# 1 On Proxy Wars and Surrogate Victims

"When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand."
— René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1977)

"The practice of violence changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world."
— Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958)

"When in doubt, just bomb Lebanon."
— Charles Glass, *The Daily Star* (2000)

The social and political history of Lebanon — despite occasional manifestations of consensus, balance and harmony — has always been characterized by successive outbursts of civil strife and political violence. The brutality and duration of almost two decades of senseless bloodletting might have obscured some of the earlier episodes. Consequently, observers are often unaware that much of Lebanon's history is essentially a history of intermittent violence. Dramatic episodes such as the peasant uprisings of 1820, 1840, and 1857 and the repeated outbreaks of sectarian hostilities in 1841, 1845, 1860, 1958, and the protracted civil war of 1975–92, reveal, if anything, the fragility of Lebanon's confessional democracy, its deficient civility and perpetual grievances of dominant groups within society. Because of such inherent deficiencies and contradictions, Lebanon has always been vulnerable to inter-Arab and superpower rivalries. Quite often a purely internal or local grievance is magnified or deflected to become the source of international conflict. Conversely, such foreign intervention has always exacerbated internal cleavages.

Typical of small, communal and highly factionalized societies, much of the violence in the early nineteenth century took the form of internal strife between factions and feuding families. Little of it assumed an open confessional conflict. At least until 1840, the bulk of violence was more in the

nature of feuds, personal and factional rivalry between bickering feudal chieftains, and rival families vying for a greater share of power and privilege in society. Nineteenth-century travelers and local chroniclers all uniformly commented on the spirit of amity that had characterized confessional relations at the time (for further details, see Hitti 1957; Salibi 1965; Khalaf 1979; Abraham 1981; Akarli 1993; Fawaz 1994).

Throughout the nineteenth century, Lebanon witnessed various forms of social change which began to dislocate feudal relations and disturb the balance of forces between the various sects and religious communities. The interplay of both external and internal transformations opened up the society to new ideological and cultural encounters, various forms of secular reforms, and generated further socioeconomic mobilization. Such swift transformations, however, also produced pronounced shifts in the relative socioeconomic and political positions of the various religious communities. These dislocations almost always touched off renewed outbreaks of civil unrest and political violence.

In some obvious respects, Lebanon has all the features of a fragmented political culture. In fact, it has been fashionable in the relentless outpouring of literature to depict the country as an "improbable," "precarious," "fragmented," "dismembered," "torn" society; a house so "divided" and riven by ethnic, religious, and communal schisms that it has become extremely difficult to "piece it together again." Indeed, given this inherent "deficiency in its civility," some go as far as to doubt whether Lebanon has ever existed as a viable political entity.[1]

Such conceptions, particularly those propounded by Lebanon's detractors, and they are legion, are often exaggerated. They bear nonetheless some measure of truth. Even those who continue to entertain a more flattering and felicitous image of Lebanon and speak — often in highly evocative, idyllic and romanticized tones — of this "valiant little democracy," as a "privileged creation" and a "bold cultural experiment," a "miraculous" pluralistic society sustained by resourcefulness, resilience, and *unfuwan* cannot entirely dismiss or mystify the inherently problematic nature of Lebanon's pluralism.[2]

Lebanon's predicament, given the resurgence of what is termed "Low Intensity Conflict" (LIC) by experts on global warfare and Third World insurgency, is far from unique. Its sanguinary history with protracted strife epitomizes the predicaments other small, plural, fragmented political cultures caught up in turbulent regional and global rivalries are also facing. More, perhaps, than other comparable entities, this interplay between internal dislocations and external destabilizing pressures has been much more

acute and problematic in Lebanon. It is also a long-standing and persisting feature. Neither the internal divisions, nor the external unsettling forces are of recent vintage. Nor should they be attributed, as claimed recently, to the divisive presence of "borrowed ideologies" and other disheartening derivatives or fallouts of the new world order, post-modernity or the "clash of civilization."

Long before the state of Lebanon came into being in 1920, it had been a puzzling and enigmatic entity: extremely difficult to manage politically, or to cement together into a viable and integrative social fabric. To a large extent, its fragmented political culture is a byproduct of two general features. First, it reflects some of the traditional forces and sharp cleavages, sustained by striking differences in religious beliefs, communal and sectarian loyalties, kinship and fealty sentiments, and other primordial attachments which continue to split the society vertically and reinforce its factional and parochial character. Second, and superimposed on these, are some of the new forms of socioeconomic and cultural differentiation generated by the asymmetrical growth Lebanon has been undergoing with the advent of modernity. These differences manifest themselves in virtually all the common indicators of socioeconomic mobilization, demographic variables, literacy, quality of life, exposure to westernization, professionalization and the like.

Hence, there have always been both vertical and horizontal divisions which on occasion pulled the society apart and threatened the delicate balance of forces. With the exception of the massacres of 1860, all earlier episodes of conflict were however comparatively limited in scope, clearly not as belligerent or devastating in their destructive consequences. For better or worse, prompt foreign intervention always managed to bring about a cessation of hostilities, if not a firm or just resolution of the issues underlying the conflict.

Disruptive as they might have been by standards of the day, all earlier episodes of collective strife pale when compared to the ruthless atrocities the country has been afflicted with recently. For almost two decades, Lebanon was besieged and beleaguered by every possible form of brutality and collective terror known to human history: from the cruelties of factional and religious bigotry to the massive devastations wrought by private militias and state-sponsored armies. They have all generated an endless carnage of innocent victims and immeasurable toll of human suffering.

Even by the most moderate of estimates, the magnitude of such damage to human life and property is staggering. About 170,000 have perished, twice as many have been wounded or disabled, close to two-thirds of the popula-

tion experienced some form of dislocation or uprootedness from their homes and communities. By the fall of 1982, UN experts estimated that the country had sustained $12–15 billion in damages, i.e. $2 billion per year. Today more than one-third of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line on a subsistence budget of $600 a month as a result of war and displacement (Corm 1998: 9).

