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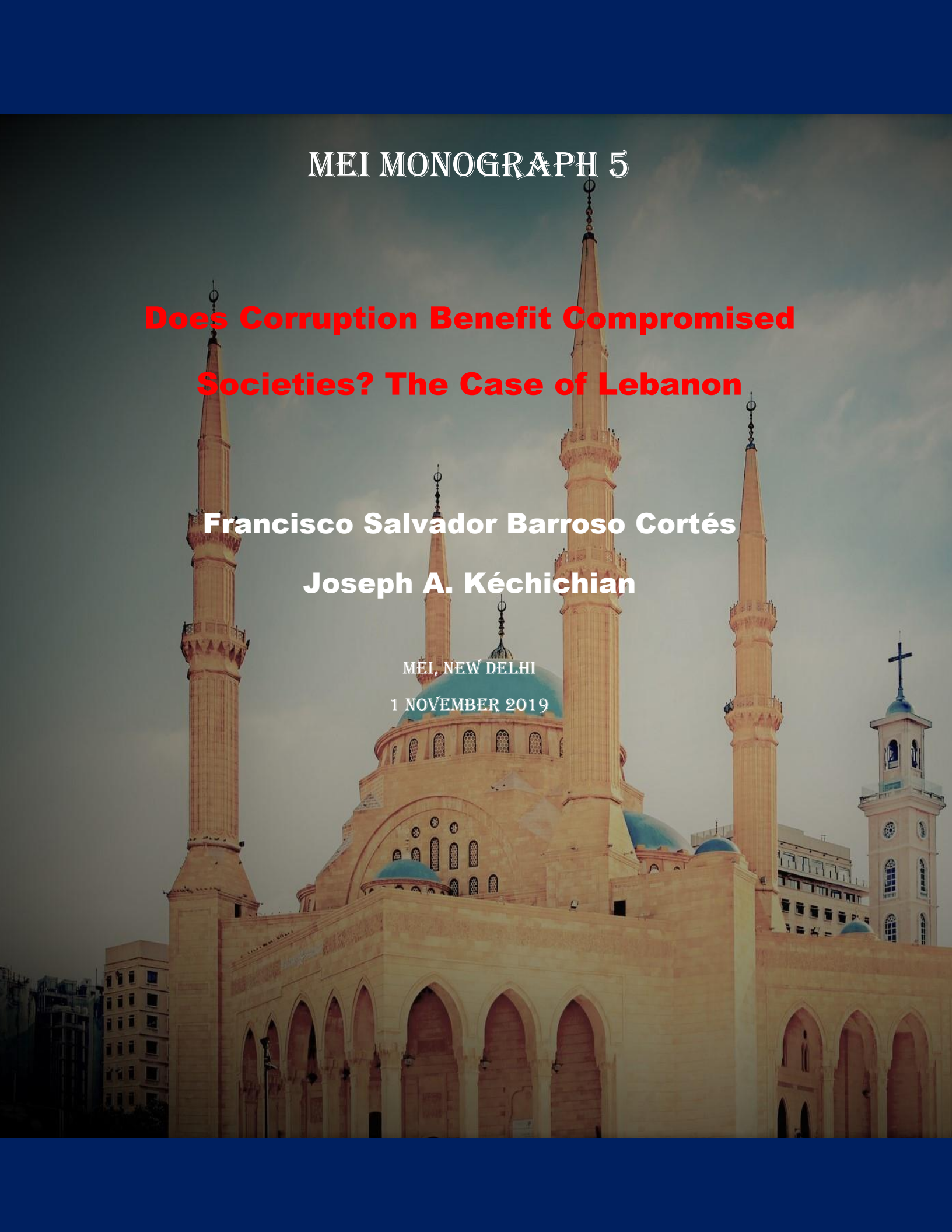
**Does Corruption Benefit Compromised
Societies? The Case of Lebanon**

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Does Corruption Benefit Compromised

Societies? The Case of Lebanon

Francisco Salvador Barroso Cortés

Joseph A. Kéchichian

Lebanon is a gerrymandered democracy and, according to several of its current officials, a peculiar republic—called *dimuqratiyyah tawafuqiyyah* [democracy by consensus]—rather than a straightforward political entity where the rule of law applies to all. Almost every Lebanese, including its challenged leaders, complain about it, though most are sophisticated operators that oil the system for their respective benefits. Strangely, and for the past century, the same political dynasties remained in power emboldened by an established distribution of authority among various religious denominations.

Inasmuch as politicians either upheld their sects, or pushed their own family interests, they did not work for their “country,” which few placed ahead of narrow sectarian priorities. Few took any pride in the “nation” and no government official seemed to have had the courage to repair the electricity system, for example, leaving it decrepit for decades. The same could fairly be said about a variety of services that local authorities neglected to provide, ranging the gamut from the proper collection of garbage to tax collection and from illegal beach-front properties erected without any licenses to petty bribery at just about every imaginable institution. Business feuds dominated the country as leaders divided spoils amongst themselves and the practices were tolerated by every community out of fear that any loosening might quickly lead to a loss of power or patronage.

Since nothing changed during the past century, that is, after France created the so-called “Grand Liban” [Greater Lebanon] in 1920 by attaching four adjoining geographical regions to the core Mount Lebanon entity, few demanded

accountability. The country's core landmass—Mount Lebanon—was and is the sole legitimate territory for the Lebanese even if a revisionist narrative has been weaved around the larger geographic entity that was and is the primary contention with Syria. Nothing changed after the 1943 National Pact either, which was little more than an unwritten understanding that established a unique confessional system known as consociationalism, and that further highlighted intrinsic governance difficulties when the country's demographic composition changed. Consociationalism was that mechanism that required the President of the Republic to be a Maronite (Catholic) Christian, the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'a Muslim, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Deputy Prime Minister a Greek Orthodox. These posts were presumably based on the 1932 census, the last nationwide survey held in the country, and that determined that Muslims made up 40 percent of the population while Christians locked in at 60 percent.

Lebanon, thus, operated a unique power-sharing system based on religious communities, which it continues to practice in the twenty-first century, with periodic calls for adjustments because of dramatic demographic transformations—that essentially toppled the 1932 Christian majority, which was optimistically estimated to stand at around 40 percent in 2019. Few were prepared to embark on a recount for fear that such a tally would easily rekindle the last civil war. After the 1975-1990 confrontations that decimated the country but failed to make a dent in the rule by consensus, the balance between Christians (15 different sects), Sunnis, Shias, and Druze, preserved the appearance of stability that always stood on the precipice.

The country lingered after the 1989 Ta'if Agreement, which brought the fighting to a stop and introduced political parity between Christians and Muslims, although Ta'if significantly weakened the prerogatives of the Maronite head-of-state. What Ta'if did not change was how the Lebanese managed their business affairs. Leaders continued to divide spoils amongst themselves, irrespective of their respective sectarian affiliations, including among seasoned clerics who also excelled in various business activities.

Moreover, practices honed in the chaos of war picked-up steam, as sophisticated mechanisms were introduced, precisely to protect each and every community. Patronage reached new heights as it was the way Christian and Muslim leaders behaved in private even when they appeared to be at odds with each other in public. Remarkably, and notwithstanding theatrical performances for purely entertainment purposes, Christian and Muslim leaders engaged in manifold “deals,” often as partners, alert not to cross carefully negotiated red-lines that could, even remotely, threaten their harmonious relationships.

Of course, while this was not corruption in the technical sense given that all major “deals” were legal and, one assumed, legally binding, the practices oozed corruption like nothing else. In time, the system was so well oiled that corrupt behavior became second nature, practiced by immensely talented personalities that masterfully hid their behaviors from public scrutiny. Regrettably, such conduct at the highest levels of authority spilled over into society at large, both in the public as well as private sectors, as everyone chased the golden goose. Lebanon was a “happy” spot, where certain joie-de-vivre [a joy of everything, a happy philosophy of life, a Weltanschauung] prevailed, where visitors and locals enjoyed high standards of living, and where many trekked to engage in wicked, but eminently enjoyable times.

Rank and File

Lebanon scored 28 points out of 100 on the 2018 *Corruption Perceptions Index* reported by Transparency International, as the country averaged 28.50 points from 2003 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 36 points in 2006 and a record low of 25 points in 2009. It ranked 138 out of 175 corrupt countries in 2018, which meant that it was the 36th most corrupt country in the world.¹ This was a global assessment that took into account a variety of factors, including budgetary anomalies that reflected irregular allocations, sale of international bonds to cover deficits, large state

¹ *Corruption Perception Index 2018*, Berlin: Transparency International, at <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>.

purchases that failed to materialize on the ground, along with a myriad other items that allowed for fair evaluations compared to 175 other countries. Still, it was critical to ask whether the Lebanese considered themselves to be corrupt and, in the affirmative, whether they advanced any solutions to presumably remedy this existential dilemma?

In fact, at least fifty percent of the Lebanese—perhaps even more depending on how one read recent statistics—readily admitted that they would “compromise [on principles] or engage in corrupt behavior, like cutting in line or resorting to go-betweens, [offer] gifts or bribery,” to get things done.² Remarkably, and according to the published survey, wealthier Lebanese—that is those with the financial means to get around the law—were ready to doing so simply by paying the required amounts to get formalities accomplished. Such an avowal highlighted that “the real corruption plaguing the country is that which occurs through influential individuals who take advantage of their [power] through big monetary deals,” which was not surprising even if the blunt admission was.³

Indeed, few realized that this level of corruption gradually eroded any country’s assets, and Lebanon was not an exception. Petty corruption practiced as a matter of routine behavior undermined growth and limited wealth, which benefitted a small, but corrupt minority that monopolized major projects, “be they waste management procurement, electricity, oil, public works, roadwork, tenders, tax evasion or other issues that perpetuate[d] Lebanon’s third-world status and push[ed] its population to emigrate and those remaining to squabble among themselves.”⁴ The answer to the survey’s question was, therefore, affirmative, even it was also a survival mechanism

² “Corruption in Lebanon,” *Sakker El Dekkene Report* 1:1, January 2015, p. 2. *Sakker El Dekkene* [spelled in Lebanese Arabic instead of the scholarly Saqqir al-Dikan] is published in Beirut and is available at <https://www.sakker.com>.

