surprised to find Mengistu 'swallow his pride and act like a pussycat';⁴² Mengistu's attitude can be explained by the fact that he was worried about losing Soviet military support and desperate to find new allies, especially new military suppliers. In fact, the regime proved quick to meet the demands made by the US administration; with regard

³⁸ Herman, J. Cohen (2000), p. 9.

³⁹ For a detailed first-hand account on the issue of the Falasha see the memoirs of Herman J. Cohen (2000), p. 28ff.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴² Ibid., p. 25.

to the conflict with the EPLF this meant a first round of peace talks presided over by former US president Jimmy Carter in Atlanta, Georgia, that took place from 9-19 September 1989. These failed due to the Ethiopian refusal to allow UN observers to participate. While the US remained the accepted negotiator between the EPLF and the Ethiopian government, further peace talks were marked by American support for Ethiopia's territorial integrity, with a return to federation being the preferred solution. However, the Eritrean fighters, with military victory in reach, refused to consider this as an option. By the end of 1990 very little had been achieved as '[t]he EPLF wanted to talk only about self-determination, while the GPDRE wanted to talk only about federalism.'⁴³

Eventually, it was the military victory of the TPLF and the EPLF that ended the conflict, not negotiations.⁴⁴ Winning what an ex-fighter called 'the forgotten war' in which 'everyone was against us' became an important part of Eritrean national identity since '[w]inning that war meant we came to exist as a nation'.⁴⁵ In the 1993 referendum, the Eritrean population clearly opted for independence, not least because the long struggle for independence against Ethiopia and its allies had cemented Eritrean national identity as distinct from Ethiopia.

Eritrean-Arab partnership vs. Ethiopian-Israeli alliance

Despite the fact that the Eritrean liberation movement has often been depicted as 'largely foreign inspired and financed' by Arab countries,⁴⁶ especially during the early stages of the independence struggle, such claims were highly exaggerated and used to construct a picture of a liberation front directed from outside. While Arab support for

⁴³ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁴ Even though Herman Cohen states that intervention by the US precipitated an earlier end to the war, there was also a perception within the Ethiopian army that war was almost over which led to a decreasing motivation to fight. See Herman, J. Cohen (2000), p. 58/59.

⁴⁵ As quoted in: Michela Wrong (2005), p. 370.

⁴⁶ David Pool (1997), p. 7.

and influence on the Eritrean nationalist movement existed, most Arab countries were inconsistent in their attitude towards the Eritrean cause, with the notable exception of Syria and Iraq.⁴⁷ By the late 1960s, ELF offices existed in virtually all Arab countries; yet the majority of Arab states constantly changed their position according to their wider international and regional interests which were largely linked to superpower politics as well as to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In general it is fair to say, as Pool noted, that ‘Arab support has not been as strong as western journalists have imagined.’⁴⁸

Egypt was one of the Arab countries with a particular interest in the territory as it had formerly possessed parts of it, namely the coastal area of Massawa. When the Four Powers decided on the future of Eritrea, Egypt was one of the powers claiming rights over its former possession, tracing the entitlement back to pre-Ottoman times. Referring back to assurances by the Italians that the dispatch of Italian troops to Massawa in 1885 was not to be seen as an act of seizure, Egypt was hoping that ‘she will be granted her request and that her historic rights to Massawah will be conceded.’⁴⁹ However, Egyptian claims did not play a substantial role in the negotiations over the disposal of Eritrea. Of greater importance to Eritrea in the negotiations over its future was neighbouring Sudan; proposals that the Western provinces of Eritrea should become part of the Sudan were suggested by the British and reflected their interests more than those of Sudan which had a traditionally close relationship with Ethiopia, the source of 80 per cent of its water.⁵⁰ Furthermore, neither Egyptian claims over Eritrean territory nor the proposal to join the Western provinces with Sudan were ever endorsed by the Eritrean Muslim community as they did not reflect its nationalist aspirations.

The Muslim states, together with the Latin American-French bloc, were the only

⁴⁷ Marina Ottaway (1982), p. 29.

⁴⁸ David Pool (1982), p. 45.

⁴⁹ ‘Note concerning Egyptian rights on Massawah’, Paris, 30 August, 1946, in: Habtu Ghebre-Ab (1993), p. 61.

⁵⁰ John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and U.S. Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1977), p. 64.

governments who strongly opposed Eritrean-Ethiopian federation during negotiations at the UN. Trevaski pointed out the possibility that discontented Eritrean Muslims might turn to their religious brothers in the Arab countries to gain support for their cause.⁵¹ In fact, numerous Eritrean nationalist leaders went into Arab exile, predominantly in Egypt and Sudan, where they received educational and military training. Yet, many chose exile in these countries largely because of the proximity to Eritrea independent of their own religious affiliation. The most prominent example was the Protestant Woldeab Woldemariam who affirmed that his choice to stay in Egypt, despite having the possibility of moving to Europe or the US, was predicated on the closeness of the country to Eritrea.⁵² However, the fact that most Muslim Eritreans also spoke Arabic certainly predisposed their choice of exile. Although Arabism may have been a binding force, it is questionable to what extent it actually influenced the identity of Eritrean Muslims. Wai ascribed the noticeable differences in the value systems of Africans and Arabs 'as products of the social structures and environments' and claimed that 'the impact of European culture on Africans is considerably greater than the impact of Arab culture.'⁵³

The proximity of the exiles certainly facilitated the launch of the Eritrean liberation movements, and the newly-established ELF quickly adapted Pan-Arab rhetoric for their own use. In an attempt to weaken the growing nationalist movement in Egypt and to prevent decisive support from countries hosting Eritrean exiles, Haile Selassie went on an official state visit to Cairo in 1959. Yohannes claims that Nasser did not really care about Eritrean independence but rather saw his influence on the movement as some sort of bargaining tool for any dealings with Ethiopia.⁵⁴ In fact, radio broadcasts into Eritrea by the nationalists were soon terminated and, although the

⁵¹ Gerald K.N. Trevaskis (1960), p. 130.

⁵² RDC, Bio/265/06167, p. 9.

⁵³ Dunstan M. Wai, 'The Future of Afro-Arab Relations', *Horn of Africa* 1:4 (1978), p. 38.

⁵⁴ See Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 160.

multi-communal *Political Committee of the Eritrean People's Legal Representatives Abroad* was still financed privately by Egypt until 1963,⁵⁵ the headquarters of the movement had to relocate to Syria after 1963. The change in Egypt's official policy towards the Eritrean nationalists was linked to Nasser's involvement in the OAU, which made him adhere to the principle of respecting colonial borders as interpreted by the organization. Other visits scheduled by Haile Selassie throughout the Middle East with the same aim turned out to be less successful.⁵⁶ However, this has to be largely seen in the context of the strong Ethiopian link with Israel as well as the American presence and military installations in Eritrea.

Spencer claims that the annexation of the Eritrean territory by Ethiopia in 1962 resulted in 'a redoubling of efforts by the Arab states, through propaganda, money and arms, to undermine that union', which in turn accelerated accusations of the movement being instigated from abroad.⁵⁷ However, it was rather the fact that support for the Eritrean cause could be garnered neither from the Western world nor from African countries that resulted in the Eritrean Muslim community turning towards the Arab countries. The fact that the ELF was initially dominated by a Muslim membership certainly facilitated the inscription of the Eritrean struggle within the pan-Arabist framework and the ELF leadership attempted to prove that historically 'Eritrea was part of the Arab world'.⁵⁸ However, this link was probably only sought to strengthen Arab support and, as one ex-fighter noted in an interview, 'the Arab countries probably thought that Eritrea is an Arab country and for this reason they supported the independence struggle'.⁵⁹ Pan-Arab support was also engendered by rhetorically equating the Eritrean uprising with the Palestinian struggle for independence and

⁵⁵ TNA, Letter from the British Embassy Cairo to the North and East African Department, Foreign Office, 28.08.1963

⁵⁶ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 321.

⁵⁷ John H. Spencer (1984), p. 319.

⁵⁸ TNA, FO371/17820, Letter from the British Embassy Cairo to the Foreign Office, North and East African Department, 28.08.1963.

⁵⁹ Interview with Amanuel Eyasu (by Skype), London/Munich, 19.10.2013.

linking the fight against Zionist imperialism to the fight against Ethiopian imperialism.⁶⁰ Yet, the equation of the Eritrean with the Palestinian struggle was not based on religious or 'Arab' values; both struggles were rather viewed in the wider context of the struggle of suppressed peoples for the right to self-determination. Both Muslim and Christian Eritrean fighters were trained by Syrians and Iraqis in the field and abroad,⁶¹ yet the actual influence on the fighters in the field appears to have been 'very, very limited.'⁶² However, the interpretation of the liberation struggle as a Muslim and Arab movement was strongly opposed by the growing numbers of Christian recruits in the ELF and this contributed to a large part to the crisis of the organisation and the emergence of break-away groups in 1969/1970. Consequently, the ELF later moved to describe its relationship with the Arab nations in rather general terms as a 'militant, organic, historical, and cultural one based on bonds of the joint destiny, mutual and common interests, and solidarity in face of menace and aggression of Zionism, colonialism and imperialism and the agent forces.'⁶³

The Ethiopian-Israeli relationship was largely initiated by Ben-Gurion's 'Policy of the Periphery' which aimed to form special relations with states on the edge of the Middle East.⁶⁴ Yet it was also based on a similar perception of the two countries' position in the region, thus seeing them as 'natural allies'. Ethiopia considered itself 'a Christian society surrounded by Muslim Arab nations', which may be seen as comparable to the Israeli position as only non-Arab country in the Middle East.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See e.g. RDC, ETH/BIO/43.04, Letters signed by Woldeab Woldemariam, Mohamed Saleh Mahmud, Taher Ibrahim, Zeggai Cahssai (Delegation of ELM), Telegraph Cairo 14.01.1964, p. 2.

⁶¹ Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013.

⁶² 'An Exclusive Interview with Ahmed M. Nasser by Saleh Younis (Awate.com), 29.01.2009. GS Private Archives, see also Interview with Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013.

⁶³ ELF, *ELF: The national revolutionary vanguard of the Eritrean people*, no date (probably 1977/1978), p. 20.

⁶⁴ For details on the 'Policy of the Periphery' see Michael Bar-Zohar, 'Ben-Gurion and the Policy of the Periphery', in: Rabinovich, Itamar/ Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *Israel and the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, 1948-present* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 164-171.

⁶⁵ Herman J. Cohen (2000), p. 21.

Moreover, the two countries also felt linked to each other historically as ‘an ancient colony of Ethiopian Jews [had existed] dating back to biblical times’, and the Ethiopians traced their history back to ‘the love affair between their Queen of Sheba and the Hebrew’s King Solomon, producing Ethiopia’s first monarch, Menelik I.’⁶⁶ The establishment of an independent Eritrea was opposed by Israel not only for reasons of solidarity, but also for fear that a pro-Arab Eritrea might blockade the Bab al-Mandeb strait which would greatly harm Israel’s economy. This worry was not unfounded since the *People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen* (PDRY), which had close ties to Marxist Palestinian guerrillas, ‘had declared its intention of closing the Bab el-Mandab to Israeli navigation already in 1967.’⁶⁷ After the Six-Day War, the Red Sea was used more extensively by Israeli shipping and this only increased the Arab desire to maintain its influence over the Eritrean coast. Moreover, Ethiopia’s close relationship with Israel and the presence of Israeli military advisors in Addis Ababa actually contributed to the ELF securing Arab support since it came to be seen as a liberation movement fighting a pro-Israeli regime and Israeli attempts to use Eritrea as a base for its war against the Arab world.⁶⁸ Arab aid, especially from the Syrian Ba’ath regime, increased at the beginning of 1968 ‘and Damascus radio broadcast daily ELF propaganda.’⁶⁹

With the shift of superpower allies after the 1974 revolution, the Israeli-Ethiopian relationship changed decisively, yet Israel continued to try to reforge an alliance mainly because of its connection to Ethiopian Jewry. The regime change in Ethiopia also altered relations with a number of Arab countries and directly influenced the nature of Arab support for the Eritrean nationalists. Throughout its early years, the ELF had been supported by Sudan which ‘provided the ELF with essential facilities

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Mordechai Abir (1972), p. 7.

⁶⁸ RDC, His/Arm/Stru/374 10630, Eritrean Liberation Committee, ‘Eritrean Liberation’, *Workers International Newsletter* 1 (January 1974).

⁶⁹ Mordechai Abir (1972), p. 7.

such as staging bases, supply depots for smuggled arms and shelter from the Ethiopian army.⁷⁰ Yet this support was inconsistent since it strongly depended on Sudan's own internal political developments. Sudan feared that Ethiopia might use the rebels in South Sudan for retaliation and that the Eritrean struggle might serve as a precedent for these rebels: as a result, Sudan was cautious about its level of direct support for the Eritrean nationalists.⁷¹ After Nimery seized power in 1969, the new regime in Sudan tried to establish a friendlier relationship with Ethiopia, and the first civil war in Sudan was brought to an end with the signing of an agreement by the two warring parties in Addis Ababa; 'but the regimes in Addis Ababa and Khartoum remained alert to opportunities to undermine one another.'⁷² The short *détente* between the two countries was finally crushed by the Dergue's collaboration with Libya that had previously supported the Eritrean liberation movement but was willing to trade support in exchange for permission to use Ethiopian territory to stage the overthrow of the Sudanese President Jafaar Nimery in July 1976.⁷³ The failure of the Libyan attempt and the Ethiopian involvement led to Nimery reconsidering his neutrality concerning the Eritrean independence struggle and his offering of full support to the liberation movement.

While the relationship of the ELF with Arab countries had initially been largely based on the emphasis of common religion and 'Arab-ness', it was decisively different with the emerging break-away groups that were to develop into the EPLF. The new coalition was still benefitting from Arab support through its collaboration with Osman Saleh Sabbe, yet it dismissed viewing the Eritrean liberation struggle in a Pan-Arab context from the beginning. It rather stressed that the alignment with the Middle East anti-imperialistic front only came about due to the physical proximity to the Arab world and the understanding of the liberation struggle as part of the world-wide anti-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷¹ John H. Spencer (1977), p. 65.

⁷² Richard Reid (2011), p. 178.