For a small, dense and closely knit society with a population of about 3.5 million and an area of 10,452 km$^2$, such devastations are, understandably, very menacing. More damaging, perhaps, are some of the socio-psychological and moral concomitants of protracted hostility. The scars and scares of war have left a heavy psychic toll which displays itself in pervasive post-stress symptoms and nagging feelings of despair and hopelessness. In a culture generally averse to psychoanalytic counseling and therapy, these and other psychic disorders are more debilitating. They are bound to remain masked and unrecognized and, hence, unattended to.

The demoralizing consequences of the war are also visible in symptoms of vulgarization and impoverishment of public life and erosion of civility. The routinization of violence, chaos, and fear only compounded the frayed fabrics of the social order. It drew groups into the vortex of bellicose conflict and sowed a legacy of hate and bitterness. It is in this fundamental sense that Lebanon's pluralism, radicalization of its communities, and consequent collective violence have become pathological and uncivil.

Rather than being a source of enrichment, variety, and cultural diversity, the modicum of pluralism the country once enjoyed is now generating large residues of paranoia, hostility, and differential bonding. This pervasive "geography of fear," and the predisposition of threatened and displaced groups to relocate in cloistered and homogeneous communities, only serves to accentuate distance from and indifference to the "other." This is not to be dismissed as a transient, benign feature. Given the resistance of displaced groups to return and reclaim their original homes and property, this drastic redrawing of Lebanon's social geography might turn out to be more ominous and fateful. At the least it is bound to complicate prospects for rehabilitation and national integration.

Impressive as they may seem, one need not be deceived by the public mood of optimism and symptoms of national well-being generated by the massive, often exuberant, schemes for reconstruction and physical rehabilitation of the country's devastated infrastructure. Nor does the outward political stability rest on firm foundations or consensus over substantive issues of national sovereignty and ultimate political destiny. The sociocultural po-

larization-visible in striking differences in values, normative expectations, life-style, public display of wealth and privilege, cultural artifacts, popular entertainment, consumerism, the reassertion of spatial and communal identities and, more recently, in the polemics over public issues such as civil marriage, electoral reforms, and foreign policy-are much too apparent to be masked by the fickle manifestations of national solidarity and collective consciousness. Sentiments, and avowed claims on behalf of the transcending entities of national unity and secular allegiances, pale when pitted against symptoms of social division, sharp cultural differentiation, and distance between communities.

The precepts of history in this regard are not on Lebanon's side. At least if modernity and progressive change stand for diversity, mix, hybridity, and openness, then what has been happening in Lebanon, in a majority of areas, is a movement away from such enabling encounters. Social and intellectual historians are keen on reminding us that a fascinating transformation in the historical evolution of most societies involves their passage from a relatively "closed" to a more "open" system: membership, exit or entry, access to privileges and benefits are no longer denied by virtue of limitations of religion, kinship, or race. Such openness accounts for much of the spectacular growth in the philosophical, artistic, and political emancipation of contemporary societies. It is in this sense that Lebanon is now at that critical threshold, since it is about to invert and reverse this natural course of history. Indeed, what we might be witnessing is the substitution of one form of pluralism, imperfect as it has been, for a more regressive and pathological kind. We are destroying a society that permitted, on and off, groups with divergent backgrounds and expectations to live side by side. What is emerging is a monolithic archetype that is hostile to any such coexistence or free experimentation.

While such reawakened communal solidarities provide shelter, the needed socio-psychological support and access to welfare, benefits, and privileging networks, they also heighten and reinforce the intensity of enmity toward groups perceived as different. Though open fighting and warfare have been momentarily suspended, the country remains riven with suspicious, unrelenting, and unforgiving recriminations.

Altogether then, the resort to violence — willful or otherwise, generated from within or without, byproduct of fortuitous circumstances or conspiracy and design — has been wasteful and futile. It has had little effect on redressing the gaps and imbalances in society or in transforming Lebanon's communal and confessional loyalties into more secular and civic entities. Indeed

the very persistence of such enmity means that something is not changing.

Inferences of this sort prompt me to carry the argument even further and suggest that insofar as violence has served to widen rifts and cleavages in society, it has already become counter-productive and self-defeating. The process of "breaking eggs and making omelets," to borrow a trite metaphor, need not in other words always prove judicious. I take my hint here from Hannah Arendt, who has suggested that "the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world." (Arendt 1958: 182) It is also in this sense, as will be elaborated shortly, that civil violence slips into incivility.

Who is to rescue Lebanon from the savagery and scourge of violence unleashed upon it for so long? In all earlier episodes of collective strife, though foreign powers and regional brokers had a role in inciting and escalating hostilities, they also stepped in to contain the conflict when it began to undermine their strategic interests. Both, for example, in 1860 and 1958, conflict ended largely because the interests of the superpowers were better served by stabilizing Lebanon. As will be seen, it took 32 weeks and about 50 meetings of intensive diplomatic negotiations between the concerned foreign actors at the time (i.e. France, Great Britain, Austria, Russia, Prussia, and Turkey) to arrive at the *Règlement Organique* which reconstituted Lebanon as an Ottoman province under the guarantee of the six signatory powers. Through French initiative, the international commission was set up to fix responsibility, determine guilt, estimate indemnity, and suggest reforms for the reorganization of Mount Lebanon.