³ Corruption in Lebanon, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴ Corruption in Lebanon, *Ibid.*, p. 3.

par excellence given that the fragile society, in which the rule of law was not universally applied, necessitated ethical compromises. To be sure, this presented basic dilemmas, as Lebanon struggle to become a full-fledged nation-state that seemed to be much harder than many anticipated.

Indeed, when respondents were asked to estimate whether corruption was frequent in various institutions, including in ministries, municipalities, public institutions like customs, social security services, and other government bodies, many asserted that this was the case. Customs at the country's principal harbor, through which most imports entered the country, was rated as the most corrupt establishment—widespread or frequent corruption mentioned by almost 93 percent of respondents—, followed by the cadaster (land recording) services (86 percent considered corruption widespread or frequent in this institution).

The Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the Ministry of Finance scored poorly too, with 85 percent of respondents considering corruption widespread or frequent there. The Department of Motor Vehicle, which required annual inspection and registration scored a whopping 84 percent, for what was one of the most routine services imaginable.⁵ Equally troubling was the judiciary, which came right after the top five, with more than 70 percent maintaining that corruption was widespread or frequent

⁵ In 2017, authorities promulgated that all license plates needed to be exchanged for a new model, which generated nearly US\$ 130 million that, naturally, was a perfect illustration of indirect taxation. Remarkably, two years later, the alleged universal law was still not fully applied, as many car owners simply ignored it. See “New Vehicle License Plates to Come into Force Thursday,” *The Daily Star*, 19 December 2017, at <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Dec-19/430741-new-vehicle-license-plates-to-come-into-force-thursday.ashx>. It was estimated that for every 1,000 individuals in Lebanon, there were 865 automobiles in 2018 (when the population probably stood at around 5 million), the total number of vehicles hovered around 4.3 million, a staggering number. All vehicle owners across Lebanon were technically required to change their vehicle registration plates at a total cost of L.L. 45,000 (US\$ 30). The state thus expected to recoup US\$ 129 million. See also “865 Individuals,” *Al Akhbar*, 2 February 2019, at <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/265667>.

within its ranks—a devastating conclusion.⁶ Finally, and although the armed forces fared better as the most trusted institution with regards to its integrity, there were many questions raised about how politicians and some officers “sold” entry billets to the Military Academy.⁷ Overall, the Lebanese did not trust their public administrators, which meant that corruption was a reality that, left unattended, threatened the very existence of the state.

Hardships to Endure

Regrettably, corruption caused widespread economic hardships, created a palpable income inequality among the populations that called Lebanon home, and sank the country in more or less perpetual political deadlock even if regional confrontations and similar calamities further isolated the Levantine entity into a state of morass. In fact, “Global studies have shown that the cost of corruption in third-world countries like Lebanon [was] as high as 15 percent of the GDP, or the equivalent of an annual 6 billion USD,” which was astonishing.⁸ As discussed below, there were, of course, various forms of corruption, including fraud, collusion, clientelism, nepotism, embezzlement and underhanded transactions, some of which concerned this research effort.

Yet, what citizens in Lebanon experienced on a daily basis was not only the small-scale corruption that dominated their lives, but the large-scale corruption that was practiced with a vengeance after independence, and that continued in the 21st century by putative leaders who perceived the country as their private business conglomerate. Our objective is to chiefly shed light on this larger corruption, not to justify the small-scale variety that the Lebanese practiced routinely, but to clarify

⁶ Corruption in Lebanon, *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁷ “Military Academy Scandal Reached \$19 Million in Bribes,” *The Daily Star*, 23 July 2019, at <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Jul-23/488183-military-academy-scandal-reached-19-million-in-bribes.ashx>.

⁸ “Bribe Reports (May-December 2014),” *Sakker El Dekkene* 1:2, February 2015, p. 1.

some of the reasons why those who engaged in unethical activities could not, and seldom, objected to the more sophisticated paradigms that flourished in the absence of a state of laws. Ironically, few made the linkage between their corrupt behavior with those of betrothed officials from all walks of life and from every religious denomination, Christian as well as Muslim. This was the crux of the matter that necessitated clarification and, equally important, acknowledgment, if ordinary citizens intended, or even stood a chance, to force the introduction of genuine reforms and save the country from collapse.

To date, and for reasons that are discussed below, very few Lebanese made the necessary linkages between the way they behaved and the behavior of the privileged. Indeed, hardly a peep was heard at the end of the first quarter of 2019, when Beirut boasted a gross public debt of US\$86.2 billion, which represented nearly 152 percent of GDP.⁹ When local media outlets reported in mid-2019 that official data released by the Ministry of Finance showed that Beirut's debt reached dangerous levels and that the international investment bank Goldman Sachs warned that political paralysis in Lebanon could affect planned reforms in the country, hardly anyone reacted.¹⁰

Critically, when the Governor of the Central Bank, Riad Salameh, revealed that growth during the first six months of 2019 stood at zero percent, the Lebanese continued to practice their legendary *joie de vivre*, oblivious to looming dangers. Some relied on the summer tourism season, which runs from June to September, to lift their morale, but few genuine tourists from Saudi Arabia and the other conservative Arab Gulf Monarchies—all known for their generous spending habits—arrived. Except for foreign remittances from Lebanese expatriates, which hovered between US\$6 and 8

⁹ Rouba Chbeir, "Lebanon's Gross Public Debt Up to \$86.2B in Q1 2019," *Bloominvest Bank*, 24 May 2019, at <https://blog.blominvestbank.com/29975/lebanons-gross-public-debt-up-to-86-2b-in-q1-2019/>.

¹⁰ "Lebanon's Public Debt Edges Up To \$85.7B at End-June," *The Daily Star*, 15 August 2019, p. 4, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2019/Aug-15/489670-lebanons-public-debt-edges-up-to-857b-at-end-june.ashx>.

billion per year, private sector enterprises associated with tourism fared rather poorly.¹¹

Likewise, major banks revised downward their growth expectations and forecast minimal or negative year-on-year real economic growth that still failed to faze the *bon vivant*. Undaunted by heightened political uncertainty, Lebanese officials pretended that the economy was sound, and that the country did not have a corruption problem that prevented real growth, while ordinary people blamed the same officials they tolerated because each and every last one practiced appropriate patronage.

Few officials displayed concern when in August 2019, the international rating agency *Fitch* downgraded Lebanon's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to CCC from B-, while *Standard & Poor's* "Global Ratings" affirmed its long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings for Beirut at B-/B, saying the country's outlook remained negative.¹² These two ratings followed a February 2019 issue by *Moody's*, which downgraded Lebanon to Caa1 from B3, while changing the outlook to stable from negative. Notwithstanding the lifeline offered by *Moody's*, the *Fitch* posting was yet another blow to the struggling economy that suffered from one of the world's highest debt ratios, high unemployment and little growth, though few made the connection with corruption that brought the economy, and just about everything else in the land, to their knees.

¹¹ Lebanon's best tourist season in the twenty-first century was in 2010 when over 2.1 million visitors arrived though this figure stood as an exceptional achievement. In 2011, that is immediately after the War for Syria started, the numbers dropped and stayed below the 2010 threshold. For statistical data, see the web-page of the Ministry of Tourism at <http://www.mot.gov.lb/Publications/Statistics>. See also IDAL—Invest in Lebanon, "Tourism: Key Facts and Figures," at https://investinlebanon.gov.lb/en/sectors_in_focus/tourism; and Georgi Azar and Zeina Nasser, "Lebanon Pricing Itself Out of Tourism Industry," *Al-Nahar*, 27 July 2018, at <https://en.annahar.com/article/837025-lebanon-outpricing-itself-from-tourism-industry>.

¹² "Fitch Ratings Downgrades Lebanon, S&P Maintains its Ratings," *Naharnet*, 24 August 2019, at <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/264040-fitch-ratings-downgrades-lebanon-s-p-maintains-its-ratings>.

Officials skirted basic concerns, focusing instead on the necessity to reduce deficits and implement reforms without, however, stating how one could accomplish these without addressing core corruption problems. Instead, the head-of-state and his acolytes boasted that the reforms had already started and that they would increase in coming years, which would allegedly allow Lebanon to overcome difficulties.¹³

Such optimism aside, it was important to enquire whether one of the chief reasons for such debts was increasingly large budget deficits, as well as singularly efficient mismanagement. It was fair to ask whether unprecedented levels of corruption practiced at the highest levels of government, and which rendered any contemplated remedies ephemeral, also contributing factors to the country's woes? Were state institutions affected by high-level corruption because existing laws were all based on sectarianism, drawing on the country's regrettable system where church and state were intertwined, and which transformed corruption into a way of life given that few citizens trusted laws drawn by their sectarian leaders to protect them at the national level?