⁷³ Marina Ottaway (1982), p. 113.

imperialist struggle. It emphasized that ‘when we line up in the struggle together with our Arab comrades, it is only because of our revolutionary conviction and the dictate of our strategic relationship, and not because we are Arabs or Moslems.’⁷⁴ Accordingly, ‘smashing’ Israeli Zionism was one of the objectives of the EPLF along with combating the global imperialism of the United States.⁷⁵ This anti-Western position changed after the second EPLF congress in 1987 due to the conviction that a diplomatic offensive towards the West would be more useful to the Eritrean cause.

Overall, while Arab support was at least partly based on the belief in a religious bond and a common Arab identity, for the Eritreans this collaboration had predominantly practical reasons. Arab financial and political support was vital for the independence struggle but it did not have any substantive impact on the formation of Eritrean national identity; one reason for this may have been the continually shifting alliances of most Arab countries. Muslim and Arab elements had existed in Eritrea for centuries and remained an important part of the country’s identity yet these ethnic and religious markers never became primary bases of Eritrean national identity.

LEBANON

The geostrategic position of Lebanon

Discourse on Lebanese identity has always seen a lively discussion surrounding the fact that Lebanon is located at the crossroads of East and West. Bustani asserted that this ‘unique status as a bridgehead’ between the Arab states and the West had been recognized and appreciated by the Arabs as it helped them to maintain good relations with Western nations.⁷⁶ In Lebanon itself, this expression was used predominantly to emphasise the unique identity and ideology of the country yet it also hinted at the

⁷⁴ ‘Our Struggle and its Goals’, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.16.

⁷⁶ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, ‘The Lebanon’, p. 5.

geostrategic importance of the location of the territory. This strategic importance of the Levant states (Lebanon and Syria) had been highlighted towards the end of the Second World War by Sir Edward Spears who called the Levant ‘the most important theatre in the world’ apart from Britain.⁷⁷ This view was largely based on the potential threat to British control over the Suez Canal and Egypt since the British military stationed in Alexandria ‘could not [...] [have] held out [...] under air attack from the Levant.’⁷⁸

The military importance of the territory was recognized by the US for exactly this reason, Lebanon’s shoreline potential for air bases. Due to already existing lines of communications and bases, the country was considered important for ‘a forward defense in the Middle East’.⁷⁹ In addition, its geographical location endowed Lebanon with a certain economic importance since the majority of oil pipelines from the Persian Gulf area and Iraq terminated at the Lebanese ports of Beirut and Tripoli.

The territory thus was of great interest to a number of external actors, yet the governments of independent Lebanon displayed a relative inability to formulate a clear and independent foreign policy. This inability can be traced back to the lack of a cohesive national identity that would allow for a uniform policy in general. As Salame formulated:

Sects and political parties have different foreign policies: they use their relations with foreign powers to strengthen their positions on the local scene, creating a fertile ground for foreign interference and ignoring that in this way they may destroy their country’s independence and jeopardize its national unity.⁸⁰

In fact, Lebanon never had a central government strong enough to develop and implement an unequivocal foreign policy. The National Pact of 1943 did not provide clear definition on the orientation of foreign policy; on the contrary, it left a lot of room

⁷⁷ Sir Edward Spears (1977), p. 30/31.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, A Report by the Joint Committee on Programs for Military Aid for the Middle East, 03.02.1957, as quoted in Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 128.

⁸⁰ Ghassan Salame, ‘Is a Lebanese Foreign Policy Possible?’, in: Halim Barakat (ed.). (1988), *Toward a Viable Lebanon* (Washington DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1988), p. 347.

for interpretation which resulted in relations with the West and solidarity with the Arab world remaining highly controversial issues from 1943 onwards. Furthermore, the Lebanese political system left the country highly susceptible to external influences. To solve this dilemma, successive Lebanese governments officially proclaimed a policy of neutrality and non-alignment and, especially after the 1958 crisis, 'extreme restraint was the keynote of Lebanese foreign policy.'⁸¹ Speaking at the seventh non-alignment summit in 1983, Amine Gemayel described Lebanon's non-alignment policy as 'the cornerstone of the Lebanese State, and indeed [...] one of the reasons for its existence.'⁸² Furthermore, non-alignment was considered essential to 'ensure[s] her security and promote[s] her internal unity.'⁸³

Although this policy of non-alignment was presented as part of the Lebanese identity, it was tested numerous times throughout Lebanon's independence history, especially in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Lebanon and superpower interests in the Middle East

Despite Lebanon's internationally important strategic position, the country was mainly influenced by regional events and actors until the mid-1950s; it was a regional development - the run-up to the Suez crisis - that not only exposed the internal dispute over foreign policy matters but also saw the US become directly involved in the conflict. In Lebanon, the ongoing power struggle between a pro-Western government and the pro-Arab opposition exacerbated the impact of regional and international developments which, in turn, contributed directly to further deepening the already existing conflict inside the country. The highly polarized international system during the Cold War only intensified the Lebanese situation, and all actions by the US and the

⁸¹ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 111.

⁸² Amine Gemayel, Speech entitled 'Lebanon: War or Peace' delivered at the seventh non-aligned summit, New Delhi, 09.03.1983, in: Amine Gemayel (1984), p. 83.

⁸³ Ibid.

Soviet Union have to be examined within this context. Nasser's rise to power and the expansion of his influence in the region developed into a major concern for the US since 'Arab nationalism was seen as the enemy and its policy of non-alignment as a tacit alliance with the Soviet camp.'⁸⁴ To counter this development, the strengthening of Lebanese authorities became part of the US strategy in the region that due to its geostrategic location could serve as a 'bridgehead' for a potential military intervention in the region.⁸⁵

The American position agreed with the Lebanese government under Sham'un who also considered Arab nationalism a threat to regional order. The growing influence of Arab nationalism and the run-up to the Suez crisis required taking a stand and on 15 January 1951, the Lebanese cabinet 'unanimously decided henceforward to align their policy with that of the Western democracies.'⁸⁶ This would also include making facilities such as ports and aerodromes available to Western democracies in exchange for defence agreements.⁸⁷ Sham'un tried not only to manipulate Cold War rivalries to gain economically and politically but also to keep domestic opposition in check. Furthermore, 'he saw in the Cold War a golden opportunity to put Lebanon on the map and avoid marginalization'.⁸⁸ The Soviet Union also tried to make use of the turbulent situation in the region throughout the 1950s, and to gain influence amongst the pan-Arab camp. As Bustani noted:

Her emissaries and propagandists sought everywhere in the Arab world to peddle Communism under the guise of Arab nationalism; to worsen the already disturbed relations between the Arab countries and the West, and to assist any potential saboteur of stability who might, even unwittingly, advance the Communist cause of world subjugation to Moscow. She posed as a lifelong friend of the Arab peoples, carefully omitting to recall the important part she had played in the creation of Israel, and succeeded in making the Middle East the foremost arena in the cold war.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007), p. 130.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ FO371/91435, Cypher from Beirut to Foreign Office, No. 30, 16.1.1951.

⁸⁷ FO371/91435, Lebanese support for the West, J.C. Wardrop, 17.1.1951.

⁸⁸ Fawaz Gerges, 'Lebanon', in: Yeid Sayigh/Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 86.

⁸⁹ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, 'The Lebanon', p. 9.

The pro-Western attitude of the Lebanese government alienated not only pan-Arab states such as Egypt and Syria, but also the Muslim pan-Arab opposition in Lebanon. Since the Arab nationalist cause was aligned with Communism, this brought the Cold War directly into the Lebanese equation. In Lebanon itself, Communism did not play a decisive role; people adhered to Nasser's Arab nationalism on a cultural and religious basis rather than on an ideological one inspired by Communism. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was not really interested in Lebanon itself but rather concentrated its influence on Egypt and Syria.⁹⁰ However, the different alignment of the Lebanese communities with either side of the conflict reinforced opposed nationalist aspirations and decisively shattered any form of cohesive national identity.

Supporting Lebanon openly posed a dilemma to the US since it could never go as far as to confront Syria and Egypt directly and thereby risk provoking a much wider confrontation with the USSR. Yet the US decisively supported Sham'un financially through the CIA in the 1957 elections, to such an extent that the CIA station chief in Beirut at the time, Wilbur Crane Eveland, in his autobiography claimed that the US effectively 'bought' Sham'un a parliament.⁹¹ Despite not wanting to risk a confrontation with the Soviet Union in the region, backing Sham'un was considered important since 'Western failure to support him will have repercussions among all the most moderate and responsible friends and allies of the West in the Middle East Area. Chamoun has come to symbolize to them the forces of resistance to Nasser.'⁹² The funding of his elections had thus been authorized by the US authorities because there was 'increasing evidence of massive Syrian and Egyptian aid to the armed bands now endeavouring to

⁹⁰ Fawaz Gerges, 'Lebanon', p. 87.

⁹¹ Wilbur C. Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1980), p. 266. Eveland also describes how he himself travelled to the presidential palace on a regular basis 'with a briefcase full of Lebanese pounds' (p. 252).

⁹² FO371/134116, Cypher from Beirut to Foreign Office, No. 433, 5.5.1958.

take control of the country.’⁹³

While Bustani asserted that ‘Lebanon is not, and has never been, a neutral in the cold war’ since it ‘has stronger reasons than any other Arab country to remain on good terms with the so called “imperialists”’,⁹⁴ the Lebanese government’s strategy in 1957 was clearly aimed at internationalising the internal dispute and at achieving American involvement through the transformation of ‘purely local feuds [...] into international crisis.’⁹⁵ Sham’un tried to manipulate the US to consolidate its own power. Yet this manipulation appeared mutual to some extent since when the US finally intervened militarily in the conflict it was not primarily to support the Lebanese government. Rather the reasoning behind the intervention was specifically a reaction to the *coup d’état* in Baghdad in July 1958. By intervening in Lebanon the US ‘wanted to signal to their adversaries their readiness to use force, if necessary, to arrest the further crumbling of the Arab conservative order.’⁹⁶ At the same time, Lebanon’s importance in terms of Cold War politics had diminished greatly by the late 1950s, especially because the Soviet Union did not have an interest in Lebanon *per se*. In that respect, both superpowers agreed that Lebanon itself was not important enough to justify a wider confrontation in the region.

For Lebanon though, adherence to the Eisenhower doctrine in 1958 meant that the country linked itself solely to the support of the US and the country turned into ‘the center of America’s presence in the Arab East’ before its descent into civil war in 1975.⁹⁷ Internally, alliance with the US only worsened the divide between the opposing camps which now expressed ever more different understandings of Lebanese national identity. Lebanese Muslims felt that the ‘Arab face’ of the country, as agreed upon in

⁹³ FO371/134116, Cypher from Beirut to Foreign Office, No. 477, 13.5.1958.

⁹⁴ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, ‘The Lebanon’, p. 20.

⁹⁵ Fawaz Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 248.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁹⁷ Michael C. Hudson, ‘The United States Involvement in Lebanon’, in: Halim Barakat (ed.). (1988), p. 210.

the National Pact, had been betrayed by the Lebanese government and American intervention in the country. This was considered an attack against their very identity by their own government that clearly adhered more to a Maronite understanding of Lebanese identity by putting alliance with the West first. Enraged Muslim demonstrators even 'trampled the Lebanese flag in the streets of Tyre'.⁹⁸

Lebanon's importance to the superpowers changed after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The US became Israel's main strategic partner and Hudson argues that henceforth Lebanon's importance to American interests was largely linked to the fact that it shared a border with Israel; consequently 'Lebanon could hardly be of less than vital *political* if not strategic interest for any American government.'⁹⁹ Soviet interest also increased when PLO fighters started their war of resistance against Israel from Lebanese territory. The fighters looked to the Soviets for arms and military training, partly through Soviet-backed Syria. The fact that the PLO was fighting Israel from Lebanese territory also had repercussions for the pro-Western elements in Lebanon and their relationship with the US. Since the latter was one of Israel's staunchest supporters, it urged the pro-Western governments under Helou and Franjieh to contain the guerrilla activities on its territory. All superpower attitudes towards Lebanon, especially during the early stages of the civil war, were based on the basic premise of not letting the conflict spread to other countries in the region.¹⁰⁰ This approach would change after the end of Cold War détente and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

The deteriorating situation in the country during the early stages of the civil war and the entanglement of external forces in the conflict turned the situation increasingly chaotic and strengthened the American perception that 'in many ways Lebanon is not really a country' and that 'virtually all the elements of instability are contained in that

⁹⁸ Fawaz Gerges (1994), p. 105.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁰⁰ Fawaz Gerges, 'Lebanon', p. 94.

small, narrow and unhappy land.’¹⁰¹ The American administration of 1981 was aware that an intervention would probably be needed to end the conflict, yet the situation was much more complicated than in 1958 when US military intervention in support of the Lebanese government helped to resolve the crisis. It was feared that the war in Lebanon could ignite another Arab-Israeli conflict which would have decisively harmed Western interests in the entire region. This perception was not farfetched and was based on the fact that the civil war was fuelled by both Syria and Israel who considered Lebanon a base for either attacking or being attacked by the other.¹⁰² The US agreement to contribute to the multinational peacekeeping force in 1982 has to be understood as a means of damage control which the US only agreed to because it was both multinational and a peacekeeping mission, and bore no similarity to the American involvement in Lebanon in 1958. US mediation efforts also led to the signing of the short-lived 17 May agreement in 1983 which was considered rather ‘curious’ and ‘nullified from the start’ by American officials and quickly faltered.¹⁰³ However, renewed American involvement in Lebanon fuelled the Lebanese Maronite elite’s perception of their country’s vital importance to the US. Amine Gemayel asserted that, after the redeployment of the MNF to Lebanon, the country was ‘one of their priorities in foreign policy with all that this implies in terms of exceptional means’.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the idea of Lebanon being a ‘key in the region’, meaning that ‘if she is stable, so will the region be stable’, was also propagated by the Lebanese government in order to maintain international support.¹⁰⁵

The stand-off between Soviet-supported Syria and US-backed Israel on Lebanese territory directly located the Cold War frontline in Lebanon. The fact that both

¹⁰¹ Caspar Weinberger (1990), p. 94.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 108/109. For details on the agreement see also Michael Kerr (2005), pp. 148-149.

¹⁰⁴ Amine Gemayel (1988), p. 174.

¹⁰⁵ Speech delivered by Amine Gemayel at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 18.10.1982, in: Amine Gemayel (1984), p. 19.