Likewise, in 1958 the strategic stature and significance of Lebanon was at its height. The region was seething with political ferment and ideological disputes. The Cold War had transformed the region into a proxy battlefield for superpower rivalry. The Baghdad Pact of 1955, the Suez Crisis of 1956, unrest in Jordan in 1957, the formation of the United Arab Republic (the abortive union between Egypt and Syria), the military coup in Iraq in 1958, all had unsettling implications. Since Lebanon at the time was identified with the Western camp, by virtue of its support of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the events had, naturally, direct bearings on the political standing of Lebanon. Indeed, the peace accord which ended the war was brokered by the U.S. and Egypt.

It should be noted, however, that before the Iraqi coup Eisenhower was reluctant to intervene directly despite the repeated requests made at the time by President Chamoun and foreign minister Charles Malik. Even when the US finally decided to commit its Marines, as Secretary of State John Foster

Dulles put it, "Lebanon was not very important in itself" (For this and other details, see Gerges 1997: 88–89). Hence, the intervention should not be taken as evidence of Western commitment to the security of Lebanon as such. Rather, Lebanon served as a proxy for other broader regional interests. The ultimate concern of the Eisenhower administration at the time was, of course, to curtail the spread of communism and radical Arab Nationalism which were perceived as threats to America's vital interests in the region, mainly oil supplies.

The deployment of American troops was also intended to demonstrate America's military clout and its determination to protect its regional and global interests. The US was also beginning to realize that with Nasser's charisma and growing influence in the region, Egypt was fast becoming the epicenter of Arab politics. This must account for its inclination to abandon Chamoun and work jointly with Cairo to arrive at a resolution of Lebanon's crisis. This, as in earlier and subsequent crises, served to reconfirm what was to become a recurrent modality in the resolution of conflict in Lebanon: the state is so enfeebled and divided that foreign and regional brokers take on this responsibility. Lebanon's impotence, or at least the failure of the state to immunize or protect itself against regional destabilizing forces, was of course translated into that ironical political doctrine, namely that the "country's strength lies in its weakness"! In effect this meant that the state was to surrender or relinquish its national security responsibility to other regional and global actors.[3]

Lebanon in the early and mid-seventies was not even in that mildly privileged a diplomatic or bargaining position. The détente between Russia and the U.S. defused much of the Cold War tension. Egypt under Sadat shifted toward the U.S. American inroads into the Arab Gulf and Iran became more substantive. Hence the major powers, in the wake of the first round of the war of 1975–76, had no immediate or vital interests at stake to interfere in the conflict. France was in no position to mobilize international initiative on behalf of Lebanon as it did in 1860. Unlike 1958, the U.S. also found little justification (at least initially) to dispatch their Marines or to engage in sustained diplomatic effort in settling the conflict.

Little wonder that when the war broke out in 1975, neither Washington nor Moscow felt the need to be involved in any direct diplomatic engagement as long as the conflict did not affect their vital interests. Henry Kissinger's disengagement diplomacy toward Lebanon, as Fawaz Gerges has persuasively argued, was "informed not only by his perception of the inherent precariousness of the country but also by the strategic need for a safety

valve where Arab-Israeli tensions could be released without the threat of a major Arab-Israeli confrontation" (Gerges 1997: 78). Theodor Hanf (1993) was even more explicit in arguing how by abandoning the search for a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy had actually increased the risk of proxy war in Lebanon. Indeed, Lebanon's suffering seemed of little or no concern as long as the internal hemorrhaging did not spill over, contaminate, or destabilize other vital spots in the region.

> There is no evidence that the USA ever had a 'plan', as Palestinians and Christian Lebanese believe. As early as 1969 the USA took the view that the Lebanese state could not effectively control the Palestinians. By abandoning the search for a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East in favour of a policy of step-by-step diplomacy or bilateral agreements between Israel and the Arab states, Kissinger *de facto* brought peace to Syria and Egypt, but greatly increased the risk of war in Lebanon. Kissinger's objective was gradually to reduce the risk of another conventional war in the Middle East. He regretted the fates of the Palestinians and of Lebanon, but regarded them as of secondary importance. Kissinger had suggested a policy of benign neglect toward Latin America; his policy toward Lebanon was in word benign, and in practice neglect. This attitude persisted in US foreign policy in the post-Kissinger era. Lebanon was to play a role only when, and in so far as, conflict there threatened to spill over into other states: Lebanon per se counted for little in American foreign policy (Hanf 1993: 176–77).

The "quick-fix" diplomacy the Reagan administration resorted to was ill-conceived, ill-timed, and mismanaged. There was, of course, more than just a civil war raging in Lebanon at the time. The country was already a proxy battlefield for other peoples' wars and a succession of unresolved regional/global rivalries. Reagan's rash adventure (or misadventure) undermined completely the balance of power equation between the regional and superpowers and placed the U.S. in an illusionary superior standing.

Agnes Korbani (1991) in her evaluative study of the two American interventions in Lebanon (1958 and 1982), concludes that Eisenhower's "move was effective, it brought peace without the use of force. As a result, the marines withdrew peacefully and proudly and were welcomed back home as heroes. Reagan's move however was defective. It left Lebanon in shambles.

And the victim marines were carried away to their last rest" (Korbani 1991: 124). More devastating, Lebanon's victimization from then on was compounded.

It must also be kept in mind that both in 1860 and 1958 the fighting was summarily ended with a political settlement, backed by major powers and reinforced by internal public opinion. The settlements also brought auspicious times. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Mount Lebanon was wallowing in an enviable "silver lining" (Hitti 1957) and enjoyed a blissful interlude of "long peace" (Akarli 1993). In the wake of the 1958 crisis the country was also privileged to enjoy another felicitous interlude of political stability, state building, and cultural enlightenment.

While Lebanon was released from the specter of global rivalry, it was caught instead in the more foreboding web of regional conflict. As long as the Arab-Israeli conflict was unresolved, Lebanon became once again an expedient and surrogate killing field. Indeed, all the fierce battles which inaugurated the prolonged hostilities in 1975 (PLO-Lebanese war, the PLO-Syrian war and the PLO-Israeli war) had little to do with the internal dislocations and political tensions.

