Between Diversity and Unity: Young Lebanese Visions of Legitimate Social and Political Systems 20 Years after Civil War

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Abstract

Two decades have passed since the end of the Lebanese civil war. The young generation has not experienced war but the social and political system in which they live is still influenced by the power-sharing mechanisms that ended the war. Power-sharing mechanisms protect the Lebanese diversity but further divide society along sectarian lines and affect the possibility of building a united society. In this article the visions of Lebanese university students are analysed to reveal what social and political systems they consider legitimate for Lebanon. The article argues that the current power-sharing system can remain legitimate since it provides security, which is crucial for the acceptance of the system. At the same time a united Lebanese identity is preferred by all students. By juxtaposing power-sharing democracy with a society of conviviality this article uncovers several dilemmas for post-conflict societies. The article concludes that to establish long-term peace the social and political systems cannot be viewed separately but must be analysed in relation to each other.

Keywords: Legitimacy, Social and political system, Power-sharing democracy, identity, envisioning, Post-peace, Lebanon, Young adults.

Introduction

This article deals with the long-term construction of societies after civil war. Focus in post-conflict contexts is often on the direct resolution of conflict or the immediate period following peace agreements. However, this article turns its attention to the power-sharing mechanisms that were installed to end the civil war in Lebanon 20 years ago, asking whether

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these mechanisms deliver legitimate social and political systems for the Lebanese people. The emphasis of the article is on young Lebanese, arguing that their views and visions of the current and future social and political systems are crucial since they are Lebanon's future.

With the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1991, the Ta'if Agreement put in place a power-sharing political system which equally divided parliamentary power between Muslims and Christians.[1] In the years following the settlement of the conflict Syria acted as the protector of the power-sharing system and peace.[2] With the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 Syria's presence was increasingly questioned. This spurred sectarian tensions anew and split the population into two blocs; March 8 gathering mostly Shiite followers who supported Syria's presence, and, March 14 consisting of mainly Christian, Sunni and Druze parties who demanded Syrian withdrawal. In October 2005 Syria withdrew from Lebanon but the divide between March 8 and March 14 remained.[3] Thus, the power-sharing mechanisms contributed to ending the 15-year long civil war but religious dividing lines and sectarian tension remain deeply inscribed in the society and the communities' self-identification until this day.

For long-term reconciliation changed patterns of identification towards a shared identity and common acceptance of the other are of great importance. In other words, the necessary condition for persistent peace is conviviality.[4] However, the contradiction between power-sharing which divides and conviviality which aims at uniting society raises questions of how post-conflict social and political systems are perceived by the population in a long-term perspective. Simultaneously, the population's perception of the systems as legitimate or illegitimate greatly affects their viability and thus whether peace and democracy will prevail.[5]

Today, young Lebanese have no, or very little, experience of the civil war but their reality is strongly influenced by the mechanisms that were put in place to end it.[6] This article builds on interviews with twenty politically active university students in Lebanon conducted in

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[1] Anna K. Jarstad & Timothy D. Sisk (eds.) *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1; Philip G Roeder & Donald Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace. Power and Democracy after Civil Wars* (United States of America, Cornell University Press, (2005), p. 121

[2] Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Power Sharing in Lebanon: Foreign Protectors, Domestic Peace and Democratic Failure, in Roeder, Philip G & Rothchild, Donald (eds.) *Sustainable Peace. Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, (United States of America, Cornell University Press, 2005) pp. 219-240, p. 231ff

[3] Oussama Safa, "Lebanon Springs Forward", *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (2006), pp. 22-37

[4] Susanne Buckley-Zistel, In Between War and Peace: Identities, Boundaries and Change after Violent Conflict, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 35-3 (2006) pp. 3-21, p 3f; Pamela Chrabieh Bedine*, La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban. Visions de Jeunes du Secondaire* (Beyrouth, Dar el-Machreq, 2009), p. 68

[5] Rod Hague & Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, (New York, Palgrave McMillan, 2004), p. 15

[6] Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Unpacking the Dynamics of Communal Tensions: A Focus Group Study of Perceptions among Youth in Lebanon*, (United Nations, New York, 2009).

December 2009 and January 2010. The interviews explored the students' views and future visions of the Lebanese social and political systems in relation to the post-conflict mechanisms introduced 20 years ago. The students' visions are analysed through the theoretical perspective of identity formation and power-sharing to explore the legitimacy of the current system or how a more legitimate system should look like. The article starts by scrutinising identity formation and power-sharing democracy as theoretical concepts, then analyses the future visions expressed by the interviewees in the case of Lebanon. Finally the article assesses the legitimacy of maintaining post-conflict mechanisms two decades after the end of war.