Was there an assumption that everyone ought to look after oneself and, in most cases, to seek protection within one's own community that, to put it mildly, tolerated high-level corruption on the mistaken assumption that sectarian leaders who compromised with their political allies and/or counterparts in other religious

¹³ Official optimism was what President Michel Aoun preached, seconded by his political, the Free Patriotic Movement (also known by its French name the "Courant Patriotique Libre" or CPL). See, See "Aoun Sounds Optimistic About Situation In Lebanon," *National News Agency*, 29 March 2018, at <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/89608/Aoun-optimistic-about-situation-in-Lebanon>. See also Dirk Kunze, Poliana Geha, and Philip Müller, "Change Around the Corner ahead of Elections in Lebanon," *Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit*, 28 March 2018, at <https://beirut.fnst.org/content/change-around-corner-ahead-elections-lebanon>; and "Lebanese Leaders Optimistic on Ending Government Deadlock," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 12 December 2018, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1501821/lebanese-leaders-optimistic-ending-government-deadlock>.

communities would, in the end, devise the necessary mechanisms to protect their interests?

To better answer these questions, this paper next provides a brief theoretical discussion of corruption and attempts a careful examination of conditions in Lebanon. Our aim is to identify the paradigm of efficient flexibility that seems to be both infectious and, at least for a majority of the Lebanese, necessary to get things done. In the process, we also hope to distinguish some of the putative options that Lebanon may have to heal from its afflictions, without any proselytization. Ultimately, this research effort aims to test whether Lebanon can overcome its corrupt mechanisms within its current system of government, and since no sector was immune because the very business of sectarianism in Lebanon, including how clerics—both Christian as well as Muslim—relied on its practice to advance pecuniary interests (often in cahoots with political elites), it was critical to ask why laws that were not motivated by confessional features seldom saw light. Why was it nearly impossible for successive Lebanese governments to devise and adopt laws that placed the interests of citizens first and foremost and to treat everyone equally under the law? Were there intrinsic reasons for the Lebanese to behave as dysfunctional consumers, mesmerized by alleged *joie de vivre* that created the aura of happiness when few were satisfied with the state of affairs?

A Theoretical Approach to Corruption

Before addressing the particular Lebanese case of corruption in more detail, it is essential to briefly discuss the theoretical foundations of our assumptions, to better clarify what seems to ail this Levantine society.

As a concept, corruption is almost always presented with negative meanings, since attempts to analyze whatever positive impact its practices may have had in compromised societies has not been tackled adequately. In our analysis, we start from the premise that corruption in developing countries is considered as an integral part

of the system, since its “trashes public value.”¹⁴ In the Lebanese case study, corruption becomes an essential tool to understand how elites compete to capture certain public and private sector interests. Indeed, Lebanese society has always been and remains a traditional culture based upon networks of family, as well as community loyalty, which are the real cornerstones of political and economic power. Moreover, because Lebanon represents a hybrid political order¹⁵ where “political and economic power is divided along diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power [that] co-exist, overlap, and intertwine, combining elements of introduced Western models of governance and elements stemming from local indigenous traditions of governance,” the economic and political redistribution mechanisms are permanently intertwined.¹⁶

Existing political arrangements, thus, weakened state authority while, simultaneously, they strengthened political clientelism, patronage relations, and sectarian cleavages.¹⁷ Notwithstanding sturdier sectarian identities, high education levels played decisive roles in diminishing corruption or, at least, projected the perception that such was the case, even if this was not a universal phenomenon.¹⁸ Therefore, the very concept of corruption for certain developing countries like Lebanon required a deeper investigation to better decipher its core challenges,

¹⁴ Adam Graycar, “Corruption and Public Value,” *Public Integrity* 18:4, June 2016, p. 340.

¹⁵ Nora Stel and Wim Naude, “‘Public–Private Entanglement’: Entrepreneurship in Lebanon’s Hybrid Political Order,” *The Journal of Development Studies* 52:2, January 2016, pp. 254-268.

¹⁶ Volke Boege, M. Ann Brown and Kevin P. Clements, “Hybrid political orders, not Fragile states,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 21:1, February 2009, p. 17.

¹⁷ Dima Mahdi and Daniel Garrote Sanchez, “How do People in Lebanon Perceive Corruption?,” *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies Policy Brief*, Number 38, February 2019, at https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1551258390-policy_brief_38_web.pdf.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

instead of simply following the stereotypes and dogmatic approaches from an exclusive Western perspective.¹⁹

To better understand what are the corruption drivers that can lead one to think that corruption benefits compromised societies like Lebanon, one should focus on the theory of individual utility maximization.²⁰ According to this theory, citizens decide to embark on corrupted practices, whenever their perceptions of gains outweigh those of costs.²¹ For the Lebanese, the reliance on connections (*wasta* in Arabic that loosely translates as nepotism, clout or who, amongst one's acquaintances can help facilitate matters), and bribery, are considered as necessary practices, precisely to increase the efficiency in their interactions with public institutions. In this vein, and to better to demonstrate how corruption benefits compromised societies, one can refer to "effective corrupt leaderships," the kind that can be defined as "leadership in corrupt circumstances that actively engages in corrupt practice, but intentionally makes a significant positive impact on people's welfare."²² This kind of leadership

¹⁹ According to the Lebanese Transparency Association, corrupt practices within Lebanese society and the political establishment was described as 'the norm.' For more information, see, Lebanese Transparency Association and the United Nations Development Program, *Towards a National Anti-Corruption Strategy*, 2009?, at, https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/Final_book_en.pdf.

²⁰ Tina Søreide, *Drivers of Corruption: A Brief Review*, Washington: World Bank Group, 2014, at, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20457/916420PUB0Box30UBLI0009781464804014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

²¹ The expected benefits obviously include monetary gains as well as positions and power for oneself, one's family, or one's allies. The list of possible costs consists of the bribe payment, moral "costs" of violating norms and rules, efforts to hide the crime and money laundering, as well as the perceived risk of detection and the consequences of prosecution and punishment. Indirect consequences could be the reputational cost if the corruption is revealed, including a loss of status and future income, for example, as the result of debarment from work positions or tenders. See Søreide, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²² Mark W. Neal and Richard Tansey, "The Dynamics of Effective Corrupt Leadership: Lessons from Rafik Hariri's Political Career in Lebanon," *The Leadership Quarterly*, Number 21, 2010, p. 34.

promotes “the Blifil Paradox,” where politicians engage in corrupted practices to gain power and secure positions. At a later stage, especially after scandals erupt, opponents can and often use the “paradox” to undermine their authority and harm their capabilities to deliver public services.²³

While the “Blifil Paradox” reveals interesting behavioral patterns, an equally critical factor, that of the “dirty hands,” necessitated attention too, as unethical methods were adopted to usher in something that appeared to be ethical.²⁴ In Lebanon, competition over scarce resources created fierce rivalries where the only way to deliver welfare benefits to citizens necessitated wrongdoing and unethical practices, though the same authorities who engaged in such practices denied their own behavior. Thus, it may be fair to state that the altruistic principle “for the good of the people” justified corrupt practices that, unequivocally, undermined public governance.

The case of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri represented an excellent example to document that “the abuse of entrusted power” could lead, and perhaps led, to the promotion of the public good instead of its expected subversion. In fact, Hariri delivered tangible welfare benefits to his community and relied upon a time-tested pattern to enhance his legitimacy by allocating resources to specific patrons that, in turn, allowed him (and them) to control vast sectors of the Lebanese economy. This further increased the number of supporters motivated by spoils just as much as by ideological inclinations, a phenomenon that other leaders emulated, often crossing religious and ethnic boundaries.

The Hariri conglomerate consisted of concentric circles composed of administrative bodies served by selected counsellors who accompanied the prime minister on every outing—thus, acting as a shadow cabinet. Just as Rafiq Hariri counted on a host of

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁴ Laurie Calhoun, “The Problem of ‘Dirty Hands’ and Corrupt Leadership,” *Independent Review* 8:3, January 2004, pp. 363-385; and Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2:2, Winter 1973, pp. 160-180.

advisors such as Nouhad Mashnouq, Ghassan Tahir, Fuad Saniora, Bassem Sabah, Basil Fleihan or Fadl Chalak, and on business interests in media (al-Mustaqbal Group), real estate (Solidere), finance (Banque de la Mediterranee) and telecommunications (Ogero) as well as on selected public administrations (Council for Development and Reconstruction, Finance Ministry), so his son and successor too strategically positioned his armada of aides and intermediaries, even if the latter's overall performance was poor.²⁵ To be sure, Rafiq Hariri's accomplishments were significant, including a sharp reduction in inflation rates that reached 120 percent in 1992 (and dropped to 10 percent by 1997), as well as his abilities to attract Saudi, Kuwaiti and Emirati business investments.

Undeniably, the Prime Minister built confidence and improved productivity for Lebanese exporters, especially medium and small sized firms, reinforced Beirut's traditional role as a major mass media capital after sharp declines during the 1975-1990 civil war; developed the tourism industry (which grew by 10.5 percent between 1998 and 2003), and embarked on many similar initiatives even if all of these steps were accompanied by steps that were perceived by independent observers as being politically incorrect. Indeed, most of Hariri's efforts often included clear conflict of interest measures, given that he relied on government financed economic incentives to attract foreign investors.

Paradoxically, the abuse of "entrusted power" had an impact on voter intentions since most forgave malfeasant candidates when these same contenders provided valued services considered to have lasting value to the electorate.²⁶ Consequently, it was relatively easy to see how partisanship diminished the perception of corruption.

²⁵ Dima Mahdi and Daniel Garrote Sanchez, "How do People in Lebanon Perceive Corruption?," *Policy Brief Number 38*, Beirut: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, February 2019, p. 37. See also Ward Vloeberghs, "The Hariri Political Dynasty after the Arab Spring," *Mediterranean Politics* 17:2, 2012, pp. 241-248.

²⁶ Sofia Breitenstein, "Choosing the Crook: A Conjoint Experiment on Voting for Corrupt Politicians," *Research and Politics*, January-March 2019, pp. 1-8.

When the latest electoral results in Lebanon were analyzed, this hypothesis was corroborated. In fact, the 2018 parliamentary electoral results were stellar in nature as well as substance, as the most important leaders from all denominations and/or political parties retained their posts, even when blatant corrupt behavior by victors was divulged.