More perhaps than other political observers, Ghassan Tueni has been propounding this persuasive thesis (i.e. Lebanon as a proxy killing field for other people's wars) with relentless tenacity; first as head of Lebanon's UN delegation and subsequently in many of his trenchant weekly columns in an-Nahar (Tueni 1985). Charles Issawi, another astute observer of Lebanon's unsettled history, was equally poignant in contemplating Lebanon's victimization in the wake of 1958 crisis. He had this to say by way of accounting for the moral indifference of the regional and international community:

Lebanon is too conspicuous and successful an example of political democracy and economic liberalism to be tolerated in a region that has turned its back on both systems. . . . It may be answered that such fears are unfounded, that the conscience of the world would not allow any harm to befall such a harmless country as Lebanon, that the neighboring world would not want to have a recalcitrant minority on their hands, and that it is their interests to preserve Lebanon as "a window on the West." But to anyone who has followed the course of national and international politics in the last fifty years, such arguments are sheer nonsense. Minorities have been very effectively liquidated, windows have been violently slammed and hardly a ripple has stirred in the conscience of the world (Issawi 1966: 80–81).

Lebanon as an Ugly Metaphor

The moral indifference to Lebanon's suffering Issawi was bemoaning three decades ago has slid further into hardened denial or rebuke. The conscience of the world did not get softer, more charitable, or apprehensive of Lebanon's continued abuse as a surrogate victim of inveterate regional rivalries. Ironically, it turned a callous blind eye and started to blame and malign the victim instead. It is also odd that this should continue to happen at a time the country is beginning to display some reassuring signs in concerted efforts of reconstruction and rehabilitation and in containing the level of open hostility. Such disheartening indifference is most visible at the diplomatic level. Even consequential issues, which have direct bearing on Lebanon's national security and sovereignty as an independent nation-state, are being debated, Lebanon is usually the last country to be involved.

Not only are events in Lebanon overlooked and mystified, but also "Lebanization" has been reduced to an ugly metaphor indiscriminately employed by sensational journalistic accounts and media soundbites. At times it is no more than an allegoric figure of speech; a sobriquet, a mere byword to conjure up images of the grotesque and unspoken.

These, and other hidden abominations, are pardonable. The most injurious, however, is when the label is reduced to a fiendish prop without emotion; a mere foil to evoke the anguish of others. When cataloguing the horrors of Lebanon at a time when it was still newsworthy on American TV, I kept a ledger of the times this indignant label popped up compulsively in an incredulous set of random but dreaded circumstances: a fireman fighting a blaze in Philadelphia, the anguish of an AIDS victim, a jogger facing the fearful prospects of Manhattan's Central Park, survivors of a train crash, dejected Vietnamese "boat people," evacuees from China, the frenzy of delirious masses mourning Khomeini's death, looting and the chaos in the wake of the Los Angeles earthquake, a shooting rampage of a crazed spree-killer, even the anguish and perplexing bewilderment on the face and demeanor of a psychopath was described by a noted American psychiatrist as if his subject was deranged by the cruelties of war in Lebanon!!

At times the pejorative codeword spilled over to include natural catastrophes: fires, earthquakes, hurricanes and the like, and the damage they inflict on vulnerable and braceless people. Even wanton acts of bestiality, the hapless victims of anomie, entropy and other symptoms of collective terror and fear are also epitomized as analogues to life in Lebanon.

Tabloids and sensational image-makers may be forgiven these epithets. As of late scholars, sadly, have begun to appropriate the label. Indeed, considering the growing number of scholarly writing which readily invokes "Lebanization" or "Lebanonization," it has now entered part of the regular lexicon of social science terminology. *Larousse*, the prominent French dictionary, might have well been the first when, in 1991, it introduced "Libanisation" formally into the French language to mean "proces de fragmentation d'un État, résultant de l'affronternent entre diverses communautés" (process of fragmentation of a state, as a result of confrontation between diverse communities). *Larousse* goes further to suggest that the term might be considered as an alternate to "balkanization," to capture more graphically the collapse and dismemberment of the "Eastern Bloc" in the wake of the Cold War.[4]

James Gillian, in his recent wide-ranging work on violence, singles out Lebanon (Beirut in particular)-along with the atrocities committed by Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Kamikaze pilots, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Red Brigades, and the victimization of innocents in Belfast, Bosnia, and Bogata-as illustrative "of the most horrendously destructive of human life around the world in this century" (Gillian 1996: 95). Rupesinghe does not remain at this broad narrative level. He goes further to accord "Lebanization" the attribute of a concept to refer to "situations where the state has lost control of law and order and where many armed groups are contending to power" (Rupesinghe 1992: 26). Nor does Helene d'Encausse, in an otherwise excellent study, where she talks about the "Lebanization of the Caucasus" to explore the clash of Christian Armenians with Shi'i Muslim Azeris for control of the Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbajian (d'Encausse 1993).

Even serious scholars could not resist the allure of the metaphor. The most revealing, perhaps, is the way William Harris has chosen to use the label in his most recent book on sectarian conflict and globalization in Lebanon (Harris 1997). In fact, the distinction he makes between the "Lebanization" of the 1980's and that of the 1990's informs the guiding thesis of his work. The former referred to "sectarian strife and temporary cantonization at a time of global transition." Lebanon then attracted attention as an "extreme case of regime multiplied across Eurasia" (Harris 1997: 6). Lebanonization of the 1990 ushered in a new threat. Extreme and militant Shi'is, by becoming the most potent political force, "represented the principal extension of the Iranian revolution in the Arab world." Hizballah quickly acquires its international bogeyman image and "Lebanonization"

begins to signify "a black hole of destruction, extremism and terror" (Harris 1997: 7).