Theoretical Approaches to Identity Formation and Power-Sharing

Identification and Conviviality

The starting point of conflict is often related to intergroup relationships in society which are closely interlinked to different groups' self-identification.[7] Identification is a continuously changing process where subjects adopt temporary identifications within the current discourse. Existing discourses and practices hail the subject into place by activating certain identities but not others. At the same time the subject himself/herself invests in its subject position. Consequently, the process of identification is not only an imposition of identity; it is an act of agency by the subject as well. Identification through the activation of certain identities but not others implies that individual or group identity is formed in relation to what it considers itself to be and how it differs from others.[8] Thus, in Lebanon, the 18 different religious sects, whether Christian, Muslim or Jewish[9], identify themselves through how their sectarian group differs from the others, in other words through what they are that the others are not.[10]

The violent or peaceful nature of relationships between groups is determined through a process of mutual recognition.[11] With unsatisfactory mutual recognition, tensions and conflicts arise because the self perceives the other as a threat to the self's identity or security.[12] When the self feels threatened the out-group is named as a threat, simultaneously

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[7] John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (United States of America, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 8

[8] Maria Eriksson Baaz, *The White Wo/Man's Burden in the Age of Partnership. A Postcolonial Reading of Identity in Development Aid* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Gothenburg, Department of Peace and Development Research, 2002), p. 33f

[9] Among the 18 different religious sects twelve are Christian, four are Muslim, one is Druze and one is Jewish (Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban)*.

[10] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban*, p.52ff

[11] Brian Greenhill, Recognition and Collective Identity Formation in International Relations, *European Journal of International Relations*, 14-2(2008) pp. 343-368, p. 348f

[12] Stephen Worchel, Culture's role in conflict and conflict management: Some suggestions, many questions, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29 (2005) pp. 739–757, p. 748

indicating what the in-group identity is. In light of insecurity, identities become more persistent instead of being part of an otherwise continuously changing process.[13]

On the other hand, positive mutual recognition can be part of creating a common identity which could help solve conflict or prevent it from arising. The key to a common identity is joint engagement in intergroup contacts and activities through which groups can find shared characteristics and thus divisions between groups may change. This can lead to a de-categorisation when group categories are ignored altogether through a process of assimilation of group identities. Or, a re-categorisation in which individuals view themselves foremost as part of a common group by downplaying separate group identities may occur resulting in individuals adhering to dual identities.[14]

Coexistence is an important goal in divided societies since it implies different communities living side by side in peace. Conviviality (*convivencia*) is a deep coexistence where different communities not only live side by side but also experience life together. Consequently, a common '*we*' transcends dispersed group identities resulting in individuals having dual identities instead of merely different group identities.[15] Conviviality is a state with frequent interaction between different communities as well as individuals. This is seen as a precondition to achieve dialogue and freedom of expression which facilitates mutual comprehension, a guarantee for religious, civil and political rights, respect of traditional institutions and complete equality for individuals belonging to different communities. Conviviality does not mean assimilation between different groups into one entity but a respect for a diverse society.[16] The achievement of conviviality in a multi-confessional society is thus the ideal form of coexistence.

Thus, in post-conflict societies, group identities as well as the relationships between groups are both reasons for conflicts and at the core of conflict resolution. In Lebanon, this implies that if some sectarian communities were to feel insecure about others' perception of their identity it could lead to hostilities in the society or even an escalation of violence. On the other hand, if intergroup contacts and cooperative activities lead to a mutual understanding, barriers between, for example, communities of Christians and Muslims, Sunni and Shiite, Maronites and Druze in Lebanon could be lowered. This would open up the possibility to create a common Lebanese identity and a society of conviviality.