For our analysis, it may be useful to bear in mind the different forms of corruption found in this case study, including specific practices that can be categorized as minor, alongside large-scale corruption. It was worth repeating that there were institutional practices in Lebanon, including influence peddling (*wasta*), nepotism, abuse of position, partisanship, cronyism, tendering, bribery, rent-seeking, bottlenecks, personal gains, kickbacks, embezzlements, extortion, fraud, misappropriation, misuse of information, abuse of discretion, just to name a few of the more common practices. Our premise relies on the idea that corruption is not only the result of individual wrongdoings but the connivance offered by certain institutions that have taken a life of their own.²⁷ In Lebanon, public (along with some private) institutions have played in the past, and are practicing at present, critical roles in shielding corrupt customs where kleptocracy (the rule of thieves), patronage, and intimidation prevail.²⁸

To further buttress this investigation, two forms of corruption required particular attention, “petty corruption,” which is understood as a form of corruption characterized by lower-level officials who may have opportunities to do things that are wrong, and “grand corruption,” where politicians manipulate the instruments of the state for their own personal benefits (and thus terribly distort policy), to the point

²⁷ Lawrence Lessig, “Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress and a Plan to Stop it,” New York: Twelve, 2011, p. 234.

²⁸ Adam Graycar, “Corruption: Classification and Analysis,” *Policy and Society* 34:2, March 2015 p. 88.

where they effectively “own” the state, its institutions, as well as its resources.²⁹ Both forms of corruption are quite common in Lebanon, because corruption is vital for the political and economic clientelism, which are promoted by sectarian agendas hiding behind the power-sharing mechanisms in place. Some individuals invested by a certain level of authority engaged in such practices to feed their network, proving to their “constituents” that they can deliver for families, cronies, lovers or friends.³⁰

Another concept that must be applied in the Lebanese case is related to the perception of morality. Indeed, “bounded morality” must be examined in earnest, as practices associated with elites, or by those above certain hierarchical levels in the public administration, often engage in moral justifications that overlook standards and ethical codes, presumably because these do not apply to them any longer.³¹ What this implies is that the entire issue of delegation must be reappraised, since the politician involved in corruption will be prone to delegate to lower-ranking bureaucrats, precisely to dilute his responsibilities. Still, the delegation process can only function successfully if the politicians enjoy informal influences over their bureaucracies and officers that serve them, which is a perfect illustration of what may be accurately termed, how to best exercise an iron-will.³²

Again, this influence is often guaranteed in Lebanon through a new form of governance, “communitocracy,” which is best defined as the “organized misuse of political power for private gain by legislative or cabinet officials or by political parties

²⁹ Graycar, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³⁰ Philip Gounev, Rositsa Dzhekova and Tihomir Bezlov, *Anti-Corruption Measures in EU Border Control*, Sofia, Bulgaria: The Centre for the Study of Democracy, March 2012.

³¹ Davide Torsello, ed., *Corruption in Public Administration: An Ethnographic Approach*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2016, pp. 53-74.

³² Matt W. Loftis, “Deliberate Indiscretion? How Political Corruption Encourages Discretionary Policy Making,” *Comparative Political Studies* 48:6, 2015 p. 730.

in power (for example, selling votes, decrees, or influence).”³³ Such political corruption can lead to kleptocratic principles that are understood as “a self-serving principle, a government that disregards its duty of serving the public, [and which] might create an environment where laws do not prohibit its own self-enrichment or that of the ruling class.”³⁴

As a result, one is obligated to reconsider the linkage(s) between corruption and impartiality.³⁵ Accordingly, political corruption can be perceived as a breach of the norm of impartiality.³⁶ Indeed, certain practices such as clientelism, favoritism, discrimination, patronage and nepotism, among others, can be perceived as a violation of the norm of impartiality.³⁷ Concerning the breach of the norm of impartiality, one can add the concept of “legal corruption” to this long list, which describes a systemic and legal abuse of public rights for private gains.³⁸

The aforementioned typologies of corruption, thus, provide the analyst with the basic theoretical elements to understand the corruption-trust civil society theory.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 735.

³⁴ Johann G. Lambsdorff, *The institutional economics of corruption and reform: Theory, Evidence, and Policy*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 81.

³⁵ Robert A. Sparling, “Impartiality and the Definition of Corruption,” *Political Studies* 66:2, 2018, pp. 376–391.

³⁶ Oskar Kurer, “Corruption: An Alternative Approach to Its Definition and Measurement,” *Political Studies* 53:1, March 2005, pp. 222–239; Emanuela Ceva and Maria Paola Ferreti, “Liberal Democratic Institutions and the Damages of Political Corruption,” *Les Ateliers de l'Étique/The Ethics Forum* 9:1, 2014, pp. 126–145; Kim Sass Mikkekelsen, “In Murky Waters: A Disentangling of Corruption and Related Concepts,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 60:4, 2013 pp. 357–374; Bo Rothstein, “What Is the Opposite of Corruption?,” *Third World Quarterly* 35:5, July 2014, pp. 745–746.

³⁷ Rothstein, *Ibid.*, pp. 745–746.

³⁸ Daniel Kaufmann and Pedro C. Vicente, “Legal Corruption,” *Economics & Politics* 23:2, February 2011, pp. 195–219.

According to this theory, a high level of political corruption will increase the feeling of pessimism, mistrust and cynicism concerning public institutions. Invariably, this issue will harm the perception that citizens have regarding those government initiatives that will lead them to feel politically disaffected, and make them far more reluctant to participate in political activities that will empower society or encourage citizens to join civic organizations that may usher in significant changes for the public good.³⁹

In Lebanon, the high level of corruption does not encourage citizens to take part in political activities, because of a lack of trust at the national level along with an overall sense of pessimism that pervades throughout the country. Still, while the Lebanese abhor the existing political domains that they must navigate through, a recent spike in civic awareness prompted scores of citizens to join civil society organizations. It remained to be determined how the Lebanese would navigate their “Blifil Paradox,” various “dirty hands,” behaviors and, most critically, their insatiable appetites for “communitocracy.” Can Lebanon overcome these challenges when elites routinely legalize their corrupt practices?

Involuntary Corruption vs. Legalized Corruption

To understand the impact that petty corruption has in Lebanon requires deep sociopolitical analysis. As a matter of fact, corruption is not only a consequence of the lack of political culture, or of basic civic education that is the core of any social contract between people and elected/selected officials, but the result of the political game itself. This is so because an analysis of corruption demands an examination of traditions, social practices, and blurred inclinations developed over centuries and decades between authorities and citizens. Indeed, it may be safe to assert that the social contract created after independence in 1943 did not build the “state,” or promote the rule of law. Rather, and driven by acute sectarianism, itself backed by the

³⁹ Patty Zakaria, “Is Corruption an Enemy of Civil Society?: The case of Central and Eastern Europe,” *International Political Science Review* 34:4, September 2013, p. 354.

political power-sharing formula that stipulated a system of distribution of power based on a confessional factors, converted limited sociopolitical resources into a cruel competition where citizens were, and remained in 2019, the most affected parties, even if many dismissed the phenomenon as being tangential to existing woes.

To understand the incidences of corruption, thus, require an analyst to recognize the roots of the sociopolitical system in place. In his *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon*, Reinoud Leenders reflected on how corruption spread alongside the different layers and realms of Lebanese society.⁴⁰ This corrupted system developed through time, he argued, reaching the current situation where various networks emerged that permitted a large segment of the population to progressively enjoy spoils at every imaginable level. Indeed, and according to the theory of individual utility maximization, the Lebanese were eminently satisfied with their indulgences, though few realized that what they harvested were not particularly rewarding over the long-term.

Nevertheless, few can deny that corruption in Lebanon became a social phenomenon with a positive dimension, because wily elites presented it as an essential tool to guarantee existing inter-sectarian balances, allegedly due to scarce resources that needed to be evenly shared. Inasmuch as an illusion of competition over sparse possessions was presented to unsuspecting masses, even when motivated by raw sectarian preferences, the hybrid political order in place, as well as the predominant form of governance such as “communitocracy,” all guaranteed legal support for corruption.

Therefore, institutional corruption along with its legalized variety, helped reduce the negative component of corruption and justified its perpetuation. Whatever negative dimensions existed were, thus, diluted based on the hegemony of sectarian ideologies, where the principle of what may be done “for the good of people” was

⁴⁰ Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012.

reduced to the recognition of the benefit to a specific community, of course applicable to all similar kinships. In this sense, the type of “effective corrupt leadership” corroborated the hypothesis advanced earlier, for as long as the politician on duty continued to provide basic needs to his community, support accrued, even though said official engaged in advanced corrupt practices with impunity. There was, therefore, a kind of “bounded morality” between members of a particular community and its members because corrupt practices became accepted as long as the actor who committed them belonged to their specific association.

If “petty” as well as “grand” depravities constituted socially accepted practices and helped demonstrate how corruption presented a positive component in the management of public services, then corruption incorporated a positive element, which guaranteed the stability of a challenged socio-political regime. Whether such a system was considered as being illiberal was an entirely different matter since, presumably, corrupt practices by elites as well as masses operating within clearly different boundaries would not help increase the level of political disaffection. This was the case because politics itself became undermined by public opinion based on lack of trust and transparency.