It is also in this context, incidentally, that militant Shi'ism becomes the harbinger of the sort of collision between Islam and the West-a most likely preamble of the next world war-as hypothesized in Samuel Huntington's celebrated "Clash of Civilizations" (Huntington 1993 and 1996). Harris, to his credit, is critical of Huntington's rough divisions of "cultural zones" and "fault lines" through the entire Mediterranean region and he, accordingly, cautions against such "superficial generalizations." Yet, surprisingly, he turns around to assert, in view of General Aoun's "ill-fated bid to break the constraints of sectarianism and external pressures" in Lebanon's wars of 1989– 90, that "Lebanonization by then has eclipsed Lebanon" (Harris 1997: 16).

These and other such characterizations — particularly those which either exaggerate the fratricious innate character of Lebanon's internal divisions and dislocations or those which view it as a victim of predominantly external sources of instability — are naturally too generic and misleading. They do not capture or elucidate the rich diversity and complexities of the country's encounters with collective unrest. Nor do they do justice to some of the peculiar pathologies and circumstances associated with Lebanon's entrapment in that ravaging spiral of protracted and unappeased hostility which has beleaguered its strife-torn history for so long.

These two features — *displaced* and *protracted* hostility — remain the most defining elements in the country's encounters with collective strife. They also feed on each other and compound the pathological consequences of each. This is understandable when grievances or feelings of anger are not allayed or pacified. Agitated groups are prone to release their unappeased hostility, as Girard (1977) reminds us, on any accessible and vulnerable alibi. Episodes of protracted strife in Lebanon, as will be demonstrated, are replete with such instances of displaced enmity.

The character of communal strife and peasant uprising, in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, displayed many of these symptoms. Aroused peasants, aggrieved by the oppressive exactions of distant pashas or *amirs*, turned against the relatively weaker and more accessible feudal lords. Likewise, an *amir* or *hakim*, unable to resist the demands of an Ottoman sultan or *wali*, would vent his outrage on his defenseless feudal lords, often by playing one faction against another. Feuding cousins, sometimes brothers, vying to win the patronage of a *wali*, would end up in a fractious and bloody tribal rivalry. More decisive, in all these and related instances, the original character of the conflict was transformed in the process. A gen-

uine social protest was deflected into confessional rivalry; a sedition of op-
pressed peasants was muted and derailed into factional belligerency.

Foreign intervention in the 1958 crisis, by regional and global powers,
also generated its odd coalitions and proxy and divisive turf wars. Here again
an internal crisis over political succession and the intractable issues of so-
cioeconomic disparities, grievances of neglected groups and regions, and
Lebanon's contested national identity and foreign policy orientation, degen-
erated into sectarian and communal strife. It was then that the largely non-
belligerent forms of collective protest started to slip into vengeful cycles of
reprisals with all the atavistic and free-floating violence begotten by it. It was
also then that innocent citizens became proxy victims of unprovoked hos-
tility. They just happened to be there; "vulnerable and close at hand" (Girard
1977). With the absence of public order, unanchored masses were released
from the arbiters of conventional restraints. Acts of hooliganism, banditry,
pillage, looting, and disdain for law and order became rampant.

The grievous consequences of displaced hostility were naturally far more
barbarous during the protracted strife of the past two decades. Indeed, when
one reexamines some of the most ominous episodes, particularly those
which were fateful in redirecting the pattern of collective violence and
escalating its intensity, they were all byproducts of such surrogate victimi-
zation. For example, when Syrian forces were alternating their targets of
hostility-by shelling Christian militias' strongholds or, contrarily, when ward-
ing off the logistical gains of Palestinian fighters-they would rather have been
attacking their more ostensible enemies, namely, Israeli or Iraqi forces. Yet
neither of these regional superpowers were defenseless or at hand. Display-
ing their military powers over lesser and more compliant groups also allowed
them to extend or reinforce their patronage over alternate client groups.
This, as we shall see, accounted for much of the protraction of hostility and
miscarried cruelties.

The war raging in South Lebanon is a glaring instance of such proxy
violence. It has had little to do with the internal disparities or contradictions
within Lebanon. The war began when the ousted Palestinians from Jordan
relocated their bases and resumed their guerrilla operations from South Leb-
anon. From then on the South became an embattled war zone with grievous
repercussions for escalating the levels of hostility elsewhere in the country.
It is the war in the South that unleashed throngs of uprooted Shi'ites who
ultimately congested and radicalized the suburbs of destitution encircling
Beirut and other urban fringes. It is out of such slums of squalor and dere-
liction that Hizbullah emerged during the Israeli invasion of 1982. Ironi-

cally, when Israel expelled the PLO from Beirut it had in effect created a more ferocious and recalcitrant enemy. Hizbullah, like the PLO before it, is now embroiled in the same interlocking web of regional and global rivalries. Hence much of its activities are profoundly shaped by its two principal backers, namely Iran and Syria. Iran is, after all, the fount of Hizbullah's brand of Shi'ite fundamentalism and a source of an estimated $2 billion in support since the early 1980s (Norton 1999). Syria remains the sole vector through which the arms supplied by Iran have flowed.

The slightest shift in the balance of such exogenous forces, or the conduct of the intermittent Arab-Israeli peace talks, is bound to reactivate the cycle of belligerency. Not only the defenseless and innocent villagers in the South stand to suffer the outcome of such assaults. Both the magnitude and targets of Israeli reprisals for Hizbullah's Katyusha rockets on their settlements have recently witnessed some momentous changes. First, they are rarely directed against those ultimately responsible for them, namely Syria, Iran, or the military bases of the Shi'ite resistance forces. The reprisals are massive and disproportionate when compared to the benign damage generated by Hizbullah's rocket lobs or forays into the 9–mile "security zone" Israel has occupied in South Lebanon since 1978. Also the targets of such attacks always devastate civilian installations, power plants, villages, towns, families very far removed from Shi'ite guerrilla bases. In the latest bouts of Israeli belligerency (June 1999 and early February 2000) three power stations were destroyed, thereby leaving 80 percent of the country in utter darkness.