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[13] Maria Stern, 'We' the Subject: The Power and Failure of (In)Security, *Security Dialogue*, 37-2, (2006) pp. 187-205, p. 192f

[14] Greenhill, Recognition and Collective Identity Formation in International Relations, p. 358; Worchel, Culture's role in conflict and conflict management, p. 243

[15] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban,* p. 68

[16] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban,* p. 76f

Power-sharing Democracy and its Consequences in Divided Societies

In the emergence from conflict, persistent divisions between groups and lack of trust between them complicate democratic transitions and peacebuilding. In addition, rule by majority, common in democracies, is often undesired as it might imply that the minorities' needs are dismissed in the political arena.[17] In these situations, power-sharing, or the predefined inclusion and autonomy of communities, is an often used measure to manage the parties' uncertainty about the future.[18] This was the case in Lebanon where the Ta'if Agreement contributed to ending the war by introducing equal division of parliamentary seats between Muslims and Christians[19] and establishing that the President must be Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister Sunni and the Speaker of Parliament Shiite.[20]

According to Lijphart, a power-sharing democracy is the only possibility in multi-ethnic societies since majority rule risks becoming undemocratic or dangerous to society through the exclusion of minorities. What these divided societies need is a power-sharing democracy that "*emphasizes consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximize the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with a bare majority*".[21]

Although Lijphart argues that power-sharing is the best option for multi-ethnic societies, such as Lebanon, it is also contested. Power-sharing democracy in post-war societies might have considerable negative effects on long-term democratisation and peacebuilding.[22]

In post-war power-sharing democracies the predefined participation of particular groups in government is contested since it means the exclusion of other 'insignificant' parties who may be instigated to continue fighting until they are included in the power-sharing deal.[23] To make matters worse, inclusion of warring parties excludes moderate movements

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[17] Timothy D. Sisk, Democracy and Conflict Management, *Beyond Intractability*, Eds. Guy Burgess & Heidi Burgess (Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2003), http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/democ_con_manag/

[18] Jarstad & Sisk, From War to Democracy, p. 111

[19] The Ta'if Agreement installed the fourth Lebanese power-sharing regime since 1860 aiming at ruling the multi-confessional country. In addition to dividing the Lebanese society along sectarian lines, the power-sharing regimes have, through politically privileging the Christians, influenced the socio-economic division in society where the Christians have traditionally dominated the wealthier classes and, the traditionally politically marginalised Shia, the lower classes, with the Sunni and Druze in the middle range. The Ta'if Agreement slightly adjusted this through equally dividing power between Christians and Muslims, compared to the previous six to five ratio but the proportional overrepresentation of Christians still remains. Today, however, the socio-economic divisions are not as clear and all religious sects include disparities of extreme wealth as well as poverty. (Maktabi, 2000; Wenger & Denney, 1990)

[20] Zahar, Power Sharing in Lebanon, p. 231ff

[21] Arend Lijphart, *Democracies. Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries,* (United States of America, Yale University Press, 1984), p. 22f

[22] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 106; Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace*, p. 49

[23] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 116

who were not part of the war. By such a system violence is rewarded and change is impeded.[24] In addition, predefined inclusion limits democratic competition between elites and as a result the citizens' concerns can be ignored. Consequently the democratic criteria of accountability may be circumvented.[25]

The criterion of proportionality in power-sharing aims at distributing political and societal power and resources fairly. At the same time it is criticised for freezing the war's status quo and hindering change in the future. The rigidity of the power-sharing system allows the already included elite to resist the inclusion of new politicians and demographic changes in society are not accounted for.[26] In the long run, elites are no longer representative of society which might lead to lack of popular support and democratic legitimacy. In addition, tension may rise or even violence may break out when dissatisfaction with division of power rises and the rigid political system is unable to adapt to changes peacefully.[27] In Lebanon, the power-sharing system has maintained confessional division in society and the predefined inclusion has allowed the same elite within each sectarian community to rule the country despite demographic[28] and political change.[29]

To reduce the negative effects of power-sharing in post-conflict societies it is important that the power-sharing deal is a short-term solution and that the peace accord includes clauses that emphasise power-sharing as a transitional phase.[30] The Ta'if Agreement includes such passages, however, until today no real steps have been taken to remove sectarian division in Lebanese politics.[31] In addition, when negotiating peace accords the inclusion of such clauses might be impossible since warring parties may not agree to a peace accord at all knowing that they risk losing power in the future. Thus, the power-sharing mechanisms remain a complicating but sometimes necessary measure since the alternative could be no peace at all.[32]

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[24] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 124f

[25] Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace,* p. 36f

[26] Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace,* p. 39f, 46f

[27] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 120ff, 125f, 127ff

[28] The last official Lebanese census was conducted in 1932 and showed an almost equal division between Christians and Muslims. Although no recent official census exists, population estimates illustrate a growth of the Muslim population to approximately 60 percent. However, the current power-sharing system is based on the 1932 census (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009: Population; Maktabi, 2000:146f, 150).