Israel and Syria, and both superpowers, wanted to avoid escalation and direct confrontation on Lebanese territory had resulted in the so-called 'red line agreement' of 1976; this agreement also remained intact after the Israeli invasion in 1982.¹⁰⁶ Gemayel recognized the fundamental role of both superpowers in the region; he considered the Soviet Union an important actor in bringing about a possible peace conference for the entire region, noting that 'the attitude of Moscow was often found to be paradoxically favorable to the Lebanese position, and the Soviet ambassador did not fail to let us know this.'¹⁰⁷ Consequently Gemayel tried to maintain contact with the Soviet Union but at a much lower level than with the US.

Superpower interests in Lebanon were predominantly related to the wider Cold War context and to the fact that the country constituted a sort of 'buffer-zone' between the main allies of the superpowers in the region. Yet, since the opposing politics of the superpowers, as well as their allies, were intrinsically linked to existing divisions within Lebanese society, they negatively impacted any possible formation of a cohesive national identity.

The Arab states, Israel and the Palestinian factor in Lebanon

Apart from the special relationship with its neighbour Syria, Lebanon's relationships with other Arab countries were often problematic, due in large part to the plurality of identities and their respective interests within Lebanon; this resulted in the absence of a unified foreign policy that would have facilitated engagement with Lebanon as a nation. Lebanon's adopted policy of non-alignment and neutrality created major problems when dealing with other Arab states, as well as with pro-Arab elements within the country. This was also reflected in diverging views on the function of organizations of Arab

¹⁰⁶ On the 'red-line agreement' see Rex Brynen (1990), p. 101. For a map showing the red line see Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Amine Gemayel (1988), p. 179.

cooperation such as the Arab League. Although Lebanon was one of the founding members of the Arab League on 22 March 1945, for the Lebanese Christian population this was purely a matter of cooperation with other states; support for the League amongst non-pro-Arab elements in Lebanon was facilitated by the fact that the purpose of the Arab League was for member states 'to safeguard their independence and sovereignty'.¹⁰⁸ In fact, member states of the League voiced heavy criticism of French actions in both Lebanon and Syria in 1945, considering them attempts by the French to preserve 'dictatorship' in these countries.¹⁰⁹ Yet, Hanf asserts that the Lebanese Muslim community considered membership in the League 'a step towards integration', at least by those parts of the Muslim population that still hoped for a re-integration into a Greater Syria.¹¹⁰ In fact, because they saw their identity as intrinsically linked to the Arab world, cooperation with other Arab states constituted a logical extension of their definition of Lebanese national identity.

Official Lebanese policy towards Arab states was based on neutrality, yet the politics of the various communities varied depending on their understanding of Lebanese identity. Consequently, those communities who saw themselves as Arabs strove for an active pro-Arab policy. The position of the Arab states towards Lebanon was heavily influenced by the Palestinian cause, especially after the PLO moved its headquarters into Lebanese territory. Initially, all Lebanese communities' attitude towards the Palestinian cause was quite supportive, especially before 1948. As Longrigg notes, the frequent outbreaks of violent resistance by the local Palestinian population to increased settlement policies by the Zionist movement in Palestine evoked sympathy within the Lebanese population and found expression not only in demonstrations and

¹⁰⁸ Pact of the Arab League of states, Art.2, 22.03.1945, available at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/arableague.htm>, (last accessed 25.02.2014).

¹⁰⁹ Archives diplomatique, Serie Afrique-Levant, Liban 1953-1965, file 279, carton 6, dossier 8D, lettre no. 270 AL, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Note soumise au ministre, Cairo, 25.6.1945.

¹¹⁰ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 111.

public donations, but sometimes even saw volunteers from Lebanon joining the resistance movement in Palestine. While the French authorities were attempting to prevent all such activities during the mandate period, 'the Syrian and Lebanese authorities, at every level, gave all support within their power to Arab brothers.'¹¹¹ However, the situation quickly changed after the founding of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. The Arab-Israeli conflict, and the plight of the Palestinian refugees had a divisive impact on Lebanon, even though, or probably especially because, the Lebanese government tried to avoid direct involvement in the conflict after the Lebanese-Israeli armistice of 1949.¹¹² This policy was based on the fact that Lebanon, as a small, young independent state was still struggling with its own institutions and question of national identity. However, this was a rather short-sighted policy given Lebanon's proximity to Israel which made neutrality in the conflict difficult to maintain. Of course, the problem was aggravated by the fact that a large number of Palestinian refugees came to Lebanon as a result of the 1948 and the 1967 wars. On the regional level, the presence of the Palestinian guerrilla forces in Lebanese territory also heightened Arab interest in Lebanon. Since the Palestinian struggle was considered an Arab cause, attempts by the Lebanese army to crack down on the guerrilla groups operating from Lebanese territory led to retaliations by Arab guerrillas operating from Syria into Lebanon. These attacks resulted in a number of casualties in the Lebanese army and were declared to be understood as a warning by Palestinian guerrilla forces and their Arab supporters. So, instead of Israeli retaliations, which the Lebanese authorities wanted to prevent by not allowing guerrilla operations from their territory, they had to deal with retaliatory attacks from Arab guerrillas. The fact that the attacks came from Syrian territory also played an important role since it 'underscored Syria's role as key foe of Lebanon's attempt to steer a militarily neutral course in the Arab-

¹¹¹ Stephen H. Longrigg (1958), p. 257/258.

¹¹² On the armistice negotiations see Kirsten E. Schulze (1998), p. 27ff.

Israeli conflict.’¹¹³ Furthermore, the policy was partially supported by pro-Arab Lebanese who considered loyalty to Lebanon and the Palestinian and Arab causes as intrinsically linked to each other as expressed by a Lebanese guerrilla leader: ‘We are protecting our honor – the honor of the Lebanese, the Palestinians and all Arabs [...] We carry the Lebanese flag as well as the Palestinian flag.’¹¹⁴

Expectations of a pro-Arab Lebanese foreign policy also destroyed Lebanon’s relationship with a number of Arab states in the wake of the 1958 crisis. The UAR was disappointed with Sham’un’s pro-Western policy and ‘the authorities in Damascus exploited the situation and made it more violent than it need have been’.¹¹⁵ The massive UAR interference in Lebanon helped the country gain some support amongst a number of moderate Arab states, especially Jordan whose King Hussein publicly avowed his support for the Sham’un government, which he considered represented the ‘right cause’ and ‘democracy’.¹¹⁶ Sympathy and support for Sham’un’s government was also voiced by other countries belonging to the Baghdad Pact such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey.¹¹⁷ Bustani argued though, that the 1958 crisis and the American intervention in Lebanon ‘put the clock of Lebanese progress towards Arab Federation back by several decades.’¹¹⁸ In fact, the influence of Cold War politics in the region also contributed to the decline of Lebanon’s relationship with Arab nationalist countries. The Lebanese government was keen to maintain its traditionally good relationship with Western countries, mainly the US, whereas most Arab nationalist countries turned to the Soviet Union for support to counter the strength of the Israeli-American relationship.

As Kirsten Schulze revealed in her study on Israeli covert diplomacy in Lebanon, there also existed an important, yet secret, link between members of the

¹¹³ AUB Archives, Zeine Nour-Ed-Dine Zeine papers, Box 2, file 1, The Arizona Republic, Phoenix/Arizona, Friday, 24.10.1969, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., The Arizona Republic, Phoenix/Arizona, Monday, 27.10.1969, p.1/4.

¹¹⁵ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, ‘The Lebanon’, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ FO371/134116, Telegram from Amman to Foreign Office, No. 516, 13.5.1958.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Cypher from Beirut to Foreign Office, No. 433, 5.5.1958.

¹¹⁸ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, ‘The Lebanon’, p. 16.

Maronite community and Israel. Even before 1948, the Maronites were considered a possible ally by Israel as they represented another large religious minority in the predominantly Muslim area; there was a similar perception amongst the Maronite clergy, some of whom actually proposed an Israeli-Maronite minority-alliance.¹¹⁹

As early as 1953, the Muslims of Lebanon voiced their concern over Maronite-Israeli relations and requested ‘to stop absolutely all secret trade with the Zionist forces in Palestine’¹²⁰ This demand was based on ongoing rumours of Maronite-Israeli cooperation which exacerbated religious tensions in the country:

The former Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, Monsignor Ignatius Mubarak, has always been noted for his favouring the Israelis against the Arabs and for his statements which are sometimes so indiscreet as to embarrass even the Maronite clique, which is not yet ready to defy the Arab world openly. He has made statements which indicated to the UN committee of enquiry on Palestine that he favors the founding of the political Zionist state of Israel as an additional protection to the Christian minorities of the Middle East against the Moslems.¹²¹

In order not to upset the Muslim communities of the country, any relationship had to remain covert; yet the Lebanese Muslim communities were aware of the collaboration and, because of their pro-Arab stance, this contributed to heightening the mistrust between the communities even further.

In fact, Lebanon’s descent into civil war resulted in the positions of the Arab states and Lebanese actors becoming even more rigid. During the civil war, perceptions of Israel as a ‘natural ally’ in a ‘Muslim sea’ were openly propagated in pamphlets by some of the extremist Maronite nationalists groups and parties, such as the *Guardians of the Cedar (Hizb Huruz al-Arz)*.¹²² The fact that the 1982 invasion was preceded by Israel’s covert relations with the *Phalange*, designed to bring a government under Bashir Gemayel to power, contributed to deepen sectarian resentments. Jumblatt noted that the ‘Phalange and its allies are setting up a Maronite Haganah; their ambition is to

¹¹⁹ Kirsten E. Schulze (1998), p. 14.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹²¹ TNA, FO1018/93, ‘Moslem Lebanon Today’, 1953, p. 14.

¹²² UMAM, *Hizb Huruz al-Arz*, al-Ru’ia wa al-Ahdaf wa al-Mawqif (Vision, Aim and Position), p. 124.

carve up Lebanon and establish a Christian state on the lines of the Zionist entity.’¹²³ In fact, the diaries of David Ben Gurion and Moshe Sharett, Israel’s first and second Prime Ministers, have revealed long-held plans to overthrow the multi-religious state of Lebanon and ‘create a Christian regime that will ally itself with Israel.’¹²⁴ The ongoing civil war in Lebanon and the long covert cultivation of the *Phalange* appeared to provide circumstances conducive to the final realisation of this plan while, at the same time, ensuring the expulsion of the PLO from its border areas.

Israeli relations with the Lebanese Maronite elites and the *Phalange* party were largely facilitated by the fact that many of them still considered their identity linked to their religious and communal affiliations rather than the concept of a multi-communal Lebanon. Furthermore, Arab governments were accused of sponsoring the PLO and thereby undermining Lebanese sovereignty and letting the country slide into civil war despite the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers’ 1975 declaration of ‘the concern of all the Arab countries for the sovereignty of Lebanon and the unity of her territory and people’ and the request that each Arab country ‘do all in its power to consolidate Lebanon’s stability and national unity.’¹²⁵ However, considering the Palestinian factor in the outbreak of the hostilities and the scope of Arab support for the PLO, the civil war actually came to be viewed by many Lebanese as a basically regional and Arab conflict that was fought on Lebanese territory.¹²⁶ The Arab world was considered collectively responsible for the outbreak of violence and the fact that there was no loud outcry from the Arab states in the face of the occupation of an Arab capital, Beirut, by Israeli forces in 1982 further contributed to this perception.¹²⁷ At the same time, the search for supporting external allies by various communities in Lebanon coupled with the strategic

¹²³ As quoted in Eric Rouleau, ‘Crisis in Lebanon’, p. 235.

¹²⁴ From the diary of Moshe Sharett as quoted in: Caroline Tisdall, ‘The Pattern repeats itself’, in: Nassib, Selim with Caroline Tisdall, *Beirut: Frontline Story* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1983), p. 14.

¹²⁵ ‘Communiqué issued by the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers’, Cairo, 17.10.1975, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies* 5:1/2 (Autumn 1975- Winter 1976), pp. 293.

¹²⁶ See questionnaires conducted between May and December 2013.

¹²⁷ Amine Gemayel (1988), p.167-170.

importance of the country all advanced the use of the Lebanese arena for proxy wars. This was proven by the fact that of twenty-six distinct confrontations only nine were primarily inter-Lebanese, and six did not involve any Lebanese parties.¹²⁸ While the Lebanese political system and the unresolved issue over the identity of the country together with the lack of a coherent foreign policy had made these external interventions possible in the first place, they also reinforced sectarian divisions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that both Eritrea and Lebanon were of interest to regional and international powers due to their strategic importance. While their respective geostrategic positions – on the Red Sea and on the Mediterranean - influenced nascent national identity formation in both countries, regional and international interests after the departure of the colonial/mandate powers contributed to the consolidation of specific national identities, but in very different ways.

In the case of Eritrea, it was largely the absence of support and non-recognition of the right to self-determination that impacted the formation of national identity. Superpower interests in the Horn of Africa were almost exclusively satisfied through alliances with Ethiopia because both the US and the USSR were convinced that Eritrea was part of Ethiopia and did not constitute a nation in itself. Furthermore, the Soviet Union saw its interests in the region secured through its alliance with Somalia to counter the US-Ethiopian relationship. Even though the Soviet Union provided some indirect support at times, it never exceeded a level that would jeopardize any possibility of a later Soviet-Ethiopian alliance. In fact, when such an alliance materialized under the new Ethiopian regime in the mid-1970s, Eritrean nationalists simply saw American military support for Ethiopia replaced by Russian support. This enhanced Eritrean

¹²⁸ Theodor Hanf (1993), p. 559.

perceptions of international disregard for their cause and strengthened their belief that only through national unity, based on a cohesive identity, could they emerge from the struggle successfully. Eritrean liberation movements' relations with various Arab states were also intrinsically linked to existing alliances between Ethiopia, the US and Israel. Although a religious and linguistic bond existed between the Arab states and the initially Muslim-dominated Eritrean nationalist movement, Arab support was not consistent and always depended on their wider regional interests while the Eritrean movements regarded their relationship with the Arab states as a means to the end of their larger strategic interests. Consequently, these relationships with Arab states did not have a decisive impact on the formation of an Arabic Eritrean national identity; rather the independence movement utilized the Muslim aspect of identity to generate regional support.