In fact, it does not really matter who provokes Israel's wrath. Nor does it need to fabricate alibis by way of justifying its reprisals. Over the years its government has not been able to restrain its compulsion to take out its wrath and pent-up hostility on Lebanon. In a recent editorial, aptly titled "when in doubt, just bomb Lebanon," Charles Glass expressed no surprise, in this context, if Israeli war planes were to be dispatched over Lebanon because "the Orthodox vigilantes in Jerusalem's Mea Shearim throw rocks at people driving on the Sabbath"! Such an affront may be far-fetched. Still the thirty years of relentless war in South Lebanon is one of the saddest tales of modern times, precisely because it is the one prime proxy war that does not seem to go away. The recent round of bellicosity attests to this. If anything, Hizbullah's stepped-up military offensives against Israel were most certainly encouraged by Syria by way of wresting concessions that Israel has refused to agree upon in the suspended talks.

Much of the internecine fighting, because it often involved spilling the blood of one's own kinsman, has been clearly more perfidious. Unlike its

analogue in biblical mythology, Cain and his many facsimiles, were never banished by avenging God for killing Abel. Rather than wandering fearfully, they were instead entrapped in a relentless carnage of renewed blood baths. In such settings of heightened emotional contagion, belligerent groups find themselves avenging almost anyone. *Instead of killing those they wanted to kill, they end up victimizing those they could.*

Another defining element needs to be noted. The blurring of boundaries between internal and external sources of conflict is not of recent vintage; a portent, as some claim, of the new world order or a precursor of what is to become the dominant unfolding pattern of political violence. Virtually all episodes of collective strife during the first half of the nineteenth century — recurrent peasant uprisings, sectarian rivalries, even petty factional feuds — were all predisposed to being manipulated by external circumstances. Such internationalization of the conflict almost always contributed to the protraction of hostility. In earlier and more recent conflict, as the country became increasingly embroiled in regional and superpower rivalries, it could not be sheltered from the destabilizing consequences of such struggles. As this occurred, the original issues provoking the conflict receded. Threatened and marginalized groups, victims of internal socioeconomic disparities or political neglect, sought external protection and patronage. Foreign powers, keen on gaining inroads into the region, have always been too eager to rush into the fray. Such intervention, solicited or otherwise, almost always served to polarize the factions and deepen sources of hostility. In short, Lebanon again and again became an object and victim of this "inside-outside" dialectics.

## Inside-Outside Dialectics

To assert that Lebanon's entrapment in protracted strife is largely a byproduct of the interplay between internal dislocations and external pressures is, in many respects, an affirmation of the obvious. Yet, it is an affirmation worth belaboring given some of its persisting complexities and disruptive consequences. The catalogue of the recent horrors of nearly two decades of bloody strife makes it abundantly clear that unless we consider alternative strategies for neutralizing external sources of instability and pacifying internal conflict, Lebanon's precarious polity will always be made more vulnerable to such pressures.

There is nothing novel about this kind of polemics. Long before the state of Lebanon came into being it was a subject of much speculation and won-

der. Early in the nineteenth century, foreign travelers, missionaries, chron-
iclers, and historians were already intrigued by how this tiny republic, per-
haps one of the smallest sovereign nations in the world, could have survived
as the only liberal and relatively orderly and prosperous democracy amidst
a host of authoritarian and turbulent political regimes. From Volney's ad-
miring remarks-the celebrated French traveler who visited Lebanon in the
1780s-and was so impressed by that "ray of liberty and genuine republican
spirit," (Volney 1788: 73–74) to the more recent critical studies of dispas-
sionate social scientists, observers almost always disagreed in their assessment
of Lebanon's nature and prospects.

Until the outbreak of hostilities in 1975, the tone of much of the litera-
ture, both favorable and unfavorable, remained on the whole fairly guarded
and cautious. Even those who were writing off Lebanon as a "precarious,"
"improbable," or problematic republic, were not oblivious to some of its
distinctive accomplishments — particularly its survival as a parliamentary de-
mocracy and liberal economy in a region that had turned its back on both.
Indeed, to many of its critics, this is precisely the one attribute of Lebanon's
"success story" which they did not disparage. Avowed Marxist and left-
leaning thinkers, normally eager to attribute Lebanon's pitfalls to internal
disparities, did not overlook or exempt the disruptive impact of external
forces. The war was hardly a year old when Fuad Faris, an activist in the
Organization of Communist Action and part of the left alliance of the Leb-
anese Nationalist Movement (LMN), was already asserting that the Palestin-
ian issue "explained much of what has happened in Lebanon. This is not
so much because the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has been
one of the main protagonists during the actual fighting, but more because
the Palestinian issue remains one of the linchpins that lock the internal
Lebanese situation into its external context"(Faris 1976: 174). The same year
Frank Stoakes had also pronounced the Palestinian dimension as the most
powerful irritant among the wide range of other disruptive extraneous ele-
ments already visible at the time (Stoakes 1976: 10–11).

Lebanon's bloody encounters with almost two decades of relentless cru-
elties, unleashed a less charitable, at times pernicious, genre of writing. The
cautious, balanced assessments of the country's shortcomings and prospects,
so common in the 1960s and 1970s, have given way recently to a barrage of
endless diatribes. It has become so fashionable, much too facile in fact, to
malign and defile Lebanon, that the country's origin, legacy, and future seem
bereft now of any redeeming virtues. Typical of "obituary" writers nothing
is spared. Even the undisputed accomplishments the country enjoyed, par-

ticularly during the post World War II era, are dismissed either as byproducts of external fortuitous circumstances or as anomalies or an illusive silver lining disguising the gathering darkening clouds.