[29] Bassel F. Salloukh, The Limits of Electoral Engineering in Divided Societies: Elections in Postwar Lebanon, *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 39-3 (2006) pp. 635–655

[30] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 121f, 132

[31] Elias Sakr, Speaker's pitch to abolish political sectarianism stirs debate among parties, *The Daily Star,* http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=109080 (2009-11-25)

[32] Jarstad & Sisk, *From* War to Democracy, p. 121f, 132

Democracy in its simplest form means rule by the people in a system in which the people possess some kind of political equality.[33] However, in divided societies, where politics are characterised by power-sharing institutions, equal citizenship is restricted and the democratic ideal one (wo)man one vote is not applicable since that would transform a community's demographical size into its possibilities to influence political power. Power-sharing democracy in divided societies defines access to the state according to group affiliation and, thus, the distribution of equal citizenship is restrained.[34]

As seen above, a power-sharing democracy can both create stability between groups as well as differentiate between citizens' influence depending on group affiliation. The difficulties that arise with the system certainly influence its popular view. The viability of the system of government in a country is to a great extent dependent on public acceptance of the system itself, in other words the system's legitimacy. When the public believes the system to be legitimate, its effectiveness and stability is maximised.[35] Thus, the visions of the social and political systems expressed by the young Lebanese students in this paper indicate the perceived legitimacy of the system itself or what the system would need to look like in order to be considered legitimate in their eyes.

How It Should Be: The Students' visions of the Lebanese Future

Future Lebanese Society and Identification

The visions presented in this paper were identified by 20 politically-active university students in Lebanon.[36] To capture the diversity of Lebanese society the students were selected based, firstly, on sectarian affiliation where ten Christians from different sects were selected and ten Muslims whereof four were Sunni, four Shia and two Druze. Secondly the selection was based on political affiliation and eight of the respondents supported March 8, nine supported March 14 and three respondents were independent.[37]

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[33] David Held, *Demokratimodeller. Från klassisk demokrati till demokratisk autonomi* (Uddevalla, Daidalos, 2002), p. 13

[34] Raina Maktabi, State Formation and Citizenship in Lebanon: The Politics of Membership and Exclusion in a Sectarian State, in Nils A Butenschon, Uri Davis & Manuel Hassassian (eds.) *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East* (United States of America, Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 152f

[35] Hague & Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics,* p. 15

[36] The interviews were conducted with students from the Notre Dame University (NDU) and Université Saint Joseph (USJ). Both are private universities with rather costly tuition fees. Thus, this study reflects the visions of students belonging to the upper-middle or the upper socio-economic classes. Nevertheless, economic assets can also be an important resource for political participation (Hague & Harrop, 2004:123). Therefore these students can be assumed to be more likely to engage in national politics in the future.

[37] At the time of the study, March 8 gathered Shiite Hezbollah and Amal as well as the mostly Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) representing the view of Lebanon as a guardian of the resistance

The views of the Lebanese future that were presented in the interviews were difficult or at times even impossible to divide according to the political or sectarian affiliation of the interviewees. This implies that students from different communities often share similar visions for the Lebanese future which, according to Lederach,[38] is an important part of reconciliation. However, as we will see in the discussion, the preference for a united future does not always overcome current sectarian divisions.

"*I want to say I am Lebanese, not I am Sunni Lebanese, I'm Lebanese, I'm only Lebanese*"[39]

In the views of the students, the future Lebanese society should be a united society in which a common Lebanese identity plays a uniting role. The interviewees emphasise the need for a common Lebanese identity instead of different group identities. In today's divided Lebanese society the students´ dream is encouraging for the reconciliation of peace since it suggests that they are using their individual agency to identify themselves as Lebanese rather than by sectarian affiliation. The students' preference for a common identity could, thus, be seen as a small step towards realising this shared dream.

However, uniting different identities into one implies more than just believing that it can be done. To unite the Lebanese identity, it needs to be able to identify in what way the Lebanese '*we*' differs from the outside, what the Lebanese '*we*' is in relation to what the outside is not and what the Lebanese '*we*' is not in relation to what the outside is. Some of the interviewees emphasise the Lebanese identity as unique in its acceptance of diversity which implies an identity that could be broad enough to encompass differences in society. If the Lebanese identity encompasses difference it also gives room for citizens to have dual identities, one Lebanese and one sectarian, which could protect the Lebanese diversity and Lebanon's uniqueness. With a satisfactory recognition between groups, peaceful relationships are formed which increase inter-group contacts and open up for a uniting identity between the groups.[40] The Lebanese students envision the possibility of such a future, and, as noted by Worchel, the mere existence of group identities does not mean that there are tensions and hostilities in the society.[41]

Although a common identity can coexist with sectarian group identities, the uniting of a Lebanese identity would imply downgrading religion as the foremost identifier in society. Many students did express a wish for a detachment of identity from religion. Worchel assumes

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against Israel and opposing western influence in the region. March 14 comprised, among others, the Sunni Future Movement and the Christian Lebanese Forces as well as the Druze Socialist Party. It represents the pro-western alternative which favours continued Lebanese relations with western countries (Economist, 2009-06-13; Coleman, 2010:57).