The Lebanese case proved to be decisively different in terms of the influence of superpower politics and the Arab world/Israel on the formation of Lebanese national identity. The US, the Soviet Union and their regional allies all failed to directly influence the national identity of the country; popular attitudes towards these external powers were actually determined by pre-existing and highly oppositional perceptions of Lebanese identity. The active involvement of the US in the country especially divided opinion related to the question of national identity; these divisions were moreover exacerbated by a Lebanese political system that made manipulation by outside powers possible in the first place. The Lebanese government was weary of this problem and, as a result, tried to adopt a policy of neutrality. However this neutrality was only extended towards Arab countries and this upset the pro-Arab elements who resented the state's bias towards non-Arab powers. Various communities in Lebanon maintained relationships with different external actors who were often in opposition to each other and this discord resulted in the use of Lebanese territory for proxy wars. Consequently,

the lack of a coherent unified foreign policy reinforced differences and inhibited the development of a cohesive national identity.

While this chapter has examined the external influences that impacted the formation of national identity in Eritrea and Lebanon, the next chapter will look at an internal factor generally considered as playing an essential role in the process of socialization and forming a cohesive national identity: education.

Chapter 7 – Education: Shaping or breaking national identity?

The belief in a common history and myths together with a shared set of values and norms is widely considered one of the key factors in ensuring social cohesion and the development of a sense of belonging and national identity. Education not only plays an important part in the process of socialization of children but also serves to transfer knowledge of such common history and myths. As such, it has to be considered as contributing decisively to the process of ‘imaginative construction’ of the nation and a shared national identity.¹ It can further play a role in social and economic development and/or change which also constitutes an important factor in the process of national identity formation.² This is because education – through both the official curriculum and the ‘hidden curriculum’ – often not only aims at the reproduction of culture, but also of class relations, race and gender. All these together contribute to the formation of national consciousness and identity.

Theorists of cultural politics of education generally affirm that schools function ‘to inscribe particular rationalities into the sensibilities, dispositions, and awarenesses [*sic*] of individuals to make them conform to a single set of imaginaries about culture and national citizenship’³; yet, this is not always viewed positively since schools can also be used by dominant groups for the indoctrination of their culture and beliefs, thereby exerting social control over a society. Taking into account Marxist positions on education, Carnoy argues that education cannot only be used to dominate another group, but also constitute the outcome of the struggle for domination. In this case, education is viewed as a means to instil ‘universally accepted rules and regulations’⁴ in order to

¹ George Richardson, ‘Singular Nation, Plural Possibilities: Reimagining Curriculum as Third Space’, in: Katta, Yanu (ed.), *Curriculum as Cultural Practice: Postcolonial Imaginations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 283.

² Michael W. Apple, ‘Reproduction and contradiction in education: an introduction’, in: Michael W. Apple (Ed.), *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays on Class, Ideology and the State* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 1ff.

³ Yatta Kanu, ‘Introduction’, in: Kanu, Yatta (Ed.). (2006), p. 5.

⁴ Martin Carnoy, ‘Education, Economy and the State’, in: Michael W. Apple, (Ed.). (1982), p. 79.

avoid a struggle amongst the individuals forming the state. Hence, to him, education is also part of the state and ‘an expression of the consensual social mood, also subject to conflict, but a conflict which is acted out in the context of democratic decision-making and individual choice as to how much and what kind of education and training to take.’⁵ Such a statement obviously refers to countries with a strong central state and democratic institutions. In fact, in such cases the role of the political system and the government sector can hardly be separated from the educational sector. Gellner has pointed out that because of the size of educational infrastructure and the costs linked to it, ‘only the state can sustain so large a burden, only the state is also strong enough to control so important and crucial a function.’⁶ Therefore, even in countries where large parts of the educational sector are covered by private and/or religious institutions, the state is generally in charge of controlling not only the quality of education but also the application of a curriculum that is not detrimental to the state and the cohesion of its society.

Tawil affirms that in the European context it was ‘[i]ndeed, compulsory, standardized, public schooling [that] played a crucial part in the emergence, construction and consolidation of the nation-state.’⁷ However, he also notes the detrimental effect that education can have when it mirrors or enhances existing cleavages, or is used as ‘an ideological vehicle for political socialization.’⁸ In that case, it rather works against social cohesion and can fuel hostilities and violence. A UNICEF study identified the detrimental effects of education with regard to social integration and cohesion in cases of

[...] uneven distribution of education; education as a weapon in cultural repression; denial of education as a weapon of war; the manipulation of history for political purposes; the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ernest Gellner (1983), pp. 37/38.

⁷ Sobhi Tawil, ‘Exploring Humanitarian Law: Armed conflict and education for social cohesion’, *IBE: Prospects*, 11/3 (September 2001), p. 3.

⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

manipulation of textbooks; and segregated education that tends to reinforce inequality, lower self-esteem, and stereotyping.⁹

The danger of such ‘abuse’ of education appears much higher in less developed countries and in states with heterogeneous or multi-communal societies - which includes most post-colonial/-mandate states. Especially when uneven socio-economic development results in exclusion from education, it can lead to the development or enhancement of differential identities contesting a unified national identity.

This chapter examines the growth of the education sector in Eritrea and Lebanon, and analyses how it developed from systems of colonial/mandate education inculcating the cultures of the dominating European powers to promoting an independent and specifically national culture. In both cases, the main task was to build a curriculum and education system inclusive of all the communities of the country that ascribed not only to different religious beliefs but also to opposed interpretations of history and identity. It will argue that a completely inclusive education system did not develop in either of the two cases and that, therefore, the development of a syncretistic nationalism was undermined.

ERITREA

Education in colonial Eritrea

Prior to the advent of Italian colonialism, education in the Eritrean territories did not take place within the framework of a state and was largely dominated by local religious institutions. Thus, secular content was limited and reading and writing was taught to a very limited group of people and primarily for the study of religious texts.¹⁰ By the end of the 19th century, a few missionary schools had been established in the territory, most

⁹ Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley, ‘Chapter 1: Education and Identity-based Conflict: Assessing Curriculum policy for social and civic reconstruction’, in: Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley (Eds.), *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion, Studies in Comparative Education* (Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2004), p. 5.

¹⁰ See Günter Schröder, *Bildung in Eritrea* (Kassel: GhK, 1987), p. 9.

notably by the Swedish Evangelic Mission near Massawa and by French Lazarists in Keren. As Schröder notes, these schools offered a quite modern, Western curriculum despite its religious content; yet their influence and appeal remained rather limited in pre-colonial Eritrea and their missionary zeal was viewed as unacceptable by the religious communities in the territory.¹¹

After the establishment of the colony of Eritrea by Italy, education came under the control of a single administration. While Italian approaches towards native education varied according to how the purpose of the colonial possession was viewed, they were generally marked by an attitude of superiority towards the local population and education was never a priority in Italian colonial politics. The little importance that was given to native education is reflected in the limited amount of archival material available.¹² Unlike other European colonial powers, such as France, the Italians initially had little interest in ‘Italianizing’ or ‘culturally assimilating’ the native populations in their colonies. Considering the territories more as economic enterprises and areas to settle its own population, ‘the main motive for colonialism was not to civilize the native but to substitute him with the Italian.’¹³ Schools established to cater the needs of Italians and other Europeans in the territory were not open to the local population. As the Italian Governor Ferdinando Martini noted:

[...] mixed schools for whites and blacks: no, no, and again no. The native child more agile and alert, has the intelligence of the white child; therefore avoid comparison. [...] Schools for blacks? Is their establishment useful? We do not have the same conditions as the British in Kassala. We cannot use the natives in postal services for example, or telegraphic services. And it will be happy the day when we do not even need them as interpreters. [...] To stammer out some Italian, they can learn by themselves.¹⁴

Therefore, little importance was given to native education and schools for locals remained restricted to primary education. In general, schools were largely run by

¹¹ Ibid., p. 52.

¹² Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 67.

¹³ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁴ Ferdinando Martini, *Il diario eritreo*, Vol. 2 (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1947), p. 472.

Catholic missions, and Catholic priests ‘played a leading role’ while maintaining ‘good relationships with the colonial authorities’.¹⁵ While missionary schools received financial support, their importance lay in the fact that they kept the overall costs of educational institutions to the colonial authorities limited.

When Governor Salvago-Raggi succeeded Martini in 1907 the attitude towards native education changed and education of the local elites became considered necessary in order to recruit them for lower jobs in the colonial administration, yet the official policy of segregation established in 1905 remained. The first government school for locals was opened by Salvago-Raggi in Keren in 1911. It was limited to lower elementary education and followed a curriculum that was specifically and *ad hoc* designed for Eritrea by the Italian Foreign Office.¹⁶ Furthermore, the school in Keren was specifically aimed at the children of Muslim notables; other schools that opened in 1914 in Segeneti and Addi Ugri targeted the Catholic and Orthodox communities. In line with the respective religious affiliation, Arabic or Tigrinya was used as the language of instruction as well as Italian.¹⁷ Pateman asserts that the introduction of separate languages of instruction enforced the separate development of Muslims and Christians, and he traces later divisions back to this period.¹⁸ It can, indeed, be considered as strengthening religious identities, especially within the linguistically rather diverse Muslim community, and enforcing differentiation from those of the other denomination. For the Italians though, the establishment of a uniform education system was mainly impeded by the make-up of the colony itself:

It is not yet, nor will it probably ever be, possible to adopt a uniform school regulation, not only because of the wide diversity in the degree of civilization of the various races which inhabit Eritrea, but also because their prejudices and their century-old mutual antipathy do not permit

¹⁵ Matteo Pretelli, ‘Education in the Italian colonies during the interwar period’, *Modern Italy* 16:3 (August 2011), p. 277.

¹⁶ See Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 69.

¹⁷ A. Malvezzi de ‘Medici, ‘Native education in the Italian colonies – Eritrea’, *International Institute of Teachers College Educational Yearbook 1931* (Columbia: Columbia University, 1931), p. 653.

¹⁸ Roy Pateman (1998), p. 16.

children of different race and religion to be educated in the same school. There would be needed as many groups of schools as there are races in Eritrea, each of which should have its own program of special instruction for particular cases.¹⁹

Consequently, the few further schools that opened always targeted specific communities. Even after 1928, when Italian was established as the compulsory language of instruction by decree, the traditional missionary schools were allowed to continue teaching in native languages.²⁰

With the emergence of the Fascist regime, the approach towards native education changed as, as the education officer for Libya and Eritrea, Andrea Festa put it, the next generation of local people ‘must understand Italy’s civilizing mission’.²¹ It was now considered essential to instil in them some sort of loyalty to the ‘motherland’; consequently, Italian textbooks were full of praise for *Il Duce* and lauded military service in the Italian army, clearly encouraging young Eritrean students to join.²² Furthermore, textbooks focused mainly on Italian history and topics and as Negash rightfully notes, constituted ‘the classic colonial teaching aid [...] with little knowledge of the cultural heritage of the inhabitants of the colony’.²³ They were produced by the Ministry for the Colonies in both Italian and Arabic and replaced the previous textbooks that had been published in Asmara by the Catholic missionaries. By 1931, all schools in the territory were put under direct government supervision with the exception of Koranic schools and Coptic monasteries’ schools.²⁴

In general, education during the colonial period only had a limited impact on the Eritrean population and the development of national consciousness. This is due to the fact that it remained largely concentrated in the urban centres and enrolment figures

¹⁹ A. Malvezzi de ‘Medici, ‘Native education’, p. 652.

²⁰ Christine Smith-Simonsen, “‘...all’Ombra della Nostra Bandiera.’ A study on Italian Educational Activities in Colonial Eritrea: 1890-1941’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tromsø, 1997), p. 126.

²¹ As quoted in Matteo Pretelli, ‘Education in the Italian colonies’, p. 279.

²² British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia/ Ministry of Information (1944), p. 33.

²³ Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 73.

²⁴ See Matteo Pretelli, ‘Education in the Italian colonies’, p. 280.

were always rather low, even though an overall increase can be seen in the fragmented archival material available. In the Muslim rural areas, schools were largely absent and the Muslim urban population was very small at only 27,000 people. As a consequence, quite a high percentage of the Muslim population remained illiterate.²⁵ Furthermore, education remained virtually limited to the primary level and the strongest focus was on practical skills considered necessary for the material needs of the colony; agriculture, for example, was one of the main subjects of instruction. Even though two-year secondary school courses were established in Asmara in 1927, seven years later there were still only 38 students enrolled.²⁶ Overall, education remained very elitist with colonial schools being 'accessible at the most to 2 per cent of the school age population.'²⁷ Nevertheless, it made Eritreans more eligible than local Ethiopians for administrative positions in the Italian East Africa Empire, and facilitated the emergence of a small politically conscious group of intellectuals that first gathered in the MFH, and which certainly did not have an equivalent in Ethiopia.

Education during the BMA

As with all aspects of its administration of Eritrea, the British approach towards education in the territory was largely guided by the goal of keeping the financial burden as low as possible. Therefore, of the schools that had been closed down during hostilities, initially only native elementary schools were re-opened.²⁸ In January 1943, there were 28 primary schools including one girls' school with 75 students. Eight of the schools were Muslim and teaching took place in Arabic.²⁹ The main problem, the

²⁵ See FO 371/131298, Report of the British Consulate-General, No. 4 (501/58), Asmara, 23.09.1958.

²⁶ See Les Gottesman, *To Fight and Learn: The Praxis and Promise of Literacy in Eritrea's Independence War* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 77.

²⁷ Tekeste Negash (1987), p. 83.

²⁸ TNA, FO371/27583, Future of Government schools in Eritrea and Somalia, from the War Office to Mr McKereth, 02.10.1941.

²⁹ TNA, FO1015/37, Future of Government schools the occupied territories of Eritrea and Somalia, from the Acting Controller of Finance & Accounts to the Permanent Under Secretary of State, 7.08.1944.

recruitment of teachers, was addressed by increasing their status by granting them special privileges and a better salary. Furthermore, while teachers still had to 'be recruited from the highways and by-ways', the administration started special teacher training including demonstration lessons.³⁰ A curriculum was also introduced in 1943 that, as well as basic literacy, covered other subjects considered relevant for the population such as agriculture and woodwork.³¹ For books in Tigrinya, the administration initially resorted to the Medical Department's pamphlets on hygiene, until new books were produced.³² For education in Arabic, it was first proposed to provide books from Sudan and to follow the example of British Somaliland, establishing a system of 'grant-in-aid to Koranic schools'.³³ Miran notes that more than a dozen Islamic religious institutions opened during the British administration which established a collaboration with the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and, thereby, secured financial assistance and trained teachers while adapting the Egyptian curricula.³⁴ This certainly contributed to the transformation of the heterogeneous Muslim communities into a more unified group; yet, it also reinforced a certain level of differentiation from the non-Muslim communities in the territory.