A recurrent, almost stereotypical version of this now popularized image, maintains that Lebanon's economic prosperity and political stability are rooted in factors beyond its borders. Invariably, most observers single out, in this context, events like the partition of Palestine in 1946. Displaced Palestinians, the oil boom, the inflow of Arab capital, and protracted political turmoil in adjacent regimes were seen as the prime catalysts underlying Lebanon's enviable stature at the time.

These and other such external factors are not, clearly, all that neutral. Nor are they entirely positive in their impact. Yet in much of the literature, most of the ruinous byproducts of such considerations are often overlooked. Only their presumed benefits are highlighted. For example, rather than considering how the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 had a devastating impact by disrupting the vital economic, commercial and social bonds that for centuries had linked Lebanon (via the Beirut-Haifa-Cairo railroad) with Arab Africa, Northern Palestine, and Southern Syria and accounted for the economic unity and prosperity of the entire region (Petran 1987: 65–66), the literature instead dwells almost exclusively on their presumed regenerative consequences. Hence, we are repeatedly reminded how Beirut's position as an entrepôt, or a transit port, is largely a byproduct of circumstances associated with the 1948 war in Palestine. The imposition of economic boycott by the Arab states against Israel redirected traffic and capital toward Beirut. The Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), which was originally slated to terminate in British-held Northern Palestine, was rerouted by Saudi Arabia to Sidon. Similarly, Iraq's pipeline, originally destined to Haifa, ended up instead in Tripoli. To David Waines (1976) it was primarily these external factors which ensured Beirut's position as the key transit port to and from the entire Eastern Arab World. Mackey is much more triumphant in heralding the instant transforming impact of such forces. "Almost overnight, Lebanon found itself the major way station of the oil route between the Persian Gulf and Europe" (Mackey 1989: 6).

Likewise, the literature dwells all too often on how Palestinian resources, including highly skilled professionals, bankers, speculators, and that large pool of cheap labor, were instrumental in propping up the Lebanese economy. Without the aggressive and competitive skills Palestinians and other displaced groups brought with them, sparked by the ethos of exile and marginality, Beirut would not have become, it is argued, the appealing haven

for Arab and Western capital. Here as well Waines, among many others, attributes Beirut's emergence as an "intellectual emporium" for a wide range of radical groupings and novel cultural and artistic expressions to such exogenous incursions.

Until very recently there was little or no methodical documentation of the impact of Palestinian militarism on the destabilization and radicalization of Lebanese society. If and when Palestinian military presence was recognized as a protagonist in the war, it was largely depicted as though the Palestinians were trapped or drawn unwillingly into Lebanon's sectarian quagmire. Their own meddling in the internal affairs of Lebanon was dismissed as *tawrit*, a conspiratorial design to tame or liquidate the PLO. Its deepening involvement in heavy fighting was seen as an act of self-defense to protect its own defenseless civilians in hapless refugee camps or to provide support to the progressive forces of their endangered Lebanese allies. Others go further to suggest how an otherwise pure and emancipating revolutionary movement was corrupted and demoralized by Lebanon's tribalism and confessional politics.[5] Two noted and recent exceptions are Winslow (1996) and el-Khazin (2000) who provide persuasive evidence of the role of Palestinian militarism in undermining the consensual character of Lebanese politics and in escalating the magnitude of violence.

Similar claims are also made regarding the massive infusion of oil revenues. So much, in fact, is made of the pervasive impact of the ubiquitous petrodollar, that Lebanon is often reduced to a disparate medley of languishing mountainous fiefdoms, desolate and impoverished rural enclaves, and sparsely settled urban centers until resurrected by the gush of Arab oil!

Finally, and perhaps most intriguing, is the view that the boom Lebanon enjoyed was largely accidental and momentary, more the outcome of what its surrounding regimes were beleaguered with at the time rather than the result of indigenous sources. While much of the Middle East was embroiled in the Arab-Israeli struggle or convulsed by factional and/or ideological rivalries, Lebanon stood aloof, reaping the benefits from the disorders of others. Even Lebanon's lush topography and scenic beauty became appealing only when juxtaposed against the overwhelmingly arid and desert landscape of the region.

There is a painful irony in all this. When Lebanon is not being maligned as a flawed, artificial creation, its accomplishments—little as they may seem—are linked to external and fortuitous circumstances. Its blemishes, however, are always attributed to endemic forces and internal contradictions. The Lebanese, in other words, are only made responsible for their country's

shortcomings and the disasters that have beleaguered it. They are accorded little or no credit for its achievements.

In much the same vein, Lebanon's legacy as an asylum, much of the economic allures it enjoyed during the 1960s and 1970s, as a haven for foreign capital and displaced minorities, are attributed to the chaos of surrounding Arab regimes. In short, rather than considering how Lebanon might have been made more vulnerable by such forces, we turn around instead and assail it for reaping the benefits of the disorders of others. The victim becomes, as it were, the avenger. In Sandra Mackey's words (1989), perhaps the latest example of those popularized obituaries of Lebanon, one finds typical expressions of such uncharitable views: "If Lebanon was pulsating in the 1960s, it was vibrating by early 1975. With the oil boom in the Arabian peninsula, every source of Lebanon's income had ballooned. Once more Lebanon's economy reaped the benefits of events beyond its borders. But this time the infusion of capital was Arab money." (Mackey 1989: 8). Awad is even more explicit in attributing the economic prosperity Lebanon enjoyed between 1950–1975 to either coincidental or external factors. This "remarkable growth was not the result of any coherent development strategy carried out by the public sector." Instead Awad argues, it was "coincidental, the product of external factors, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the closure of the Suez Canal or the nationalization of Arab economies" (Awad 1991: 83–86).