[38] Lederach, *Building Peace,* p. 31

[39] Stated by one of the interviewed students.

[40] Greenhill, Recognition and Collective Identity Formation in International Relations, p. 348f

[41] Worchel, Culture's role in conflict and conflict management, p. 742f

that this will happen when common goals are recognised and individuals identify themselves with a common 'we' rather than as belonging to different communities.[42] If sectarian identity loses influence, something else would necessarily need to take its place. The idea that a secular society should emerge in the future was expressed by the interviewees, for some as the basis for the individual's identification while for others it would constitute a common ground for relationships that do not judge and divide people based on religion. Thus, if the common 'we' builds on secularism, coexistence will be facilitated in society. However, despite the positive consequences of secularism, the question is whether the Lebanese uniqueness will remain when its main characteristic (religious diversity) is no longer considered important? This was noted especially by one student who said: *"this country, it is a very special country. (...) Maybe if this happens and the one unite, maybe the country won't be special anymore."* Thus, unity is desired but the possible cost of assimilation could be a very high price to pay.

Among some students suspicion towards the outcome of a common identity was also expressed, although the need for a common uniting identity was greatly emphasised. The hostile feelings expressed by some interviewees of the Christian Lebanese Forces (March 14) towards Shiite Hezbollah (March 8) illustrate the fear that still exist between groups in the Lebanese society revealing doubts about unity and even more so towards assimilation. One student emphasised this by saying: *"if I want to live with these people [the Shiite], these people they don't want to live with us. They want their own way of living."* According to Worchel, it is only when the other is perceived as a threat to the self's security and identity that conflicts arise between groups.[43] Hezbollah is perceived as threatening by some and thus it is also named as a threat by them. Not only the Lebanese Forces perceive Hezbollah as a threat but, in addition, some supporters of March 14 believe that Hezbollah could be a threat to Lebanon if it tries to achieve its domestic goals by the force of arms. According to Stern the naming of a threat freezes patterns of identification and the possibility of changing hostile relationships towards more friendly ones becomes difficult.[44] Thus, naming Hezbollah as a threat to the Lebanese society implies difficulties in changing relationships between Hezbollah and some actors within March 14. This shows that the Lebanese society still inhabits divisions and hostile relationships that complicate the creation of a common Lebanese identity.

Thus, feelings of insecurity and fear exist as expressed by some of the students. However, the preferred future that all interviewees envision is a society of unity in which people adhere to their Lebanese identity as their most important subject position, before sectarian or regional identifications. Nevertheless, this future Lebanese common identity is not seen as eliminating sectarian identities but merely downgrading their importance. Assimilation

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[42] Worchel, Culture's role in conflict and conflict management, p. 742f

[43] Worchel, Culture's Role in Conflict and Conflict Management, p. 748

[44] Stern, 'We' the Subject, p. 192f

of diverse identities into one is thus not the choice of the students; it is rather the existence of dual identities, Lebanese as well as sectarian, which is preferred. Consequently, the future society which is imagined is one of conviviality where different communities share the experience of living together. The characteristics of conviviality, a common identity, guarantee of rights, respect for diversity, equality but not assimilation, are all wished for by the students in one way or another.[45] Hence, the students' visions for a future Lebanese society reveal a peaceful and stable society where diversity is respected but a common identity unites all citizens.[46]

Future Lebanese Governance

The students' visions for a future political system are divided between a reformed political system in which sectarianism has been removed and the continuation of the current system of power-sharing based on sectarian divides.