However, financial assistance in the education sector was of great importance. While the British planned to introduce secondary education in the interests of the local population, many initiatives in the sector depended largely on costs for the institutions being shared. As the acting Chief Civil Affairs Officer of the War Office, Colonel Anderson, noted:

In practically all the Eritrean schools the natives bear some part of the running costs. Certain schools have been built entirely at native expense and everywhere there is a keen desire to

³⁰ British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia/ Ministry of Information (1944), p. 34.

³¹ TNA, FO1015/37, Future of Government schools the occupied territories of Eritrea and Somalia, Letter by Colonel J.N.D. Anderson, 11.04.1946.

³² British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia/ Ministry of Information (1944), p. 35.

³³ TNA, FO371/27583, Future of Government schools in Eritrea and Somalia, from the War Office to the G.O.C., 23.10.1941.

³⁴ Joseph Miran, 'A Historical Overview of Islam in Eritrea', p. 206.

cooperate with the authorities in providing more and better education. Native education in the territory is essentially a matter of helping those who help themselves.³⁵

Despite the financial constraints, the number of schools in the territory increased; over one hundred primary and middle schools were introduced and two secondary schools established. The British themselves described the education system in Eritrea as ‘perhaps the most constructive and most popular of our innovations.’³⁶ Nevertheless, as the Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Eritrea noted in June 1950, as many as ‘70 per cent of the people are illiterate’ and ‘a little less than 10,000 Eritrean children attend school, which is approximately 6 per cent of the Eritrean population of school age’.³⁷ While this was an improvement compared to the Italian colonial period, the number of people benefiting from the education system still remained limited. At the same time, together with the overall politicization taking place in the territory, it has to be considered essential in the development of a sizeable intelligentsia that was envisioned to continue education efforts in the autonomous Eritrean state.

The constitution developed for Eritrea guaranteed the right to education, and both Tigrinya and Arabic were to be used for educational purposes. While the religious communities were also granted the right to maintain their educational institutions, a secular approach was introduced for governmental education. Article 29 of the constitution stated that ‘[n]o pupil attending a public school shall be required to take part in any religious instruction at such school or attend any religious service at such school.’³⁸ In 1953, the Department of Education was founded and a Publications Committee tasked with the development of textbooks in Tigrinya. Textbooks in Arabic

³⁵ TNA, FO1015/37, Future of Government schools in the occupied territories of Eritrea and Somalia, from the Acting Controller of Finance & Accounts to the Permanent Under Secretary of State, 07.08.1944.

³⁶ TNA, FO1015/37, Future of Government schools in the occupied territories of Eritrea and Somalia, Letter by Colonel J.N.D. Anderson, 11.04.1946.

³⁷ A/1285, Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Eritrea (excerpt), 8 June 1950, reproduced in: United Nations/ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), p. 64.

³⁸ Article 29 of the constitution of Eritrea, adopted by the Eritrean Constituent Assembly on July 15, 1952. Reproduced in: Tekeste Negash (1997), Appendix 2, p. 193.

continued to be imported from Egypt.³⁹

While an education system had been established in Eritrea and textbooks were available, the lack of the latter left teaching in Ethiopia ‘virtually [...] up to the teachers.’⁴⁰ Even though a stronger emphasis was put on education, and the number of schools in Ethiopia decisively increased between 1952 and 1955, the standard of education in Eritrea would make the territory stand out in the federation.

Education under Ethiopian control

During the first few years of federation ‘education was at its best in Eritrea’.⁴¹ It was extended to the rural areas and two secondary schools were added to the already existing levels of primary and middle schools. In 1954, a vocational trade school was opened in Asmara.⁴² While the latter was partly funded by Ethiopia, the undermining of the autonomous institutions by the federal authorities also affected the education sector.

The Muslim community in Eritrea in particular quickly felt discriminated against when the federal government declared the imposition of Amharic as the sole language of instruction. In a memorandum submitted by the Moslem Mosques Committee on 21 May 1956 to the Eritrean government specific reference was made to article 31 of the Eritrean constitution and the government was reminded that it ‘should encourage the Moslem students to have instructions in Arabic language’ and that qualified teachers should be provided ‘in order to enable the Moslem students to have their high education in their own language’.⁴³ However, Christian students and teachers were equally opposed to the imposition of Amharic which resulted in a number of strikes from 1956

³⁹ See Les Gottesman (1998), p. 80.

⁴⁰ Tekeste Negash, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education: Some implications for Nation-Building* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1990), p. 4.

⁴¹ Berhane Woldemichael, *Primary education in Eritrea: Issues, challenges and prospects* (Asmara: Department of Education, 1992), p. 20.

⁴² Adane Taye, *A Historical Survey of State Education in Eritrea* (Asmara: Educational Material Production and Distribution Agency, 1992), p.81/82.

⁴³ TNA, FO371/118744, H.E. The Chief Executive, Government of Eritrea Headquarters. (Memorandum submitted by the Moslem Mosques Committee Asmara, 11 Shawal, 1375; 21.5.1956).

onwards, which spread from the Prince Makonnen Secondary School and the Haile Selassie I Secondary School in Asmara all over the country. As discussed earlier, these strikes quickly turned into a general condemnation of Ethiopian politics in the territory. With reference to the strikes starting from predominantly Christian schools attended by children of prominent Unionists, the American Consul in Asmara noted that ‘the initial attempt of the Ethiopians to recruit and educate a loyal group of young Eritreans in their own schools in Eritrea appears to be counterproductive. Instead of producing Unionist advocates, they appear so far to have fostered the growth of a group of young Turks.’⁴⁴

Strikes followed all Ethiopian acts of undermining the autonomous status of Eritrea such as the placing of the schools under the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Education Department in 1960, and the abrogation of the federation in 1962. A new curriculum for elementary schools was implemented in 1963 supporting the policy of ‘Amharization’ and aimed at socialising children as Ethiopians from early on. The Eritrean Publications Committee was officially abolished and all schoolbooks and literature in Tigrinya and Arabic were burnt.⁴⁵ The obligation to teach in Amharic created a huge problem for Eritrean teachers and a number of them were forced into early retirement or had to do menial jobs in schools and offices.⁴⁶ To replace them and to facilitate education in Amharic, teachers were transferred from Ethiopia to Eritrea, where they taught wearing army uniforms in a bid to intimidate the Eritrean students.⁴⁷ Eritrean teachers went on strike, officially to protest the discrepancy in salary between them and Ethiopian teachers, but underlying this was the growing discontent with the denial of any educational freedom, aimed at suppressing dissent or Eritrean nationalist

⁴⁴ As quoted in Okbazghi Yohannes (1997), p. 156.

⁴⁵ Eritrei per la Liberazione in Europa – Sez. Italia, *Eritrea: Alcuni Documenti delle Forze Popolari di Liberazione Eritrea (E.P.L.F.)*, 1972, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁷ Ruth Iyob (1995), p. 102.

sentiments.⁴⁸ Many Eritrean students and teachers started to sympathise with the ELF and either joined it in the field or became active in the clandestine activities it organized.⁴⁹ The outbreak of large-scale military confrontations and the Ethiopian offensive in 1967 resulted in an increased number of students and teachers joining the ELF in the field.

Not much changed in terms of education for the Eritreans under the new Revolutionary regime after 1974. It re-affirmed the key role of education in the development of the country and started a literacy campaign which went 'well beyond the absorption capacity of the economy.'⁵⁰ The 'Red Terror' of 1977-78 constituted the peak of harassment and violence against the educated, teachers and students all over Ethiopia. This period witnessed the incarceration and executions of thousands, amongst them many Eritreans that were accused of supporting the liberation movements.⁵¹ By 1982, all schools in Eritrea, including private mission schools, were nationalized despite the fact that the Ethiopian government did not have the necessary financial means to maintain them. Besides, the Ethiopian approach to teaching was not conducive to the creation of a strong common political identity. Examining the history textbooks of grades nine to twelve used in Ethiopia during the 1980s, Negash reached the conclusion that 'the chapter on Ethiopian history has virtually no relevance for nation-building'.⁵² This exacerbated feelings of distinctiveness and the urge for independence within the Eritrean territories under Ethiopian control. At school, students were taught that Eritrea was an integral part of Ethiopia and had been so historically. The independence struggle was hardly mentioned and if the topic came up, the fighters were portrayed as traitors and bandits. However, through their parents and social networks they learned more

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch/Africa, 'Eritrea: Freedom of Expression and Ethnic Discrimination in the Educational System: Past and Future', *Africa Watch* 5/1 (1993), p. 2.

⁴⁹ See Wolde-Yesus Ammar, 'The role of Asmara students', p. 72.

⁵⁰ Tekeste Negash (1990), p. 12.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch/Africa, 'Eritrea: Freedom of Expression and Ethnic Discrimination', p. 3.

⁵² Tekeste Negash (1990), p. 59.

about the struggle.⁵³ While the standard of education in the Ethiopian-controlled areas of Eritrea plummeted and often came to a halt due to the disruptive effects of the ongoing fighting between the Liberation Forces and the Ethiopian Army, many Eritrean students still considered their education standard considerably higher than in the rest of Ethiopia.⁵⁴

Unifying the masses through education? Education initiatives by the Liberation Fronts

Recognizing the importance of education and its integrative force, the liberation movements quickly took over the task of education as part of their political programme in the field and in Eritrean refugee camps in Sudan. Many scholarly accounts have pointed out and analysed the education efforts made by the EPLF, based largely on personal visits to the field during the independence struggle.⁵⁵ This might be due to the fact that after the expulsion of the ELF to Sudan, the EPLF remained the only movement providing education in the field; yet, it somehow obscures the fact that educational efforts were also made by the former, albeit to a lesser and probably also less organized extent. In fact, the political programmes of both fronts were strikingly similar after the ELF's first organizational congress in October 1971 and included a campaign against illiteracy in recognition that 'education is the basic necessity for development'.⁵⁶

Educational programmes by the ELF were created in the mid-1970s, yet their implementation only became possible from 1976 onwards due to the previous civil confrontations. The education offered by the ELF during the struggle included literacy for the rank and file, political education for the cadres, and elementary education for

⁵³ Interview with Awet A., Geneva/Munich (by Email), 22.11.2013, Interview with Almaz Z. (by phone), Heidelberg/München, 03.01.2014.

⁵⁴ Interview mit Yohannes A., Kampala, 21.02.2013.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Roy Pateman (1998), Firebrace and Holland (1984) and Les Gottesman (1998).

⁵⁶ Interview with Dr Habte Tesfamariam, Spokesman of the ELF-RC, San Jose/CA, 06.07.2002, available at www.awate.com, GS private archives.

children.⁵⁷ While it is not clear whether the literacy campaign formed part of the basic military training of the fighters, most attended three-month literacy classes which were largely based on socialist literature translated from English, such as Marx and Mao Tse-tung.⁵⁸ Elementary education started in the Barka area with a small school of around thirty children who were taught reading and writing in both Arabic and Tigrinya.⁵⁹ The mid-1970s had seen disagreement within the ELF regarding the question of languages of instruction. A small group had proposed the development of textbooks in the various local languages; however, Muslim members of the ELF that had gained their education abroad in Arab countries objected to this and the proposal never came to fruition.⁶⁰ Henceforth, textbooks and pamphlets were produced in Tigrinya and Arabic, the two languages ‘encouraged [...] among the country’s nine ethnic groups’ by the ELF.⁶¹ A working group was formed within the Social Affairs division of the ELF, tasked with the development of a curriculum for the elementary and middle school level. By the early 1980s, more than 1300 children were taught up to seventh grade in ELF schools in Barka.⁶² Due to the circumstances in the field, classes mainly took place outside under trees and material for students was scarce. Great emphasis was placed on conveying the idea of an Eritrean nation based on the common colonial experience starting with the Italians, and educational content was deliberately devoid of regional or religious connotations.⁶³ The curriculum developed by the working groups was used both inside the liberated areas and in refugee camps in Sudan. Many of the students and educators of the ELF went on to join a school for grades 7-12 established by the UNHCR in Kassala in 1977 (often referred to as ‘UNESCO school’).⁶⁴ The expulsion of the ELF

⁵⁷ Interview with Jacob Abraham, Kassel, 06.07.2013.

⁵⁸ Interview with Berhane Gh., Esslingen, 15.06.2013 and Interview with Berhe O., Ulm, 06.12.2013.

⁵⁹ Interview with Jacob Abraham.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Dan Connell (1993), p. 90.

⁶² Interview with Jacob Abraham.

⁶³ Ibid. and Interview with Abdelaziz Saleh, Frankfurt, 15.09.2013.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

from Eritrea resulted in the cessation of its education efforts in the field but education continued in Kassala. While many of the ELF textbooks were destroyed during the civil war, it was asserted in interviews that the EPLF seized many of the materials and based their own textbooks on them while removing any reference to the ELF.⁶⁵

The educational policy of the EPLF appears, in fact, largely similar to that of the ELF. Yet, in line with the EPLF's policy of not postponing social reforms until after independence was achieved, education aimed at the transformation of Eritrean society and was extended beyond the fighters. Furthermore, the EPLF adopted a language policy inclusive of local languages. While Tigrinya and Arabic, as the two national languages of Eritrea, were compulsory subjects primary education was held in the native languages of the respective communities. To this end, primary curricula were developed in languages such as Tigre, Kunama, Saho and Afar.⁶⁶ This language policy had two aims: the conservation of the languages and cultures of the various communities and their unification by creating official languages without suppressing the native ones.

Firebrace and Holland note that the first goal of EPLF's education policy was to make the fighters literate and, according to them, that was achieved as early as 1972.⁶⁷ From 1976 onwards, education efforts were extended to civilians and became more organized with people in the liberated areas under EPLF control being required to participate in six hours of formal classes every day.⁶⁸ The National Democratic Programme of the EPLF dedicated an entire chapter to the development of culture and education. The new educational curriculum was to 'provide for the proper dissemination, respect and development of the history of Eritrea and its people, the struggle against colonialism, oppression and for national independence, the experience,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch/Africa, 'Eritrea: Freedom of Expression and Ethnic Discrimination', p. 4.