According to *Transparency International*, “petty corruption” can be defined as follows: “Everyday abuse of entrusted power by public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods or services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies.”⁴¹ Unfortunately for Lebanon, petty corruption gained so much momentum that it became a daily routine in most interactions with any kind of authority, both at the personal and institutional levels. Inasmuch as Lebanon is considered to be a neo-patrimonial state, the line between public and private is quite blurred and people in power use their influences and public resources for private gains. As amply documented, this problem developed

⁴¹ Transparency International, *Anti-Corruption Glossary*, at https://www.transparency.org/glossary/term/petty_corruption.

by certain social practices based on the concept of “wasta,” “the practice by which potential resources (specifically, institutionalized social capital) are converted into actual resources (embodied social capital or economic capital) and vice versa, as agents attempt to address concrete problems relating to their reproduction strategies.”⁴²

Over time, the practice developed and, not surprisingly, generated inequality. In the process, it created a form of power in the exchange of scarce social resources that further empowered practitioners.⁴³ Moreover, it also transformed ordinary transactions into an essential tool in the hands of “corrupt leaders,” who implemented their preferences based on an effective sectarian benchmark.

The patron-client system, thus, emerged as the cornerstone of individual subjectivization. As a matter of fact, the main factor to elucidate the political behavior and individual perception as a member of the state rested mainly on the feeling of belonging to respective confessional groups.⁴⁴ Thus, sectarianism guided all relationships, and developed into the most powerful factor that motivated the Lebanese. Instead of seeking to identify and defend the national interest, individuals preferred to look after the interest of their specific confessional groups, determined to be far more important than any nation-building initiative that required sacrifices and compromises. Remarkably, this pattern explained why the higher level of sectarian identities and higher levels of education seldom affected the perception of “communitocracy,” and why corruption rarely contracted.

⁴² Martyn Egan and Paul Tabar, “Bourdieu in Beirut: Wasta, the State and Social Reproduction in Lebanon,” *Middle East Critique* 25:3, 2016, pp. 262-263.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁴⁴ Bassel Salloukh, Rabie Barakat, Jinan S. Al-Habbal, Lara W. Khattab, and Shoghig Mikaelian, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, London: Pluto Press, 2015, London, p. 3.

Accordingly, Lebanon represented a liberal autocracy where various institutions, rules and political outcomes presented an important challenge to any attempt to develop a democratic identity or, to be more accurate, a democratizing vision.⁴⁵ To be sure, introducing and applying democratization in such a society was easier said than done, because Lebanon exemplified and continues to empower a hybrid political order where political and economic power is divided among “diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power that co-exist, overlap, and intertwine, combining elements of introduced Western models of governance and elements stemming from local indigenous traditions of governance.”⁴⁶

Moreover, and while Lebanon is presented as a real fusion of liberal democracy with confessional/neo patrimonial elements, what emerged was a new form of governance where the communities or confessional groups literally possessed (and packed) power, instead of backing the authority entrusted to state institutions.⁴⁷ As identified above, this type of governance is “communitocracy,” which clearly epitomizes who has power and how authority is exercised in Lebanon. “Communitocracy” is, thus, perceived as a governance system where policies are designed to serve more than the interests of the people, they are meant to preserve and defend the interests of confessional communities that make up the Lebanese socio-political mosaic.⁴⁸

What this discussion highlights is how the structural system determines the scope of corruption at the micro-level, and how such an extended system of corruption takes advantage of the facilities provided by the macro-level. Bribery, nepotism, favoritism,

⁴⁵ Daniel Brumberg, “Democratization in the Arab World: The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 13:4, October 2002, p. 56.

⁴⁶ Volker Boege, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Tom Najem, *Lebanon: The Politics of a Penetrated Society*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Imad Salamey, *The Decline of Nation-States after the Arab Spring: The Rise of Communitocracy*, New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 85.

patronage, embezzlement, kickbacks, and vote-buying, all of which are practiced, sometimes with a vengeance, that further buttress the existing political mechanisms in place. Amazingly, citizens cannot escape from these practices and are compelled to follow the established trend from a top-down approach, as petty corruption can be noticed within the entire realms of Lebanese daily life, paying little extras for all kinds of services, ranging the gamut from the annual motor vehicle inspection to property taxes.⁴⁹

Of course, because corruption is so far extended within Lebanese society that one may be tempted to dismiss any and all of these considerations, arguing that the social disease rendered Lebanon into a hopeless case. In fact, the results of the last legislative election, which were held on 6 May 2018, illustrated how the accountability mechanism fell by the wayside, even if party bosses insisted that these elections would be different and that they would demonstrate to citizens and observers alike that they, the political elites, were accountable and ought to be held responsible. What was on display was sophisticated gerrymandering across the board that saved the establishment and prevented opposition candidates, mostly

⁴⁹ Although the Ministry of the Interior streamlined the annual car inspection process, and to avoid inevitable long lines at the few examination centers (where presumably a car is actually checked for a variety of items), most Lebanese hire specialized teams to take their vehicles through the process—of course, for a fee. What is supposed to be a simple inspection at a fixed rate is thus—legally—up-ended, since the service fee, which ranged between US\$40 and US\$50 per car was non-negotiable for anyone not willing to waste time and waiting anywhere between 4 to 6 hours at the designated inspection centers. See “Mecanique to Restore Jobs of Fired Employees After Protest,” *The Daily Star*, 2 August 2018, at <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Aug-02/458840-workers-protest-mecaniques-arbitrary-dismissal-of-18-employees.ashx>. Property tax payments are an even more sophisticated money-generating phenomenon, not only for state coffers, but to most of the employees in the command chain that are supposed to sign-off on various permits. By the time all permits are secured for any given real estate transaction, the property owner dishes out substantial sums to various inspectors, supervisors, and directors in any given land registry (cadastre) office. See “The Taxation System in Lebanon: Between Collection and Justice,” *Civil Society Knowledge Center*, 2 November 2017, at <https://civilsociety-centre.org/event-summary/taxation-system-lebanon-between-collection-and-justice>.

representing civil society groups, from gaining save but a single seat in the 128-member parliament. It was an impeccable performance that earned elite party bosses rare accolades from civil and religious leaders for preserving “security and stability.”⁵⁰ Remarkably, when the system itself was so highly corrupt, elections became less effective and Lebanon was no exception.⁵¹

What occurred in the May 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections illustrated the differences between grand corruption executed by political decision-makers, and the petty corruption mentioned above, and which was merely implemented across the board for practical reasons. Naturally, both kinds of corruption were interlinked because they affected the entire sociopolitical system from a top-down approach, though the legally binding manipulation during the elections stood out for their egregiousness.

This was not the only example of the linkages between grand larceny and petty thefts that pullulate Lebanon. Another prominent example of the connection is the nest of vipers that is the electricity sector that siphoned nearly US\$40 billion from the state treasury during the past three decades. This extremely sophisticated case of unadulterated corruption affected, and continues to inflict financial damage to every

⁵⁰ Nadim El Kak, “A Path for Political Change in Lebanon?: Lessons and Narratives from the 2018 Elections,” *Arab Reform Initiative*, 25 July 2019, at <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/a-path-for-political-change-in-lebanon-lessons-and-narratives-from-the-2018-elections/>. See also, Sami Atallah and Sami Zoughaib, *Lebanon’s Parliamentary Election of 2018: Seats, Coalitions, and Candidate Profiles*, Beirut: The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, January 2019, at <http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1547823235-parliamentary-election-3-eng.pdf>.

⁵¹ Julie K. Faller, “The System Matters: Corruption and Vote Choice in Uganda,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 53:4, 2015, p. 429. See also Heiko Wimmen, “In Lebanon’s Elections, More of the Same is Mostly Good News,” *International Crisis Group*, 9 May 2018, at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/lebanons-elections-more-same-mostly-good-news>; and Joumana Talhouk, “Parliamentary Elections, Civil Society, and Barriers to Political Change,” *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research* 4:1, Summer 2018, at <https://kohljournal.press/parliamentary-elections>.

citizen, as the mechanism developed by the state parastatal institution, Electricité du Liban (EDL), dominates the daily life of the population. Amazingly, the Lebanese government allocates nearly a third of all annual government expenditures to EDL, roughly US\$2 billion each year, to produce a mere 1,500 megawatts when local needs are at least twice as much.⁵² Over the years, wily politicians milked the EDL at will, which stood out among all of the country's many woes.

In 2010, the then Minister of Energy and Water Gebran Bassil (and current Minister of Foreign Affairs), promised the Lebanese 24-hour electricity if the Cabinet would approve his plan to produce 5,000 megawatts each year by 2015, if only he would be allowed to build new plants and encourage solar and wind energy. At the time, Bassil claimed that his plan would cost about US\$4.8 billion, including US\$1.5 billion from the government, US\$2.3 billion from the private sector and US\$1 billion from donors over the next four years, although the only portion that was apparently spent was the government's share.⁵³

⁵² It may be useful to note that a kilowatt-hour costs about US\$0.15 on average in the United States, for example, which means that a megawatt-hour is US\$150 worth of electricity. This is of course a benchmark price and varies from country to country. Still, the point is that approximately US\$2 billion a year for a mere 1,500 megawatts is, to be charitable, excessive. It is vitally important to note that clement weather means that Lebanon can easily tap into solar power and, given its topography, yield significant resources from wind, although Beirut has, at least to date, preferred to overlook these alternatives. For further details, see Farouk Fardoun, Oussama Ibrahim, Rafic Younes, Hasna Louahlia-Gualous, "Electricity of Lebanon: Problems and Recommendations," *Energy Procedia* 19, 2012, May 2012, pp. 310-320, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egypro.2012.05.211>.