The students that prefer a future in which the sectarian division has been removed recognise that some of the problems of the current political system are the frozen dividing lines between different communities, the inhibiting of new voices in politics, such as the green party, and the guaranteed inclusion of established political elites, who are often seen as corrupt in their positions of power. Jarstad and Sisk, as well as Roeder and Rothchild, claim that the structure of the power-sharing system creates these problems. The predefined inclusion of certain groups, together with the predefined proportional representation of these groups freezes conflict lines in society, it hinders change of politicians and in the end it affects democratic accountability. Over time representation is no longer proportional and the only reason for the system still representing the most important groups is because the system itself has been institutionalised and thus has frozen the dividing lines that affect group identities in society and politics.[47] To counter these effects the students prefer a changed political system to a non-sectarian system. However, the interviews also revealed that the possibility of removing sectarianism is perceived as dependent on the society adopting more secular discourses to guide it. Thus, there is a preference of a secular society but a fear of political change before societal change.

Accordingly, the confidence-building tool that a system of power-sharing makes up in a post-conflict society is appreciated for its possibility to guarantee inclusion and therefore hinder hostility between groups.[48] The interviewees that prefer the current system to stay

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[45] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban,* p. 68, 76f

[46] The large group of Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon adds further diversity to the Lebanese society as well as to the complexity of creating a Lebanese identity. They could be considered an out-group against which the Lebanese in-group identity could unite (Stern, 'We' the Subject, p. 192f). However, their long-term existence in Lebanon raises questions as to whether the refugees are still a foreign group inside Lebanon.

[47] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 105ff; Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace,* p. 29ff

[48] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 111

argue that the divided Lebanese society requires a division of power, an opinion which corresponds to Lijphart's argumentation.[49] Whereas Jarstad and Sisk claim that power-sharing is likely to become undemocratic over time because of demographic change within the population and thus deliver unequal representation.[50] The changed proportions between communities in Lebanon are of no, or little, concern to some of the students. These students rather want to maintain today's equal division between Christians and Muslims in parliament, despite demographic change. One student specifically expressed it in this way: "*we must respect the equality, because we [the Muslims] cannot live without the Christian and the Christian cannot live without the Muslims*" [my translation].[51] Thus, the demographic changes in society are not considered a condition which renders the system undemocratic and illegitimate but rather viewed as a reason for keeping the division since it protects the Lebanese society and a redistribution of seats would cause insecurity for the minority groups, most notably the Christians.

The fear of losing influence due to demographic change could be inhibited through maintaining the power-sharing system in which the Christians are guaranteed their place in power.[52] One interviewee clearly referred to this by stating that "*… as a Christian […] we are becoming a minority, that's a problem for me. I think the quota is my warranty".* However, the question is whether the maintaining of power-sharing grants security to the different groups, or if its dividing structure further polarises religious confession as the main dividing line in society and therefore increases insecurity. The societal and political divisions might lead to increased demands for power, or number of seats, from the growing communities at the expense of others. Thus, it needs to be noted that security which power-sharing is assumed to deliver could turn into insecurity if one group changes its own self-perception and becomes unsatisfied with the others' recognition of the self's size or political power.[53]

A few interviewees emphasise the importance of the people feeling that they are equal citizens before the state in the future since it is an important step towards building a unified society in which the state is the main guarantor for its citizens. However, the emphasis on the need for equal citizenship illustrates that it is not perceived as such today. In divided societies, citizenship builds on the different communities acting as mediators between individuals and the state. Depending on the rights given to the community the individuals'

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[49] Lijphart, *Democracies,* p. 23

[50] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 120ff

[51] Il faut respecter l'égalité, car nous on peut pas vivre sans les chrétiennes et le chrétiennes peut pas vivre sans les musulmans

[52] The loss of influence was discussed by the students in relation to the loss of political influence and representation. However, a discussion on changed socio-economic division of society due to political change was not mentioned. The lack of discussion of socio-economic factors might relate to a general lack of such discussion in society or the domination of questions relating to sectarian division. However, the students' own privileged socio-economic position could be the reason since it implies that they might not be concerned about the socio-economic divide of society for their own part.

[53] Greenhill, Recognition and Collective Identity Formation in International Relations, p. 348f

rights also differ and thus citizenship can never be equal.[54] Within the Lebanese power-sharing system this is the case today and as long as power is distributed according to a power-sharing formula it will remain the same. Therefore, the preference of total equality before the state is hard to achieve without eliminating the power-sharing system which guarantees inclusion of all significant parties.

Legitimate Future Social and Political Systems

The preferred visions of Lebanon's future society and governance presented by the politically-active university students emphasise a united Lebanese identity, dual identities, non-sectarian political divides and political equality. However, the wish to protect Lebanese diversity as well as fear of societal tensions means that the social and political systems that are ultimately considered legitimate highly depend on the circumstances in society.