⁶⁷ Firebrace and Holland (1984), p. 118.

⁶⁸ Les Gottesman (1998), p.87/88.

sacrifices and heroism as well as the national folklore, traditions and culture of the Eritrean people.’⁶⁹ The fight against illiteracy was described as part of the liberation struggle with the aim to ‘free the Eritrean people from the darkness of ignorance’ that colonialism had left behind.⁷⁰ To achieve this, education was declared compulsory up to middle school, and free at all levels and in all regions of Eritrea. Another important point was that education was to be separated from religion, in accordance with the secular nationalism promoted by the EPLF.⁷¹

A department of political education, culture and education was established which was in charge of developing schoolbooks that were printed in the EPLF’s underground printing workshops. According to estimates presented to Firebrace and Holland during a visit to the EPLF’s printing section in the early 1980s ‘some 200,000 copies of 72 different textbooks for EPLF schools, adult education classes and technical courses’ were produced.⁷² However, eye-witness reports and interviews on education at that time often mention that material was scarce and that books were predominantly used by the teachers who wrote the content on blackboards.⁷³ Students not only studied subjects such as mathematics, geography and science, but also received general education on agriculture in order to make them self-sufficient in growing vegetables.⁷⁴ Aspects of hygiene and medical care were also taught from early on, in an attempt to bring basic knowledge of healthcare to the more remote areas of the country. Great importance was also placed on the teaching of Eritrean history and world civilization, all of which would help the child to acquire ‘a progressive spirit and love for his

⁶⁹ *National Democratic Programme of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front*, 1977, Section 3, A.2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Section 3, B.1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Section 3, B.6. and Section 7, C.

⁷² Firebrace and Holland (1984), p. 79.

⁷³ For example Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehiwet (by Skype), London/Munich, 15.10.2013.

⁷⁴ EPLF, *Vanguard: The Official Monthly Organ of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front* 2:2 (April 1977), p.40/41.

country and his people.’⁷⁵ The Italian colonial period was referred to as the time of the creation of Eritrea as a nation-state; yet, reference was also made to the pre-colonial times such as the period of the Medri Bahri and the occupation of Massawa by the Egyptians, thus emphasizing that Eritrea was an old nation with a long history of subjugation.⁷⁶ The presentation of Eritrean history sought to emphasize the country’s historic distinctiveness from Ethiopia, but was also highly selectively. Haile Woldensae, in charge of the department of political education, culture and education, admitted that it isolated ‘that which is worthless, or which carr[ies] the message of the old economic order.’⁷⁷

The most important aspect of the educational programme was, however, political education, not only to instil revolutionary consciousness in the students but also to ‘create a new and progressive society with a new culture.’⁷⁸ The creation of a new culture was considered essential and closely linked to the EPLF’s concept of social revolution and, therefore, not limited to education in school. To reach the most people possible, songs and poems with revolutionary content were produced, using old forms and rhythms. As Haile Woldensae explained:

We try to reach our people through those forms of communication which are not alien to them, but which are part of their daily life. Thus, for example, in villages where there is widespread illiteracy, political persuasion is done through songs, skits and plays, while, perhaps, where our people can read and write, we have reading sessions and discussion etc.⁷⁹

Hence, traditional folklore and culture were not really preserved but rather used to present ‘new wine in old bottles’. Speaking in terms of syncretistic nationalism, this

⁷⁵ As quoted from an undated EPLF document in: Alain Fenet, ‘La Politique de construction national du Front Populaire de Liberation de l’Erythrée’, paper presented at the International symposium on the African Horn, University of Cairo, Institute of African Research & Studies, 5-10 January 1985, p. 23.

⁷⁶ Interview with Amanuel Eyasu (by Skype), London/Munich, 19.10.2013, Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehwet and Interview with Abdulaziz Saleh.

⁷⁷ Interview with Haile Woldensae, Member of the Standing Committee of the E.P.L.F., in: *Eritrea Information* 2:3 (March 1980), p. 3.

⁷⁸ As quoted from an undated EPLF document in: Alain Fenet, paper (1985), p. 23.

⁷⁹ Interview with Haile Woldensae, Member of the Standing Committee of the E.P.L.F., in: *Eritrea Information* 2:3 (March 1980), p. 3.

means that communities were not just used as building-blocks that could preserve their identity under an overarching national identity, their cultures and traditions were ‘filled’ with that newly created identity. As Woldensae himself admitted, this required a high level of indoctrination, achieved through education. In fact, the revolutionary songs, skits and plays also played an important role in the schools, inside and outside the territory. Former students interviewed all report that these constituted part of the ‘national education’ and how evenings were filled with heroic and militaristic songs about Eritrea and its fighters.⁸⁰

In the literature, the *Zero School* is often referred to as a positive example of EPLF education, specifically with regard to the inclusion of females.⁸¹ This boarding school was established on 12 January 1976 to educate the children of fighters in the field and started with 265 students. By 1983, over 3000 students were being taught at elementary (five years) and middle (two years) school level.⁸² The school also included a branch specifically for nationalistic music and two former students interviewed noted that the songs taught and sung in the evenings all aimed at exciting fighters for the continuous struggle, promoting a commitment to the movement and comradeship amongst the fighters.⁸³ One of the interviewees notes that commitment was created ‘basically by brainwashing the students’,⁸⁴ an observation also made by Kibreab. He notes that through political education, fighters were socialized ‘into unquestioning submission to the party’ and recruits from different backgrounds homogenized.⁸⁵ One important aspect of this is that it was not inclusive of all Eritreans since it inculcated ‘a sense of superiority vis-à-vis all the other national, civil and political organizations.’⁸⁶

In fact, other movements such as the ELF were portrayed as enemies of the social

⁸⁰ For example Interview with Abdulaziz S. and Interview with Amanuel Eyasu.

⁸¹ See e.g. Les Gottesman (1998), p. 89.

⁸² Ibid., p. 89.

⁸³ Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehiwet and Interview with Amanuel Eyasu.

⁸⁴ Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehiwet.

⁸⁵ Gaim Kibreab (2008), p. 340.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 341.

revolution and the unity of the Eritrean people, and solely blamed for the civil war between the liberation movements.⁸⁷ Therefore, while the EPLF's education policy was certainly inclusive of the various communities in the country, members of competing movements were excluded from the 'us' to an extent that turned them into another 'them' alongside the Ethiopians.

In 1983, the ELF launched the *National Literacy Campaign* aimed at eradicating illiteracy, especially amongst the rural population, and raising national consciousness. In total, 599 high level students from the *Zero School* and other teachers were assigned to 183 stations throughout the liberated areas.⁸⁸ Due to external circumstances, such as offensives by the Dergue and periods of drought and famine, the programme became increasingly limited in 1984 and 1985. Still, the EPLF reported 24,000 students enrolled in 154 schools in Eritrea for the 1985-1986 school year.⁸⁹ Despite its limitations, the campaign has to be considered a decisive success for the EPLF and, as Gottesman noted, it 'gave the EPLF the chance to try out the curriculum they had developed in the "ups and downs of society", in the various traditional cultures. And the curriculum worked. The same curriculum worked for combatants and civilians in the cities and in rural areas.'⁹⁰ Its success during the struggle resulted in the curriculum being adopted unchanged after the independence of Eritrea.

While the EPLF's education efforts undeniably played an important role in reducing illiteracy in the country and in unifying the various religious and linguistic Eritrean communities, the often praised equality that was supposedly promoted by 'teaching its followers that every man and woman, Moslem and Christian, peasant and urban dweller, was equally valuable'⁹¹ has to be qualified by pointing to the exclusion

⁸⁷ Interview with Tsegay Ghebrehiwet.

⁸⁸ Les Gottesman (1998), p. 177.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

⁹¹ Michela Wrong (2005), p. 389/390.

of political movements opposed to the EPLF and its political programme.

LEBANON

Education in pre-mandate and mandate Lebanon

Prior to the establishment of the state of Greater Lebanon by the French in 1920, a network of private, mainly religious schools already existed in the territory. Christian missionary schools in particular had a long history in Mount Lebanon, stretching back to the 16th century and linked to the affiliation of the Maronites with the Catholic Church and French Jesuits. As Farha noted, while concessions were made regarding the establishment of these early missionary schools during the Ottoman period, they were generally considered as ‘contesting loyalty to the central, officially Sunni Ottoman state.’⁹² The 19th century saw a further spread of American and European mission schools, catering to specific religious communities within the territory. While they did provide modern forms of schooling, they also ‘allowed for the beginnings of an increasingly sectarian institutionalisation of knowledge.’⁹³ At the same time, explicitly secular and inter-confessional schools also emerged, often outside Western initiatives, most notably *al-madrasa al-wataniya*, *al-madrasa al-‘uthmaniya* and the *Madrasat al-Hikma*, all open to students of all denominations.⁹⁴ With the *Tanzimat* reaffirming the rights of religious and private schools, they further proliferated despite attempts by the Ottoman authorities to regain control over the education sector. The religious communities propagated different readings of Lebanese history in their teaching which reflected the opposing nationalist aspirations that existed towards the end of the Ottoman Empire. Two teachers at the privately-run Sunni Maqasid College, Zaki

⁹² Mark Farha, ‘The Historical Legacy and Political Implications of State and Sectarian Schools in Lebanon’, in: Shuayb, Maya (Ed.), *Rethinking Education for Social Cohesion* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 2012), p. 66.

⁹³ Nemer Frayha, ‘Chapter 4: Developing Curriculum as a Means of Bridging National Divisions in Lebanon’, in: Sobhi Tawil, and Alexandra Harley (Eds.). (2004), p. 170.

⁹⁴ See Mark Farha ‘The Historical Legacy’, p. 67.

Nakkash and Omar Farrukh, published a history textbook for elementary schools, *Tarikh Suriyah wa Lubnan* (History of Syria and Lebanon), in which no specific Lebanese history was to be found; rather Lebanon was depicted as a historical part of Syria whose history formed part of Arab history in general. The Christian establishment in Lebanon had its own textbook prepared in which Lebanon did, indeed, have a very distinctive history separate from Syrian and Arab history.⁹⁵ This competitive-like behaviour over the 'correct' history of Lebanon, and which version was to be taught in schools was mainly fought out between the Christians and the Sunni Muslims. Overall, while the general level of education in Lebanon on the eve of WWI had become the most developed in the Ottoman Empire, it was still largely limited to the urban and predominantly Christian elite.⁹⁶ Within the territory of the autonomous region of Mount Lebanon only one public school existed prior to World War I, in the predominantly Druze city of 'Abey. Therefore, it was the public schools maintained by the Ottoman government in the areas which were added to Mount Lebanon in 1920 that became 'the nucleus of the new Lebanese public-school system'.⁹⁷

The terms of the mandate given to the French by the League of Nations made a point of education taking into consideration the religious diversity of the people in the territory. Referring to both Syria and Lebanon, the text of the mandate of 12 August 1922 states in Article 8:

The mandatory shall encourage public instruction, which shall be given through the medium of the native languages in use in the territory of Syria and the Lebanon. The right of each community to maintain its own schools for the instruction and education of its own members in its own language, while conforming to such educational requirements of a general nature as the administration may impose, shall not be denied or impaired.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ The textbook *Mujaz Tarikh Lubnan* (Précis of the history of Lebanon) was authored by the Greek Orthodox Asad Rustum and the Maronite Fuad al-Bustani.

⁹⁶ See Mark Farha, 'The Historical Legacy', p. 68.

⁹⁷ Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, 'Part Six: Lebanon', in: Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, *Education in Arab countries of the Near East* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1949), p. 421; see also, *Ibid.*, p. 407, footnote 1.

⁹⁸ As quoted in Harold W.V. Temperley (Ed.). (1924), p. 647.

Hence, while developing a curriculum with French and Lebanese scholars throughout the 1920s, the French authorities also adopted the institutionalized system of private schools largely divided along sectarian lines. French was instituted as an official language alongside Arabic, which also required the inclusion of French-language instruction into the curriculum. The American Legation in Beirut noted that, indeed, the French Administration ‘has been notorious throughout the period of the mandate’ in implementing ‘a policy to make Syria and Lebanon cultural dependencies of France.’⁹⁹ While questions relating to moral education were pretty much left to the family sphere, the curriculum promoted the positive role of France, and French poetry ‘was proposed as a means of promoting nationalism. This dismissed the chance to use Lebanese literature which was closer to the students’ cultural heritage than the French.’¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the curriculum stressed the necessity of unity and religious tolerance, and considered education in history as ‘a means of awakening and nourishing nationalism.’¹⁰¹ Frayha claims that, unlike most colonial powers, the French did not fear instilling nationalist feelings within the Lebanese population since the nationalist movement was not considered a threat to French interests. On the contrary, Maronite nationalists were viewed as sharing most French cultural values. For this reason, while the majority of history textbooks were written and published in French, they focused on the history of the Lebanese territory as propagated by the Maronites. Nonetheless, the American Legation observed that many native schools as well as those directly dependent on the French administration witnessed a high ‘indoctrination of French culture’ and many graduates ‘were deplorably ignorant of the history and geography of their native land and far too often virtually illiterate in their native language, Arabic.’¹⁰²

⁹⁹ ‘French Seek to Retain French Language and Culture in Newly Independent Lebanon’, Despatch from American Legation, Beirut, July 14, 1944, reproduced in: Walter L. Browne (1977), Vol. 3, p. 234.

¹⁰⁰ Nemer Frayha, ‘Religious Conflict and the Role of Social Studies for Citizenship Education in the Lebanese Schools between 1920 and 1983’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1985), p. 188.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁰² ‘French Seek to Retain French Language and Culture in Newly Independent Lebanon’, p. 234.

While government schools generally followed the French education system, private sectarian schools largely followed the type of education of their respective foreign sponsors. As Antony D. Smith noted, curricula based on Western systems tended to be more ‘civic’ in character and viewed ‘education [...] as much for the benefit of the national community as for the individual.’¹⁰³ However, the application of different systems together with the different sectarian interpretations of history and national identity left private sectarian school sector highly diversified.