⁵³ Gebran Bassil, "Policy Paper for the Energy Sector," Beirut: Ministry of Energy and Water, June 2010, at <http://www.databank.com.lb/docs/Policy%20paper%20for%20the%20electricity%20sector%202010.pdf>. See also "Lebanon's Insoluble Electricity Crisis (Part One), *The Monthly*, 10 July 2018, at https://monthlymagazine.com/article-desc_4752_lebanons-insoluble-electricity-crisis-part-one; and "Lebanon's Insoluble Electricity Crisis (Part Two), *The Monthly*, 19 July 2018, at https://monthlymagazine.com/article-desc_4759_lebanons-insoluble-electricity-crisis-part-two; and "Public Sector: 12 Electricity Ministers With No Progress," *The Monthly*, Number 173, October

Astonishingly, Bassil received the requested budgetary allocations, but there was little to show for in the Summer of 2019 in terms of 24/7 electricity, which only surprised the gullible, even if Minister Bassil moved the goalpost once again and promised that his party (which continued to control the Ministry of Water and Energy) would deliver in the Summer of 2020 after he had promised the same for Summer 2015. Many objected to these theatrical performances and critics repeatedly proposed that Beirut privatize EDL, though political bickering dominated all discourses on the matter, as elite interests essentially ended such discussions as soon as they were raised. Simply stated, EDL stood as an ideal cash cow for powerful officials who used the company, among other such institutions, as patronage vehicles. The logic was impeccable: In the absence of accountability why look for transparency?

The electricity portfolio, which thrived on secret deals between entrepreneurs and their political connections that, in turn, empowered generator contractors with political protection, was too good to abandon. In fact, the patronage system relied on the oligopolistic system that has been encouraged by the hybrid political system, with few offers to restraint the milking process.⁵⁴ As a result, the systematic corruption that came with the socioeconomic clientelism worked out rather well for a sort of “parallel state,” which acted as an intermediary between state and society and was endorsed by the ruling elite.⁵⁵

This parallel state, which benefited elites first and foremost, implicated officials—the entire establishment—that did their best to avoid any kind of counter-corruption

2018, pp. 42-43. For the record, and between 1992 and 2018, the Ministry of Energy and Water was chiefly entrusted to the Free Patriotic Movement and its Amal and Hizballah allies.

⁵⁴ Stel and Naude, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

⁵⁵ Jamil Mouawad, “Unpacking Lebanon’s Resilience: Undermining State Institutions and Consolidating the System?,” *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, Working Paper Number 17, 29 October 2017, at: <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1729.pdf>.

proposals that could jeopardize current privileges. As a result, a clear way emerged as to how elites took advantage of the large-scale corruption system in place, to gather sizeable personal fortunes that led the country to catastrophe and, potentially, bankruptcy.⁵⁶ Incriminating evidence assembled by economists filled newspaper pages and specialized publications available to the public as well as international observers to reiterate these points that, curiously, seldom moved Lebanese officials. Ghazi Wazni, who documented details concerning Lebanon's public deficit—which stood at over US\$86 billion in 2017 and that represented 150 percent of GDP—focused on the electricity “bill” in his seminal work, though he was one of several scholars who delved on the matter.⁵⁷ This issue not only exemplified the existence of the “Blifil Paradox,” but it also gave rise to other forms of corruption, in favor of the principle “for the good of people.”

Therefore, what the Lebanese case study highlights is that subjective accountability, implemented via public opinion acquiescence, is not available to tackle the social disease that corruption represents. In fact, there exists a sort of bounded morality when one talks about corruption in Lebanon, as one observes some cases where the person(s), or institution(s), which denounce(s) corrupted practices is/are socially punished by public opinion. Needless to say, credit must go to the bureaucratic machinery behind such behavior that encouraged, and that continues to uphold, such mistreatment.

Nevertheless, it is worth repeating that petty corruption is a fact that can be observed on a daily basis, as illustrated by the Lebanese Advocacy and Legal Advice Center (LALAC) in 2015, which identified the specific sectors that gathered more concern

⁵⁶ Salamey, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Habib Osama, “Debt, Corruption Among 2018’s Challenges,” *The Daily Star*, 30 December 2017, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2017/Dec-30/431964-debt-corruption-among-2018s-challenges.ashx>. See also Éric Verdeil, “Infrastructure Crises in Beirut and the Struggle to (not) Reform the Lebanese State,” *Arab Studies Journal* 16:1, 2018, pp. 84-112, at <https://tadweenpublishing.com/pages/arab-studies-journal-1.halshs-01854027>.

among the Lebanese population that were compelled to deal with them: electricity and water, local governments-municipalities, real estate, health, private sector and commerce.⁵⁸ According to a major study, LALAC reported the most common types of concern for citizens, which were topped by inefficiency, red tape, as well as price-fixing, collusion, and cartel-like behaviors. In several instances, individuals reported more than one type of wrongdoing, or instances of corruption within the same complaint.⁵⁹ Such abuses were equally visible at the local government level, with municipal officials misusing their positions to facilitate illegal construction projects or refusing to provide citizens the necessary official documents to process personal paperwork or land registration, as part of normal practices, without kickbacks.⁶⁰

Similarly, egregious, petty corruption occurred within the higher education field, ostensibly grouping the country's elites. In recent years, at least four Lebanese universities were investigated for selling fake degrees, and while these developments were scandalous in and of themselves, what was even more striking was how Lebanese military officers relied on forged university diplomas to secure promotions.⁶¹ This issue dented the credibility and professionalism of the entire Lebanese higher education system, as well as the military, since there were four different universities involved in the scandal. These ethical violations could not be blamed on a wayward culprit since there were dozens of high-ranking officers

⁵⁸ The Lebanese Transparency Association, *Empowering citizens against Corruption*, Beirut: The Lebanese Advocacy and Legal Advice Center (LALAC), 2015 Report, at http://transparencylebanon.org/Modules/PressRoom/OurPublications/UploadFile/5512_18,06_YYLALAC_Final_Report_EN.pdf.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Sunniva Rose "Four Lebanese Universities Investigated for Selling Fake Degrees," *The National*, 8 April 2019, at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/four-lebanese-universities-investigated-for-selling-fake-degrees-1.846610>.

involved in the disgraceful behavior.⁶² In fact, the scale of the dishonor exceeded previous concerns, with the current director-general of higher education at the Ministry of Education, Ahmad al-Jammal, serving time in prison awaiting trial.⁶³

An equally devastating *Transparency International* report published in 2013, highlighted how the Lebanese population considered political parties, religious bodies, military and police personnel, media personalities and active NGOs to be corrupt or extremely corrupt too.⁶⁴ For most citizens, these concerns illustrated existing linkages between institutional corruption and legal corruption, and how authorities “managed.” For instance, security agencies involved in other cases of petty corruption stood out, as civilian as well as military personnel of several security agencies were charged with paying and receiving bribes for tempering with judicial files.⁶⁵

Cases related to bribery and prostitution were similarly exposed that, to say the least, further damaged the reputations of those who served in security institutions.⁶⁶ Bribery cases were especially upsetting as they involved diverse scenarios, including

⁶² The universities involved included, Saida University College (SUC), Lebanese French University (ULF), the American University of Culture and Education and the Arts (AUCE), and the Sciences and Technology University (AUL).

⁶³ “Education Ministry Official Detained Over Cash-for-Degrees Scandal,” *The Daily Star* 13 March 2019, at: <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Mar-13/478716-education-ministry-official-arrested-over-cash-for-degrees-scandal.ashx>.

⁶⁴ *Lebanon National Report* 2013, Beirut: Transparency International, at <https://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country?country=lebanon>.

⁶⁵ Youssef Diab, “Security Forces Corruption Scandal Grows as 20 More People Arrested,” *The Daily Star*, 6 March 2019, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Mar-06/478104-security-forces-corruption-scandal-grows-as-20-more-people-arrested.ashx>.

⁶⁶ “Judge Begins Questioning ISF Personnel in Corruption File,” *The Daily Star*, 11 February 2019, at: <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Feb-11/476356-judge-begins-questioning-isf-personnel-in-corruption-file.ashx>.

signing off on real estate transactions, and forging key documents that obligated court dismissals. As a matter of fact, several corrupted members of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) were charged allegedly for receiving money from citizens who lacked appropriate licenses to proceed with real estate construction. The ISF conducted investigations and arrested around 30 individuals though most were released for lack of evidence.

By far the most troubling developments occurred within ministries, which were used by all incumbents to promote employment to members of specific confessional groups—usually from the same community as the office holder, or to political allies as a matter of quid pro quo—even when most of these jobs were fictitious. Not only did such recipients duly receive monthly salaries, and all the other perks associated with government employment (health and retirement in particular) but, more often than not, hardly any of these “public servants” were expected to show up for work.

In 2018, and prompted by a parliamentary investigation that was so lopsided that it redefined political entertainment, an estimated 5,000 such positions were uncovered though no dismissals followed.⁶⁷ Comically, it was revealed that all “hires” intended to boost particular political parties during the 2018 parliament elections, masterfully gerrymandered to ensure that the establishment prevailed.⁶⁸ Moreover, the failure to fulfill the 2017 *Salary Scale Law*, which banned hiring new staff into public institutions, was never implemented that, naturally, further ballooned budgets and increased deficits.

⁶⁷ “Salaries of 5,000 Employees Could Reach \$4 Million Per Month,” *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 18 April 2019, at <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1684596/salaries-5000-employees-could-reach-4-million-month>.

⁶⁸ Sunniva Rose, “Lebanese MPs: 15,000 Government Employees Hired Illegally,” *The National*, 28 February 2019, at <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/lebanese-mps-15-000-government-employees-hired-illegally-1.831701>. See also “5,000-plus Hired Illegally Since 2017 Freeze,” *The Daily Star*, 23 May 2019, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/May-23/483831-5000-plus-illegally-hired-since-2017-freeze.ashx>.