The current power-sharing political system is considered legitimate in the divided Lebanese society today. The current system is perceived as capable of preserving Lebanese diversity and thus Lebanon's uniqueness. At the same time, the change of the current system to a non-sectarian system is the most often preferred future. However, for such a secular system to gain legitimacy it is dependent on the prior development of a secular society in which peoples' judgment of others, as well as their own self-identification is not based on sectarianism and which consequently would enable a political arena based on other dividing lines. There is an overarching agreement on the preference of a society in which the Lebanese identity will gain greater importance than different group identities. The Lebanese identity is considered important for the society to achieve unity and stability. Thus, unity is of great importance for the politically-active students, but it is a unity which removes tension and insecurity between groups but does not eliminate and assimilate group identities all together. Consequently, the possibility of individuals to adhere to dual identities is strongly preferred by the student interviewees for the future of Lebanon.

The visions expressed by the students thus reveal two possible scenarios of a legitimate social and political system. The rest of this article will analyse the difficulties and contradictions that arise from both of these scenarios.

The first scenario is a society which is characterised by a power-sharing political system where the divisions between sectarian communities remain but communities also coexist in conviviality. In a system which builds on conviviality there are equal rights, a common identity but no assimilation. In such a society, group identities are downplayed in relation to the common identity but they still exist and thus people have dual identities, which were strongly preferred by the students.[55] In such as system, the continuation of sectarianism as a principle for dividing power protects group identities and defines individual's relation to the state.

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[54] Butenschon, et al. *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East,* p. 22f; Maktabi, *State Formation and Citizenship in Lebanon*, p. 152f

[55] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban,* p. 76f

However, the protection of group identities also means that citizenship is not equal in the meaning of one person one vote. This questions both democratic equality and, in addition, the feeling of equality among citizens.[56] Thus, power-sharing and equal citizenship are two separate values, seemingly impossible to combine. In addition, the freezing of the dividing lines in society, caused by the power-sharing system has consequences for the possibility of creating unity between communities since unity also implies that there needs to be equality.[57] Although the visions portrayed above reveal that a sectarian division in politics is considered legitimate in a divided society, the impossibility of the system to create the desired unity results in a dilemma in which the choice lies between protecting diversity or unity among Lebanese communities.

The second scenario that involves a secular society and a secular political system does not have any difficulties in delivering equal citizenship since citizenship is based on equal rights regardless of identity. However, with a common identity based within a secular discourse, religion's role in society is downplayed or even ignored leading to integration or even assimilation between the different groups. Although citizenship is equal, the secular society leads to the removal of sectarian group identities and as such the removal of the Lebanese diversity and uniqueness. Although this second dilemma troubles some of the students, many are so fatigued with sectarian divisions that they do not perceive it as a problem and, thus, believe a non-sectarian system to be legitimate despite, or due to, their assimilating consequences.

Although many interviewees wish for a secular political system, they are all emphasising the need for a secular society and mentality among the Lebanese to develop before the political system can be changed. This portrays the view that politics should mirror society instead of reforming society. Thus, fear of instability arising with the introduction of a new political system, if one group perceives it as excluding in its structure, is present among many of the students. The bottom line is, as acknowledged by Jarstad and Sisk, that when it comes to choosing between security and insecurity, a power-sharing peace or no peace at all, the choice always has to be peace even if it will hinder democratisation[58] and, in the Lebanese case, also unity between groups. Many interviewees share this opinion and are keen on maintaining the power-sharing system until the population is conscious about being Lebanese before everything else. As long as a different system is believed to spur insecurity in society, reform is not seen as a choice, although the preferred future does include unity and a non-sectarian political system according to most interviewees. Thus, the kind of future political system that is considered legitimate or not strongly depends on the kind of future social system of Lebanon.

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[56] Maktabi, *State Formation and Citizenship in Lebanon*, p. 152f

[57] Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace,* p. 39f

[58] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy,* p. 132

Theoretical Implications from the Lebanese Case

The article has shown that the interviewed Lebanese students consider two different social and political systems legitimate; a power-sharing system if Lebanon continues to be a divided society or a secular system if the Lebanese society becomes secular. Although the theoretical framework used in this study reveals that both of them imply dilemmas in the Lebanese case, the dilemmas revealed also shed light on the implication of theories of identification and power-sharing in post-conflict societies.