Can one not advance a more balanced and realistic assessment of the legacy of this inside-outside polemics? Much after all can be extracted from at least the country's blissful peacetime history to reinforce the more auspicious view; namely that when external disruptive sources are neutralized or contained, various Lebanese communities were able to evolve fairly adaptive and accommodating strategies for peaceful coexistence. This is a view persuasively argued and documented by, among others, Theodor Hanf, 1993; George Corm, 1988; Samir Khalaf, 1995; Charles Winslow, 1996; Farid El-Khazen, 2000.

For almost a century, from 1860 to 1958, an epoch marked by internal, regional, and global turmoil in the lives of new nations, Lebanon was comparatively peaceful and free of any manifestations of collective violence. Emerging from decades of bloody communal strife, it weathered the dislocations it was beset with as a plural society embroiled in the tumultuous transformations of a troubled region. Given its deficient civility, Lebanon might have never become a nation-state but was doomed instead to remain, as Albert Hourani would say, a "republic of tribes and villages." (Hourani

1988: 6). It was a republic nonetheless. With all its grievous faults, it survived the collapse and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, successive foreign penetrations and political rearrangements, ravages of a devastating famine, the ferments of two world wars and the sociocultural dislocations associated with swift, discordant societal transformations.

These are not trivial or ordinary accomplishments. A century is also a long time in the history of a young republic. Detractors of Lebanon, and they are many, particularly those who dismiss it as a genetically flawed, artificial entity or a victim of its own belligerent culture and innate proclivity for violence, are remiss when they continue to overlook this felicitous stretch of its eventful history.

Lebanon's less felicitous and darkest moments also need to be reexamined. At the least, its repeated encounters with political unrest must be explored in an effort to elucidate the belligerent nature and consequences of this persisting inside-outside dialectics. Each of the three major interludes or episodes of collective strife — the successive peasant uprisings and communal conflicts in the nineteenth century, the 1958 civil war, and the latest prolonged hostilities — have been subjected to an endless barrage of studies. There is clearly no dearth of information or speculation on each.

Some, particularly the circumstances and events associated with the sectarian massacres of 1860, have been perhaps over-studied from every conceivable perspective. Depending on archival sources and records consulted (i.e. Ottoman, French, British, missionaries or local chronicles) one is prone to emerge with markedly different readings or analyses (see, for example, three of the most recent studies: Akarli 1995; Fawaz 1994; Makdisi 2000). Hence, matters such as the identity of protagonists and/or perpetrators of the conflict, the issues or precursors which sparked it off, the unfolding character and pattern of violence, how it was sustained and compounded, and the eventual cessation of the conflict all remain open to question.

Similar ambiguities underlie interpretation of the 1958 civil war. The episode was clearly more limited in scope and magnitude when compared to the massacres of 1860 or the recent prolonged hostilities. It marked, though, a significant threshold in Lebanon's political history. For nearly a century Lebanon had managed to live with visible socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological differences and cleavages without breaking up into open armed conflict. What happened in 1958 to radicalize the tone of political discourse?

Since it was the first major breakdown in political order after such a long peaceful interlude, it provoked a massive volume of writing.[6] Access to de-

classified documents has recently revived interest in re-examining U.S. perceptions and its role in the crisis.[7] In all this, one discerns considerable controversy regarding the nature and consequences of the inside-outside dynamics. This is visible first in the plurality of nomenclatures and labels it acquired; ranging from "insurgency," "rebellion," "sedition," "insurrection," to "revolt," "counter-revolt," or "armed resistance." More substantively, there are differences in what was the crisis attributed to. Was it, as some argued, provoked largely by internal dislocations, socioeconomic discontent and other sources of instability associated with the struggle for power and political succession? Or was it the outcome of broader regional tensions exacerbated by the Palestinian-Israeli struggle and ideological rivalries in adjacent Arab regimes? If both, how did the interplay reflect itself in the unfolding pattern of violence? What, more concretely, motivated and mobilized embattled groups into armed conflict? Answers to these and other related issues are contested.

Treatment of the prolonged hostilities of 1975–90, at least if judged by the relentless literature about it, is much more perplexing. This is understandable, given the dizzying and changing number of protagonists and combatants (internal and external, identified and unidentified, controlled and undisciplined, zealots and mercenaries); who was fighting whom and why; the alternating pattern and intensity of violence; the swift and successive changes in issues involved; what sparked the episodes off; and how they were sustained, escalated, and resolved.

Here, as well, the unending polemics is not quelled. Indeed, it assumes at times a vigorous and contentious debate. There are those who see Lebanon as an inevitable victim of its own precariousness and internal contradictions; largely a reflection of the fragility of its plural and open democracy, its failed consociationalism or neglect and fears of a growing segment of its population. To Moshe Shmesh, for example, the very "structure of the regime set up in 1943 was flimsy from the outset. What was surprising about the civil war" he goes on to assert "was not its timing but how long it took to break out." (Shmesh 1986: 77). Meir Zamir goes further to assert that insecurity, suspicions, fear, hostility, which stem from a long history of sociopolitical conflict and sectarian violence, are deeply ingrained in the Lebanese national character. They are, as it were, a natural appendage of its national ethos. "Politics and violence," he tells us "have always been closely interwoven in Lebanon. The country's political leaders and their supporters are weaned on the idea of violence and regard it as a natural part of their existence" (Zamir 1982:4). Others are more inclined to view it as a victim

of unresolved regional rivalries. Even to those who recognize the mutually reinforcing character of the inside-outside dynamics, it is the changes occurring in the regional order that are held accountable for initiating and sustaining the conflict. This is also apparent, it is argued, since hostility only ended when agreement was reached among the major external parties involved in the turmoil (See el-Khazen 2000).