The Council of Civil Service (CCS) initiated an investigation to look into the hiring implemented by certain ministries and public institutions concerning the last electoral process, though few expected concrete reforms.⁶⁹ It seemed that the irregular hiring occurred despite the aforementioned ban and, to make matters worse, additional delays followed even in cases when nominations for critical staff were necessary. Postponements of judicial, administrative and diplomatic appointees were routinized, allegedly because of elite attention to the proportionality law between Christians and Muslims, mandated for all senior posts according to the 1989 Ta'if Accords that ended the civil war.

Thus, and as these delays highlighted, the impact of sectarianism and its connection with corrupted practices within the public administration, triumphed. What lingered was the suspicion on all public employment, which was a constant in the Lebanese political ambiance, and that presumably the Ta'if agreement addressed. As a matter of fact, in 2019, an intense public debate was initiated among different political parties, all fighting to present themselves as anti-corruption leaders that, presumably, were ready to deliver substantial reforms, even if nothing changed year-in and year-out. Rather, what the Lebanese endured was more of the same, while substantial and convincing evidence, which antagonist political parties like the Lebanese Forces (LF) and Hizballah advanced, fell by the wayside.

An interesting example that buttressed the “Blifil Paradox” and the “Dirty Hands” issues concerned the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gebran Bassil, though he certainly was not unique in such practices. Like him, other political figures were involved in corruption but the figure and political weight of Bassil required specific attention because he was the head-of-state’s son-in-law and, presumably, a future

⁶⁹ Tamour Azhari, “MPs Vow to Stamp Out Illegal Hiring in Ministries,” *The Daily Star*, 16 October 2018, at <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Oct-16/466490-mps-vow-to-stamp-out-illegal-hiring-in-ministries.ashx>.

candidate for the presidency to succeed Michel Aoun. As the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Bassil fit the “Blifil Paradox” to a T.

Indeed, since taking over the Ministry of Telecommunications in July 2008, followed by the Ministry of Energy and Water in November 2009, attempts to discredit his political career by other political figures abounded, with claims that Bassil practiced corruption with a vengeance. For example, former Minister of Justice, Major-General Ashraf Rifi, accused the Foreign Minister and his party for being “responsible for the theft of US\$26 billion,” when Bassil held the Ministry of Energy and Water portfolio.⁷⁰ This was no idle accusation but one that carried significant risks for all concerned given the fact that Bassil championed “Christian” rights while Rifi promoted “Sunni Muslim” privileges.

Likewise, Rifi—who served as the head of the powerful Internal Security Forces for several years—charged Bassil with grand theft, indicating that he accepted payments for admitting certain candidates on his electoral lists. Rifi further accused Bassil of accepting money to grant certain ministerial portfolios once in power that, to put it mildly, was a solid definition of corruption. Rifi “indicted” Bassil with “Grand Larceny” as well, alleging that he bought land in Sil’atah [or Sela’ata, in Northern Lebanon] to create a power plant for an amount of US\$200 million, when the real value of the land did not reach US\$130 million.⁷¹

Be that as it may, many wondered how a minister who served in several governments for eight years could have earned US\$1.25 million, though Bassil claimed that he collected on his real estate investments in Batroun, Keserwan and Metn regions for a

⁷⁰ “Rifi: FPM, Bassil Responsible for Theft of \$26 Billion,” *Naharnet Newsdesk*, 25 December 2017, at: <http://m.naharnet.com/stories/en/240070-rifi-fpm-bassil-responsible-for-theft-of-26-billion>.

⁷¹ “Lebanese FM Received Iranian Funds in Red Crescent Parcels: Ex Justice Minister,” *Al Arabiya*, 23 April 2019, at <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/04/23/Lebanese-FM-received-iranian-funds-in-Red-Crescent-parcels-Ex-Justice-Minister.html>.

total value of US\$22 million.⁷² Of course, the origins of these large investments were murky, but the Rifi-Bassil interactions illustrated the political football that elites played with. Indeed, this tit-for-tat exercise became a normal political activity among the most prominent political figures in the country, as few, if any, could claim clean slates.

Aware that such corrupt practices prevented the Lebanese from accountability, and in order to reduce the impact of corruption, international donors pushed Beirut to take certain steps to improve the level of transparency. For instance, the 2018 CEDRE conference recommended that one of the structural reforms Lebanon ought to tackle, was to fight corruption in governance.⁷³ To do so, CEDRE advocated, the adoption of legislation to establish a *National Anti-Corruption Commission* was urgent. Simultaneously, the preparation of a plan for a “National Anti-corruption Strategy” was envisaged too, though no concrete measures were taken by the end of 2019.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, and despite the need for such structural reforms, the general perceptions considered these reform programs as a mere list of good intentions, with no actionable steps due to the fact the two-thirds of the proposed reforms needed important institutional commitments by state institutions that, regrettably, remained as putty in the hands of senior officials and their cronies. How to break the cycle of

⁷² “How Did Minister Bassil Acquire \$22M of Real Estate?,” *Beirut Report*, 3 November 2015, at <http://www.beirutreport.com/2015/11/how-did-minister-bassil-acquire-22m-of-real-estate.html>.

⁷³ The Conference for Economic Development and Reform through Enterprises (CEDRE) was launched on 6 April 2018 in order to meet the Government Reform Program entitled “Vision for Stabilization, Growth and Employment” and an accompanying “Capital Investment Program.” A total of 17 donor countries took part in the international conference, held in Paris, France, under French Government guidance.

⁷⁴ Sami Atallah, Georgia Dhagher, and Mounir Mahmalat, “The CEDRE Reform Program Needs a Credible Action Plan,” *Policy Brief*, Number 42, May 2019, Beirut: The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies at http://lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1557930590-policy_brief_42_eng_web.pdf.

corruption was on everyone's mind, though few seemed ready to abandon the Catch-22 environment that allowed them to acquire wealth, and rule with impunity.

Conclusion

On 30 June 2019, a deadly incident took place in the Shuf village of Qabrshmun (Qabr Shmoum) that resulted in two victims, Rami Salman and Samer Abu Farraj. Salman and Abu Farraj, bodyguards serving State Minister for Refugee Affairs Salih al-Gharib, were killed in the clash that involved the minister's convoy, which collided with supporters of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) headed by Walid Jumblatt. Another bodyguard and a PSP supporter were wounded in the incident though all concerned belonged to the same Druze religious community. According to General Security chief Major-General 'Abbas Ibrahim, it was essential to hand over culprits, something that al-Gharib's nominal boss, Lebanese Democratic Party (LDP) chief Talal Arslan insisted upon. Goaded by their Syrian patrons, LDP operatives insisted that the matter be referred to the Higher Judicial Council, ostensibly because what presumably occurred was an assassination attempt of a sitting minister.

In the event, the army arrested several suspects in overnight raids and while Arslan and Gharib described the clash as an armed ambush, the PSP accused the minister's bodyguards of forcing their way in and opening fire at protesters gathered in the area. The incident occurred supposedly because protesters in Qabrshmun and other Aley towns, some of whom were reportedly armed, decided to block roads to prevent Free Patriotic Movement chief Gebran Bassil from touring the region. For at least six weeks, contacts between 'Abbas Ibrahim and all parties, especially Arslan, Bassil and Jumblatt, preoccupied the Lebanese, as the sensitive negotiations culminated in a gathering between Arslan and Jumblatt at the presidential palace to benefit from a mediation session held under the auspices of the Head-of-State, the Speaker of Parliament and the Prime Minister.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Sami Moubayed, "Meeting at Baabda Palace Ends Druze Tensions," *The Arab Weekly*, 17 August 2019, at <https://the arabweekly.com/meeting-baabda-palace-ends-druze-tensions>. See also

Few observers discussed the real reasons behind what prompted the ambush and eventual deaths in the first place though the tragic event oozed corruption in all its facets. In fact, the dispute was over the French Total Company's planned purchases of gravel/cement used to make mud, essential in drilling for petroleum. Oil and gas companies invested in consortia to begin exploration and eventual production in several blocks to harvest Lebanon's petroleum resources within its Exclusive Economic Zone, estimated to hold approximately 96 trillion cubic feet of gas and 865 million barrels of oil in just 45 percent of its economic waters.⁷⁶ In other words, there was a substantial source of new wealth that needed harvesting, though how the process functioned was mysterious.

In the case of the Qabrshmun incident, both the PSP and LDP wished to position their respective leaders' private companies to benefit from whatever petroleum engineering required, in this instance a heavy, viscous fluid mixture that is used in oil and gas drilling operations to carry rock cuttings to the surface and also to lubricate and cool the drill bits. It just so happened that Jumblatt owned the Sibline Cement company, which was scheduled to sell whatever Total needed for its offshore drilling work and, not to be left out, Arslan's ally, former member of parliament Pierre Fattoush, who owned one of the largest cement factories in Ayn Dara, near Aley (Shuf), wanted in too. The Ayn Dara facility was controversial and faced serious opposition because it allegedly damaged the environment, but its owners insisted that the project ought to proceed despite various objections—political as well as environmental. Arslan was adamant that Fattoush was eminently entitled to proceed. At the height of the dispute, the Minister of State for Refugee Affairs Salih Gharib met with quarry and crusher owners from Ayn Dara to reassure them that they would be treated fairly and that only

"Arslan Says 'Won't Bargain' as Jumblat Decries 'One-Sided' Arrests," *Naharnet*, 13 September 2019, at <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/264718>.

⁷⁶ For details on holdings and associated projects, see the "Lebanon Gas and Oil" web page at <http://www.lebanongasandoil.com>.

companies operating illegally would face consequences. LDP Leader Arslan backed him as well.⁷⁷

Although no smoking gun was revealed to affirm whether the Qarbshmun deaths were related to the machinations of Lebanese politicians, rumors circulated that the Baabda Palace reconciliation settled the matter on a 50-50 percentage basis, allowing both Jumblatt and Arslan to sell to Total whatever the latter required. A similar accord was apparently reached between Gebran Bassil and Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri over the Chekka Cement factory in the north, which was scheduled to make its products available for drilling in Block 4. Mercifully, no one was killed in the Bassil-Hariri transaction, since the financial exchange was quickly settled "between partners."