As this article has revealed, the theory of conviviality, in which there is a common identity that transcends individuals and communities, a respect for equal civil and political rights as well as the guarantee for religious and traditional institutions,[59] includes protective measures that will be ignored in a non-sectarian system as well as values of unity that a power-sharing system cannot achieve. Thus, although conviviality is an ideal for divided post-conflict societies, this article suggests that all aspects of conviviality are difficult to realise in one social and political system.

In this article, both the arguments for necessity of a power-sharing system to achieve security and democracy in a divided society[60] as well as arguments against its inflexibility and solidifying characteristics of societal divisions in post-conflict societies[61] have been confirmed. Important to note is that the students' perceptions of the current social and political systems expressed the existence of dilemmas that theories on power-sharing and democracy commonly discuss. Thus, the way the social and political systems are constructed highly influences experiences in everyday life. This means that lack of security or democratic deficiencies that the system might create are not only theoretical discussions but crucial for the population's perception of the systems and how they live and interact within it.

The question whether post-conflict mechanisms will remain legitimate over time, despite changes in the post-conflict society was the point of departure for this article. It has been argued that to some extent the power-sharing mechanisms that were introduced after the war two decades ago are still legitimate to rule the current Lebanese society, in particular because they provide a sense of security to different communities in Lebanon. However, the overarching wish for change in the societal sphere on how people interact with each other and how they identify themselves would eventually call for changes in the political system as well. The article thus suggests that post-war mechanisms can remain legitimate over time. Nevertheless, continuous revisions are required for the social and political systems to be able to deliver on the demands of the Lebanese population, such as unity and sustainable long-term peace.

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[59] Chrabieh Badine, *La Gestion de la Diversité au Liban,* p. 76f

[60] Lijphart, *Democracies;* Lijphart, The Power-Sharing Approach

[61] Jarstad & Sisk, *From War to Democracy;* Roeder & Rothchild (eds.) *Sustainable Peace*

However, the need for revision also exposes the weakness of the power-sharing democracy in post-conflict societies. The stability of the system itself implies that it will necessarily trail behind changes in society if continuous revision is not carried out. In a post-conflict society, where peace between warring parties was achieved based on a specific division, threatening that division also means threatening peace. When introducing political reform before societal change is perceived as a threat to security, as in the case of Lebanon, power-sharing democracy cannot be changed without great efforts, even if revision is included in the original peace accord, such as in the Ta'if Agreement. Thus, democratic deficiencies, as well as the polarisation and freezing of conflict lines between groups heighten over time and, in the worst case scenario, political crises or outright conflict might be seen as the only option available to break the deadlock which may develop. A different system which does not include a predefined division between groups would continuously revise the proportionality between groups through elections. Thus, political deadlock might be avoided by a system that is able to reform itself over time since societies, also post-conflict societies, are not unchanging entities.

Nevertheless, the appreciation of the system expressed by some interviewees suggests that legitimacy is not only based on democratic criteria, such as proportionality and equal representation, and that the possibility of the system to deliver what is most important in society, such as security, can be of great importance to the inhabitants who in the end are the ones to decide on the system's legitimacy. Although the inhabitants' appreciation of the system is crucial for democracy, it needs to be mentioned that a legitimate system is not necessarily democratic. Thereby, in post-conflict societies where other criteria bear more importance to the population, an additional dilemma might appear, the dilemma between legitimacy and democracy.

Conclusion

This article has aimed at providing views of legitimate future Lebanese social and political systems according to twenty politically-active university students. The students' visions revealed two possible scenarios; a reformed non-sectarian system and a continuation of the current power-sharing system, both combined with a united Lebanese identity and a protection of religious diversity. However, the study also exposed the existence of three dilemmas for the social and political systems preferred. The dilemma of introducing a non-sectarian political system, which guarantees equality between citizens but is unable to protect the Lebanese diversity; the dilemma of keeping a power-sharing political system, which protects communities but is unable to unite the Lebanese society; and, finally, since security and stability are seen as more important than democratic values – the dilemma of having to choose between legitimate and democratic rule in a post-conflict context two decades after civil war. The post-conflict reality of the Lebanese case has shown that theories of identification and power-sharing democracy represent two ideals for society that greatly

differ from each other. When juxtaposed, dilemmas arise in the long-term peace perspective. Thus, to establish long-term peace the social and political systems cannot be viewed separately but must be analysed in relation to each other. In the debate over the kind of system most appropriate in a post-conflict society, determining the legitimacy in the eyes of the population may pinpoint the important aspects to include for long-term peace.