The French made attempts to control this diversification, especially among the private schools, by expanding public schools and by introducing a more secular and unified education system. Yet, these attempts by High Commissioner Sarraïl and Governor Cayla met with fierce resistance from the Maronite church that considered this system a fundamental threat to its own influence and to the Maronite community in general.¹⁰⁴ Due to the strong opposition, very few of the proposed reforms were ever put into practice and, in fact, the dominant role of the religious communities in the educational sector was affirmed by Article 10 of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926:

Education shall be free in so far as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not affect the dignity of any of the religions or creeds [mathāhib]. There shall be no violation of the right of religious communities [tawā’if] to have their own schools, provided they follow the general rules issued by the state regulating public instruction.¹⁰⁵

In accordance with this, government decrees were issued in the following years regulating the requirements for opening and administering private schools, as well as regulations on the curricula and use of books.¹⁰⁶

It is no surprise that, the Lebanese government having vetoed the expansion of public schools, only seven percent of the budget was devoted to public education. At the

¹⁰³ Anthony D. Smith (1991), p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ Meir Zamir (1985), p. 162/163.

¹⁰⁵ *The Lebanese Constitution: A reference edition in English Translation*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Decree No. 1436 of 23.03.1950.

same time, the number of private schools increased to 1,342.¹⁰⁷ Since most of the private and foreign schools were run and attended by Christians, it was mainly Muslims and those of the more underprivileged classes that were attracted by the governmental institutions. According to Farha, 83 percent of students in public schools were Muslim, and only 13 percent Christians.¹⁰⁸ The fact that the lower Muslim classes increasingly had access to education contributed to their rising political consciousness and, to a certain extent, contributed to the changing dynamics of the country. Primary and secondary education was also extended to both sexes, following a process that had started during the nineteenth century and formalized during the Ottoman Empire by the 1913 law on education which made school attendance for both sexes compulsory and free for at least the primary level.¹⁰⁹ In 1924, the French mandate also facilitated female access to higher education by officially allowing the American University of Beirut (AUB) to accept female students into its Liberal Arts programme.¹¹⁰ Although female attendance of educational institutes increased over the following years, it still had to be considered as unsatisfactory by the late 1960s, especially in the rural, predominantly Muslim areas.¹¹¹

Consolidation of sectarian education after independence

When Lebanon achieved independence in 1943, the new government automatically gained full authority over the education sector: private schools, mostly of a sectarian nature, constituted the single largest group, making up 60.3 percent of schools and 49.4 percent of enrolments in 1944-45.¹¹² Since schools were considered

¹⁰⁷ Mark Farha, 'The Historical Legacy', p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ See Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See Mirna Lattouf, *Women, Education, and Socialization in Modern Lebanon: 19th and 20th Centuries Social History* (Oxford: University Press of America, 2004), p. 64-75.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

¹¹¹ Theodor Hanf, *Erziehungswesen in Gesellschaft und Politik des Libanon* (Bielefeld: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1969), p. 352.

¹¹² Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, 'Part Six: Lebanon', p. 504.

‘the best soil to cultivate virtues and tolerance’ and to foster national cohesion among the coexisting communities the new government quickly started measures to centralize the educational system and gain control over private schools.¹¹³ Government efforts resulted in the curriculum of 1946, developed by educators at the re-organized Ministry of Education. A decree was also passed making Arabic compulsory in all private schools and requiring them to follow the official course of study. Yet, the addition that directors ‘may choose to employ techniques of teaching that they see fit’¹¹⁴ watered down the impact of the decree and the curriculum. Textbooks for history, geography, moral civics and ‘patriotic subjects’ had to be approved by the Ministry of Education, and the use of banned textbooks was to be punished by severe measures including the closing of schools.¹¹⁵ In 1949, a Textbook Committee was created, headed by the General Director of the Ministry of Education, in order to decide on the suitability of textbooks. Frayha claims that this was meant as ‘an accommodation between the principle of free education and the urgent need of national unity and orientation.’¹¹⁶ In addition to strengthening the status of Arabic and gaining greater control over the private education sector, the 1946 curriculum also put a stronger emphasis on citizenship education, starting at the second year of pre-elementary school level by ‘nurturing the children with the love of their homeland through stories’.¹¹⁷ At the elementary level this was to become more concrete, for example by using books with pictures of the Lebanese flag and map in the second year.¹¹⁸ This use of the map and placing Lebanon in its surroundings was meant to enforce an important point made in the rationale of the curriculum: to make students aware of the position of Lebanon with

¹¹³ As quoted in Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 224.

¹¹⁴ Decree 7000, Art. 13, as quoted in Munir Bashshur, ‘The Role of Education: A Mirror of a Fractured National Image’, in: Barakat, Halim (Ed.). (1988), p. 47.

¹¹⁵ Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, ‘Part Six: Lebanon’, p.415.

¹¹⁶ Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 226.

¹¹⁷ Wizāra al-tarbīya al-waṭaniya wa al-funūn al-ġamīla (Ministry of National Education and the High Arts), *Manḥaġ al-taʿālīm (Curriculum)* (Beirut, 1943), p. 15.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Al-Mišwaq al-ġadīd fī al-qirāʾa al-ʿarabiya, Salmī, Marhala at-taʿālīm al-ibtidāʾī, aṣ-ṣanna alawalī - aṣ-ṣaf 11 (Elementary education first year), Manšūrāt al-kitaba al-būlsiya, pp. 30-40.

regard to the neighbouring Arab states on the one hand and the West on the other.¹¹⁹ Special consideration was given to the teaching of history since it was considered ‘the most useful study to enhance patriotic affection and national pride.’¹²⁰ In the same way, great importance was placed on ethics and civic education with the aim of making the child ‘grow up loving his country, taking pride in it’ and ultimately to gain a consciousness of ‘sacrificing himself for its [the country’s] dignity’.¹²¹ In his detailed evaluation of the 1946 social studies curriculum, Frayha comes to the conclusion that the effort of emphasizing all aspects of Lebanese life in order to create and promote nationalism actually ignored the fact that Lebanon was indeed a pluralistic society and was based on the assumption ‘that the society could become homogenous with minimal willingness and effort.’¹²² Therefore, this curriculum has to be considered as working directly against any form of syncretistic nationalism that would consider communities as building blocks of the nation that maintain their identity while transferring loyalty to an overarching, more civic national identity.

The curriculum actually left enough space for the various schools, which in the first decades of independence showed a willingness to implement the official educational policy, to emphasize whichever aspect they wanted to at the expense of the others. Not surprisingly, religious schools emphasized religion in order to strengthen their denomination. This, in turn, enhanced sectarian interests being placed over national interests.¹²³ In fact, evaluating the Lebanese educational system in 1949, Roderic and Akrawi came to the conclusion that ‘[i]t can perhaps be safely said that the schools help to perpetuate [...] cleavages, if not make them more pronounced.’¹²⁴ Private sectarian schools continued to flourish despite efforts to strengthen

¹¹⁹ *Wizāra al-tarbīya al-waṭaniya wa al-funūn al-ġamīla* (1943), p. 3/4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹²² Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 240.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹²⁴ Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, ‘Part Six: Lebanon’, p. 505.

governmental education and to enforce a unified curriculum. It was not before 1951 that the first comprehensive public school was opened and the first state university established and so, with the exception of primary education, the monopoly on education was left in the hands of foreign and/or private schools. Furthermore, the sectarian system was also widely accepted within Lebanese society, so that the choice of school remained 'to a large extent determined by sectarian considerations.'¹²⁵ This did not necessarily mean that children were always sent to schools run by their own denomination. The choice was often also guided by the economic situation of families or which foreign system the school followed. In such cases, secular schools were often chosen since the deciding factor then became 'the absence or minimum of proselytization.'¹²⁶

When the less-privileged Muslim communities, who for financial reasons largely had to send their children to public schools, began to ask for an abolition of the sectarian system in the early 1950s, the aspect of education was crucial to them. Point nine of a Muslim manifesto demanded:

Cessation of the printing, distribution and use of text books for government schools which propagate Lebanese history and sociology from the exclusive viewpoint of one sect to the excusion [*sic*] of equal prominence for Arabism and the viewpoints of the other groups and sects.¹²⁷

In addition, the group claimed that government support was given only to Christian private schools, but not to those of the Muslim communities, and foreign scholarships were exclusively given to Christian citizens. Such treatment was considered as especially unfair since the need for assistance was considerably higher among the Muslim communities. The manifesto came to the conclusion that the government policy regarding education was abused by the regime which was 'uninterested in seeing

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 416.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ TNA, FO1018/93, Moslem Lebanon Today, 1953, p. 4.

progress or betterment for its Moslem citizens.’¹²⁸

The lack of a proper, unified educational system was partly held responsible for negative developments resulting from the lack of social cohesion in Lebanon. Referring to the 1958 crisis, Bustani claimed that ‘[s]ome system of compulsory schooling would have given the younger generation a natural sense of patriotism which would have prevented so many of its members from seeking political inspiration from beyond their national borders.’¹²⁹ In fact, the education system in place certainly exacerbated their feeling of being discriminated against and economically deprived compared to the Lebanese Christian community that facilitated the growing influence of Nasser and Pan-Arabism on the younger generation of Lebanese Muslims.

Education towards civil war

The 1960s and 1970s saw an impressive expansion of the education sector, both governmental and private. During this, the private religious schools remained the most attractive to students, followed by non-religious private schools. Socio-economic differences that became more and more polarized throughout the 1960s and 1970s were highlighted by which school students attended. The end of the 1960s constituted the high tide of public schools, yet they still only enrolled 39 percent of Lebanese students. Their quality had increased considerably, however, and Farha claims they ‘were able to compete with the best of private schools,’¹³⁰ which remained mainly frequented by children from higher social classes.

Therefore, as Hanf concluded in his comprehensive study on Lebanese education, by the end of the 1960s the education system in Lebanon largely mirrored the

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

¹²⁹ AUB Archives, Emile Bustani, ‘The Lebanon’, p. 23.

¹³⁰ Mark Farha, ‘The Historical Legacy’, p. 72.

many rifts and divisions of Lebanese society, both religious and social.¹³¹ Furthermore, the dominating private religious schools continued their tendency to ‘induce or affirm [...] a feeling of “differentness” from the other groups in the country’ and contributed to the creation or reinforcement of ‘already present jealousies and animosities among their graduates.’¹³² While this assertion by Suleiman mainly referred to private schools for the Maronite denomination, one respondent to the questionnaires who attended an American-sponsored private religious school for Muslims in the late 1960s noted that her education ‘never emphasized our being Lebanese’ and that Lebanon was rather perceived as ‘being a country for the Christians’ in which Muslims were marginalized.¹³³ On the other hand, a Shi‘a Muslim respondent who attended a private Catholic school in the 1960s explicitly stated that ‘going to a Christian school made me more understanding and comfortable with people from different sects.’¹³⁴ It can probably be asserted that it was the exposure to students of different denominations that facilitated the comfort with religious co-existence rather than the content of the curriculum. Overall, those questionnaire respondents who went to mixed secular schools all stated that their educational experience helped to shape their perception of Lebanese identity as multi-communal, while those attending private religious schools largely point to their contact with people of other denominations outside school and their upbringing at home as being responsible for instilling in them the value of co-existence.¹³⁵

The social pressures created by the increase of public schools and the continuing dominance of private religious schools led to a growing debate over the reform of the education sector amongst all denominations and resulted in the revised curriculum of

¹³¹ See Theodor Hanf (1969), p. 351.

¹³² Michael W. Suleiman (1967), p.32.

¹³³ Questionnaire answered by Hiba A. Shanshal (by Email), 26.08.2013.

¹³⁴ Questionnaire answered by Fatme Charafeddine (by Email), 27.08.2013.

¹³⁵ Questionnaires conducted between May and December 2013.

1968-71.¹³⁶ In accordance with the political atmosphere at this time, the new curriculum placed a greater emphasis on Arabism than the 1946 curriculum. This mirrored the strength pan-Arabism had gained at the expense of Lebanese nationalism because of the growing influence of Lebanon's Muslim community. Examining the teaching of history at the secondary level makes this very obvious. According to the new curriculum, no precedence was given to the Phoenician civilization, and more importance was placed on the history of the Arab world than on the history of Lebanon itself.¹³⁷ The new elementary education curriculum intended social studies courses 'to mould the student into a good citizen through moral and social education as well as geographical and historical knowledge. The teacher [...] should help to develop patriotism among his students.'¹³⁸ Yet the civics curriculum for the elementary level was merely an introduction to the Lebanese political system, and as it did not promote any sort of discussion of democratic principles it rather inhibited the development of an active citizenship.

Over time, the production of new textbooks reflected the ongoing discourse on Lebanese identity and history, often avoiding touching upon contentious issues concerning the history of the country. The governmental development plan for the period 1972 to 1977 included an article on education in the country. It reads as follows:

The principal aim of education is to develop the individual's capabilities and humanitarian aspects in order to prove himself and regain his dignity and freedom (!). Another educational aim has a special interest in Lebanon, that is, preparing the good citizen. True education is the best means to get rid of this torn situation from which the Lebanese are suffering.¹³⁹

Yet in 1973 civics was actually removed from the secondary social studies curriculum since students had started interpreting 'all institutional activities according to their

¹³⁶ Often simply referred to as the 1968 curriculum. However, it is more correct to say 1968-1971 since it comprises of three stages that were enacted in 1968 (secondary level), 1970 (complementary level), and 1971 (elementary and kindergarten level).

¹³⁷ Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 283.

¹³⁸ The Curriculum, 1971, p. 29, as quoted in Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 186.

¹³⁹ As quoted in Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 278.

ideologies.¹⁴⁰ Instead, the number of hours for religious education was increased.

Bashur asserts that there may have been some links between the expansion of government education and the outbreak of the hostilities in the mid-1970s.¹⁴¹ While this appears hard to prove, it can be stated that the increase contributed to a growing awareness of the lesser privileged Muslim communities that started demanding more equality and a fairer representation in the state. Most notably the consciousness of the Shi'a increased around the same time, and Imam Musa Sadr made a point of equality in education. During his speech announcing the launch of the *Harakat al-Mahrumin* he strongly denounced the denial of education to Lebanon's Muslim citizens and noted that there was actually only one government school in Ba'albek and it dated back to the mandate period.¹⁴² The *Supreme Shi'ite Islamic Council* said that the state should take over the responsibility for religious education while stressing the need for free, unified education:

An over-all educational plan should be drawn up to assure that the youth in the various schools receive a unified, responsible, sensible education which will take care to impart instruction in the national and Arab heritage.¹⁴³

In fact, the strong Arab character of a unified educational programme and textbooks for Lebanon was specifically emphasized.