As all of the examples cited in this essay illustrated, corruption has been deeply embedded in Lebanon, as prominent figures from the political establishment, which included various civil servants and many others, shared in the spoils that were spread on silver plates and available for picking. The case of the Free Patriotic Movement's handling of the lucrative electricity sector, which ought to have been privatized at least three decades ago, spoke volumes. This was not the sole sector that enjoyed such laissez-faire attitudes, as similar privileges were granted to Mustaqbal, Amal, Hizballah, and various other parties. Even garbage was a lucrative commodity as ministers jockeyed their private companies to purchase refuse by the tons, naturally at inflated prices, before dumping the trash in privately owned land- and sea-fills that were in turn sold to the state, with lucrative financial proceeds saved in their bank accounts.

Everything was a commodity to be bartered, including all goods that entered through the main harbor in Beirut as well as the sole international airport that served the country. The Customs Department was well-positioned to siphon off what could be as

⁷⁷ "Politicians Hail Cement Factory Decision," *The Daily Star*, 1 April 2019, p. 2, at <http://www1.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Apr-01/480124-politicians-hail-cement-factory-decision.ashx>.

prominent importers who belonged to a specific party—Hizballah—managed to remove their goods without paying any duties. Of course, those who signed off were generously rewarded, but that was par for the course. Against these major odds, law enforcement and judiciary officials stood helpless when they were not part of the system that recompensed the compliant.

Near the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, half of the Lebanese population was willing to engage in corruption and only 14 percent fully trusted the judiciary, according to a survey by *Sakker el-Dekkene* cited above that, regrettably, spoke volumes. Since only half of the citizens were willing to report on corruption—as long as such behavior does not backfire on them and as long as it leads to results—it is fair to ask about the other half. Although corruption overwhelmed the Lebanese population, and all sides, age groups, and income levels seemed ready to see change, why were promised reforms seldom successful? What could be done to change such attitudes and outcomes?

Inasmuch as genuine reforms necessitated transparency and accountability, and given current conditions, the only avenue for genuine reforms was to empower the judiciary by separating it from the political establishment. In 2019, the Lebanese could not trust the judiciary, which was and must remain the pillar of the fight against corruption. Only 14 percent of those questioned by independent observers maintained that they had full trust in the judiciary, while 46 percent had some trust, and 32 percent had no trust at all. This was the crux of the matter and when surveys asked why they did not trust or did not fully trust the judiciary, a whopping 64 percent of respondents mentioned spontaneously political interference, though 49 percent mentioned corruption.⁷⁸

Lebanon will thus remain embedded in a perpetual state of corruption until such time when nonexistent or weak public trust in the judiciary was and is updated. Over time, and without justice and accountability, the state itself remained under threat as those

⁷⁸ Sakker el dekkene 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

who practiced the law of the jungle could not prevent poverty and wars. Only the establishment of a truly independent judiciary, one that will try and, as needed, punish prominent establishment figures found guilty of theft, can—possibly—save the hapless country. Beirut was nowhere near such an outcome, for the very office of the public prosecutor was beholden to the political party that appointed incumbents. Neither the former Minister of Justice, Major General Ashraf Rifi, nor the Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, Judge Jean Fahd, two of the more transparent officials serving the country, managed to make a dent when they were entrusted with their portfolios. Their successors, Albert Serhan and Judge Suheil Abboud were Free Patriotic Movement appointees, which ensured bias and partiality, given the FPM's record. If the Lebanese are not to lose hope and emigrate en masse, as 600,000 have done permanently since 1992, concrete steps were required to address the severe ills associated with corruption.⁷⁹ Regrettably, successive Lebanese governments failed to devise and adopt laws that placed the interests of citizens first and foremost and, not a negligible point, they also bungled opportunities to adopt laws that treated everyone equally. Those with “wasta” literally got away with murder as a largely marginalized citizen-population contemplated its destiny. Most were bewildered by what the establishment continued to do, the way they behaved towards their fellow citizens, and how leaders mesmerized masses under the illusion of a unique *joie de vivre* that was, in reality, little more than exuberant despondency.

⁷⁹ “600,000 Lebanese Have Left Lebanon Since 1992,” *The Monthly*, 23 January 2019, at https://monthlymagazine.com/article-desc_4825_600000-lebanese-have-left-lebanon-since-1992. According to this source, “Some population and immigration researchers and scholars believe[d] the number of departing Lebanese [was] larger than the abovementioned one. For example, according to one count, the number of departing Lebanese reached 718,584 between 2008-2017, an annual average of 71,858 people, while the number of Lebanese residing in Lebanon rose from 3.546 million in 2007 to 3.617 million in 2017.” It was impossible to verify these figures although the gist of what they highlighted was probably accurate. Of course, these figures were recent, and came on top of the estimated million Lebanese that migrated out of the country during the 1975-1990 Civil War.

Postscript

Although this research paper was completed a few weeks before Lebanon embarked on a new revolution starting on 17 October 2019, what startled elites were the waves of citizens who rejected them and, not a negligible point, awakened to their own socio-economic slumber. The exuberant despondency practiced by many gave way, at least for a significant portion of the population that voted with their feet, to a quest for genuine liberty.

For the past two weeks, an estimated two million people took over most city centres throughout the country, blocked leading thoroughfares, assembled in various spots to vent their frustrations, forced banks to close their doors, kept up pressure on all private and public institutions (ranging the gamut from schools to non-essential shops), shamed religious figures who backed the establishment, and otherwise conducted themselves with impeccable poise—all of which surprised observers. Muslims and Christians alike tossed their fear cloaks, vowed to persist in their demands to topple the government and usher in a new parliament, as well as to put on trial corrupt officials who literally emptied the state's coffers for their personal gains. They chanted "*killun ya'nih killun*" (all of them means all of them), and though Hizballah and Amal Party supporters destroyed encampments in Riad al-Sulh and Martyr's squares—with shy Internal Security Forces standing—to show who was the real master over the land, few desired to compromise.

To be sure, many roads reopened after Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri resigned on Tuesday 29 October, even if banks remained closed for an additional day (they were scheduled to reopen on 1 November 2019). As of Thursday 31 October, the Lebanese financial institutions, which represented the country's sole independent civilian hope for prosperity, continued to hoard resources in what were unprecedented steps in peacetime. Concerns that the Lebanese pound would face significant devaluation hang in the air along with a near certain suspension of the CEDRE assistance program

that was supposed to interject US\$11 billion into the economy. Remarkably, wily politicians hoped that demonstrators would tire and abandon city squares that, in turn, would allow the failed leaders to continue their “business-as-usual” preferences, as few contemplated serious reforms that would meet popular demands. It remained to be determined whether the exuberant despondency of the Lebanese would finally give way to responsible exuberance that would diminish, perhaps even end, corruption, ensure equality, and forge a nation-state worthy of the name.

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Dr. Kéchichian published *Political Participation and Stability in the Sultanate of Oman*, Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2005, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy*, Santa Monica: RAND (1995), and edited *A Century in Thirty Years: Shaykh Zayed and the United Arab Emirates*, Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Policy Council (2000), as well as *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, New York: Palgrave (2001). In 2003, he co-authored (with R. Hrair Dekmejian) *The Just Prince: A Manual of Leadership* (London: Saqi Books), which includes a full translation of the *Sulwan al-Muta* by Muhammad Ibn Zafar al-Siqilli.

In 2008, two new volumes were published: *Power and Succession in Arab Monarchies*, [Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and Beirut: Riyadh al-Rayyes Books, 2012—in 2 volumes for the Arabic translation], and *Faysal: Saudi*

Arabia's King for All Seasons [Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida and Beirut: Dar al-'Arabiyyah lil-Mawsu'at, 2012]. Dr. Kéchichian authored *Legal and Political Reforms in Sa'udi Arabia*, [London: Routledge, 2012, and Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyes Books, 2015 for the Arabic translation], and completed a companion volume to Faysal titled *'Iffat Al Thunayan: An Arabian Queen* (Brighton, Chicago, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

The Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. welcomed Kéchichian as a non-resident fellow in 2009-2010 and hosted him once again in 2012-2013 to work on a new Smith Richardson Foundation funded project on the Gulf Cooperation Council, which resulted in a new book titled *From Alliance to Union: Challenges Facing Gulf Cooperation Council States in the Twenty-First Century*, Brighton, Chicago, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press (2016). Sussex published *The Attempt to Uproot Sunni-Arab Influence: A Geo-Strategic Analysis of the Western, Israeli and Iranian Quest for Domination*, which includes a translation of *Istihdaf Ahl al-Sunna [Targeting Sunnis]*, by Nabil Khalifé (2017). His latest book is *Saudi Arabia in 2030: The Emergence of a New Leadership*, Seoul, Korea: Asan Institute for Policy Studies, August 2019. Two forthcoming volumes will include *The Nationalist Al Sa'ud Advisor: Yusuf Yassin of Sa'udi Arabia and Sacred Duty and Realistic Strategies: Sa'udi Policies Towards Migrants and Refugees* (with Fahad Alsharif).

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Dr. Kéchichian is a frequent participant in conferences throughout the world and delivers frequent lectures to leading think-tanks and political institutions. He is also a regular interviewee on radio and television programs and is a frequent guest on *Al Jazeera English* as well as various *BBC* programs. The National Public Radio affiliate in Chicago, USA, *WBEZ*, airs his commentaries on a regular basis too. Dr. Kéchichian is fluent in Arabic, Armenian, English, French, Italian, Turkish, and is very slowly but surely learning some Persian and a little Korean.

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