The *Permanent Congress of Superiors General of the Lebanese Monastic Orders* and the *Maronite League* brought up the necessity of reforming the educational sector as well. However, no mention was made of the need for unified curricula and textbooks. On the contrary, the paper reaffirmed the special role of private education and the assurance of the freedom of education as guaranteed by the constitution. While

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁴¹ Munir Bashshur, 'The Role of Education', p. 55.

¹⁴² *an-Nahar*, 18.03.1974, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Working Paper: Political, Social and Economic Reform, published by the Supreme Shi'ite Islamic Council, November 27, 1975, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), Vol. 3, p. 93.

it asserted that '[e]ducational reform must be focused on common goals which bring together the various human, national, professional, spiritual and cultural aspects',¹⁴⁴ this left enough room for interpretation. Also, no mention was made of Arab history and/or culture; rather the educational programme 'must be related to world culture'.¹⁴⁵ Such statements have to be considered part of a trend labelled 'cultural pluralism' that had started in the mid-1970s. Despite the new label, this trend remained based on the traditional divisive concept of sectarian education.¹⁴⁶

Any debate surrounding educational reforms, however, quickly came to an end with the outbreak of hostilities.

Education during the civil war

The descent into civil war, the breakdown of the state and the virtual fragmentation of the country into militia districts resulted in the increase of sectarian schools. Instead of reforms, students' lives were repeatedly interrupted by fighting, school buildings being destroyed or militias and displaced people occupying facilities. The academic year 1975-1976 was cancelled altogether due to the fighting in most of Lebanon. As the questionnaires reveal, students not only had their education interrupted but most of the respondents also had to change school several times due to relocations related to the conflict.¹⁴⁷ While during the first phase of the war, students were still able to attend schools of different denominations, respondents also noted that the civil war 'divided Lebanon more or less according to religion' and this started to be reflected in the

¹⁴⁴ Memorandum Concerning Reform, prepared by the Lebanese Committee for Research (The Kaslik Group), adopted by the Permanent Congress of Superiors General of the Lebanese Monastic Orders and the Maronite League, published in al-Anwar newspaper on 23.12.1975, p. 3, in: Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World/ Saint Joseph's University (1975), Vol. 3, p. 112.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴⁶ See Munir Bashshur, 'The Role of Education', p. 55/56.

¹⁴⁷ Questionnaires conducted between May and December 2013.

composition of students in schools in the later phases of the conflict.¹⁴⁸

These things were, however, out of the control of the state that had largely broken down. Throughout the civil war no legislative acts concerning social studies and citizenship education were passed. While a memorandum in 1981 recommended the use of Red Cross educational material, this did not seem to have been put into practice. However, Frayha points out that the Ministry of Education of the virtually demised central state made some attempts 'to revive patriotism and a sense of nationhood among the Lebanese youth' through the recommendation of cultural activities at the schools such as flag day and independence day.¹⁴⁹ Students were also encouraged to raise the Lebanese flag at home; yet it does not seem that these attempts were successful in the highly politicized and militarized environment during the civil war. Such activities were also not mentioned by any of the questionnaire respondents.

As Salibi pointed out, the civil war was in many ways also a war over the correct history of the country, and the lack of a uniform textbook on Lebanese history in order to effectively educate Lebanese children as citizens of the country was an issue recognized and discussed throughout the various stages of the civil war and the production of such a textbook was considered essential to achieve a solution to the conflict.¹⁵⁰ While the competition over the 'correct history' had been played out mainly between the Maronite and the Sunni Muslim communities, the Shi'a and the Druze communities had increasingly entered the discussion as well. Since 1983, the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt had 'repeatedly declared that the rewriting of the Lebanese history textbooks was a necessary precondition for any lasting political settlement in Lebanon, if not the primary one' and asked for the removal of 'all the Christian-

¹⁴⁸ Questionnaire answered by Suha Tutunji (by Email), 18.10.2013. See also questionnaire answered by Nayla Hamadeh (by Email), 13.12.2013.

¹⁴⁹ Nemer Frayha, thesis, p. 280.

¹⁵⁰ Kamal Salibi (1988), p. 201.

fabricated myths.’¹⁵¹ In the absence of a working central state, he took matters into his own hands in the predominantly Shuf mountains under his control. The curriculum was rewritten ‘in keeping with the political ethos of the Druze community’, and a new version of history introduced for instruction in Druze schools.¹⁵² Most importantly though, and surely contributing to aggravate already existing cleavages, was the different way in which national symbols were dealt with. Salibi notes that students in Druze schools ‘no longer honoured the Lebanese banner and national anthem, nor did they defer in any way to the state as a matter of principle.’¹⁵³ He ascribes this to the fact that the Lebanese republic was considered as congruent with the official version of Lebanese history and, as such, only serving the Maronite community. The opposite trend was noticed in Sunni schools around Beirut where the official government curriculum was strictly adhered to, and specifically the schools run by the Maqasid Society in Beirut emphasized the upholding of established Lebanese national symbols and traditions. Salibi notes that this was an important factor in the disintegrating country, and it has to be considered especially remarkable since the Maqasid College had been the centre of opposition to the official Lebanese historical narrative in the early 1930s.¹⁵⁴

The issue of education also played a role in the Ta’if agreement that finally ended the civil war in 1989. However, it was relegated to a place under the heading of ‘Other Reforms’ where earlier agreements and documents concerning education were merely reaffirmed. On the one hand that was consistent with the rest of the agreement since it, in general, basically constituted a reaffirmation of the 1943 National Pact. On the other hand it meant that with the postponement of a durable solution yet another contentious issue within the Lebanese system was left in limbo. While private education

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ See Theodor Hanf (1969), pp. 325-337.

remained ‘protected’, the agreement also stated that ‘state control over private schools and textbooks shall be strengthened.’¹⁵⁵ The existing curricula should be reviewed and ‘developed in a manner that strengthens national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, and that unifies textbooks on the subjects of history and national education.’¹⁵⁶ This rather vague statement did not differ much from previous ones concerned with the education system in the country and lacked any precise suggestions for reform.

CONCLUSION

Modern education in both Eritrea and Lebanon was first introduced by missionary institutions and initially not under the firm control of a central government. During the colonial/mandate period, religious institutions continued to play an important role despite the existence of a strong, central state. Aside from the content of education working towards the inculcation of the dominating European power’s culture, this contributed to enhancing cleavages largely based on religious lines and related concepts of a sense of belonging. Hence, when the period of European domination ended, an educational system and a unified curriculum was needed that would be inclusive of all communities in the territory, while taking over the role of socializing students as citizens of the territorial entity by promoting an overarching civil, national identity. In Eritrea, such was created through the UN resolution and with the help of the British administration before the territory became an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia. However, the experience of this system and curriculum was short-lived due to Ethiopian undermining and finally annexation that resulted in the Ethiopian system, curriculum and language being imposed on Eritrean students. Soon after the beginning

¹⁵⁵ Ta’if *Agreement* (officially, the Document of National Accord), Section F.3., available at: <http://www.mideastinfo.com/documents/taif.htm>, (last accessed 25.08.2012).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Section F.5.

of the liberation struggle, the task of education was taken up by the liberation movements in the liberated areas. While the newly developed system and curriculum did ultimately promote cohesion between the various socio-linguistic, ethnic and religious communities, it was solely designed by the dominating EPLF and largely used for political indoctrination, which included the demonizing of any political opposition, thereby creating new cleavages. The sovereign government of independent Lebanon, on the other hand, presented a unified curriculum but, at the same time, failed to create a unified educational system or to strictly implement the new curriculum, especially in the private religious schools. Consequently, the system continued to reflect existing cleavages and this was exacerbated during the civil war.

Therefore, while the educational systems that had developed certainly have to be credited with reducing illiteracy, especially in the case of Eritrea, and the promotion of a sense of belonging to the territorial entity, neither was inclusive truly inclusive of all parts of their society. The fact that no unified and standardized education creating a cohesive national identity had been established certainly contributed to the outbreak of civil conflict to a certain extent. In addition, the conflict turned the educational sector into an area of contestation over domination which was detrimental for establishing a system promoting syncretistic nationalism.

CONCLUSION

Drawing together the experiences of the two cases researched attests to the difficulty of developing and realising a national identity based on the concept of syncretistic nationalism in postcolonial, multi-communal states. As the various lenses used to look at the development of national identity formation have shown, a development from positions strongly marked by religious cleavages and correlated opposed definitions of identity towards a more civic understanding of national identity occurred in both Eritrea and Lebanon despite their different circumstances.

By the end of the European domination of Eritrea, two opposed nationalist aspirations had emerged that, due to the international decision on the future status of the territory, did not have to find a mode of reconciliation within an independent state but rather in an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia. Although a system of power-sharing was established that could have allowed a syncretistic nationalism to develop, the dismantling of the federation and final annexation of the territory by Ethiopia resulted in the Eritrean people establishing a concept of Eritrean national identity in the context of their struggle for independence from Ethiopia. The fact that the Eritrean right to self-determination was repudiated not only by the Ethiopian state but also by the international community at large, gave rise to a strong emphasis on self-reliance. Furthermore, the absence of a state structure and a political system within which Eritrean identity could be defined and developed led to the evolution of a concept of identity based on the territorial entity created by the former colonial power of Italy and the system envisioned for a liberated Eritrea. In order to facilitate the establishment of a transcending national identity, considered specifically relevant to enforce claims to self-determination, communities were deliberately depoliticized. This corresponds to the form of syncretistic nationalism that is generally described as potentially more successful. However, it was achieved through indoctrination and the stripping of

traditional cultures and traditions of their content and, in an attempt to secure monopoly over power within the liberation movement and the future independent state, political opposition was violently suppressed which resulted in the creation of new cleavages.

In Lebanon, on the other hand, a form of syncretistic nationalism was implemented that combined power-sharing with institutionalized sectarianism. Thus, religious communities were highly politicized which, together with the system's inflexibility with regard to demographic changes, created a constant source of conflict. The depoliticization of the communities that could have opened the way to stronger political unity of the state was prevented by the fact that the Maronite community and its foreign supporters, decisively strengthened by the system, constantly insisted on the reaffirmation of the system due to their fear of losing influence and power. While these approaches to nation-building on the elite level appear rather detrimental to the development of a cohesive national identity, this thesis has also shown that a will to live together and a sense of belonging to the same 'imagined' national community has, indeed, developed in both countries.

What is conclusive is that a syncretistic nationalism does, indeed, appear to be the concept most likely to facilitate co-existence and the development of a national identity that does not infringe on the generally more deeply rooted and emotionally loaded sense of belonging to a subnational community. However, this overarching identity, based on civic rather than ethnic, cultural or religious principals, needs to also provide symbols and myths that can evoke at least the same level of emotional appeal as identities based on the latter in order to not become submerged in times of crisis and/or conflict. Furthermore, in countries with an almost even division between the main communities such as Eritrea and Lebanon, a democratic system of power-sharing is needed that is flexible enough to adapt to demographic changes and does not give predominance to either side. It appears that the periods under common administration

and, in the case of Eritrea, common subjugation, had already created the will to live together and the imagination of belonging to one single community amongst the people. Yet, appropriate still had to be taken on the elite level to transfer this into a viable and democratic political system, otherwise both countries will remain susceptible to internal disaffections and the negative impact of the rather instable regional environment.

Therefore, in both countries the process of national identity formation could not be considered conclusive by the beginning of the 1990s and both faced similar tasks with regard to demilitarizing the society and creating an atmosphere of reconciliation between all communities and/or political organizations. Furthermore, a relationship with the regional neighbours had to be established that would not be detrimental to the internal stability of the country and/or evoke the reappearance of old sentiments of bonds with the neighbouring entity. In the case of Eritrea, the commonly experienced suppression and violence by the Ethiopian state not only facilitated unity with regard to opposition to Ethiopian control but resulted in breaking Ethiopian hegemony in the region by realizing military victory; and due to cooperation with the movements which were to form the new regime in Addis Ababa the newly independent state of Eritrea managed to establish a new relationship with the former dominant country. With Eritrea treated as an equal partner, and both countries acknowledging the need for economic cooperation and regional stability, the question of granting Ethiopia access to the sea no longer constituted an issue. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the fragility of national identity had left the country vulnerable to foreign manipulation and intervention, which resulted in neighbouring Syria establishing a decisive influence, even domination, over the country. In fact, post-war Lebanon's strong dependence on Syria decisively impacted its ability to act as an independent and sovereign state.

Furthermore, the existing national consciousness also had to prove its resilience in the face of the challenges ahead of both countries. In Eritrea, the main problems were

linked to the need for massive reconstruction work, effective institution-building and the establishment of a pluralist and democratic system. The last point was of major importance since it not only referred to the crucial question of whether Eritrean society would be able to maintain political pluralism but also contained the necessity of addressing the strictly hierarchical and autocratic structure developed by the EPLF. While the development of this structure and the suppression of internal opposition during the independence struggle were justified by the fear of weakening the struggle through disunity, the disappearance of the common enemy rendered them obsolete in the independent polity. The new context required finding a new basis for and establishment of an inclusive political system which would tolerate and be able to contain all the existing internal differences. In addition, Eritrea also had to face the challenge of the sense of isolation and mistrust it had developed during the struggle. While the relationship with Ethiopia was quickly established, and suspicion of the international community, specifically Western powers, persisted and influenced reconstruction efforts decisively as foreign aid was largely refuted. In Lebanon, the main challenges, in addition to Syrian dominance, were linked to the question of the solidity of the national feeling developed during the war, and the likeliness of it transcending to the elite level. The majority of the people were desirous of peaceful co-existence and were largely ready to accept a political system based on power-sharing. Yet the fact that the Ta'if agreement merely re-affirmed the sectarian system based on the 1943 National Pact without any modification carried the danger of the elites simply returning to their pre-war power politics. Since the system was, again, affirmed to be only of a temporary nature, the agreement did not include any mechanisms to take into account demographic changes in the country either since the National Pact, or in the future. Furthermore, it did not provide for any process of reconciliation, an essential element in a post-civil war environment. Unlike Eritrea, Lebanon's prolonged conflict

was largely inter-communal and even intra-communal at times. Without any reconciliation it appeared questionable whether the common desire for peace would be strong enough to overcome memories of atrocities committed by co-nationals, and to build the trust necessary for a strong national cohesive feeling.

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