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Introduction

From the 17th century onwards, a gradual historical process of shifting the primary mode of politics from empire-states to nation-states defined the European continent. Fast forward to 2020, nation-states continue to be the most desirable mode of governance, with national self-determination projects usually being predicated on statehood aspirations. These political projects, which begin as political imaginaries, rely on two assumptions: the people who are to be ruled by a state constitute a nation and identify with said nation, and people who constitute and identify with a nation have the right to be ruled under their own state. The feeling of identification with a nation can be labeled a national identity. However, national identity is not merely defined at the individual level; collective consciousness, state politics, international politics, material interests and historical contingencies all interact to form a national identity. Furthermore, national identity is not the sole mode of self-identification, as humans often define themselves along subnational identities (sect, ethnicity, class, etc.) and supranational identities (pan-Arabism, Islamic Ummah, etc.). Given the complexity of a national identity and its importance in the process of state-building, this paper seeks to explore how Lebanese national identity -if there even is one- was constructed.

Through historical research, I argue that there has been no solid construction of a single Lebanese national identity. In fact, I posit that competing visions of Lebanese national identity - or competing ‘national *identities*’ as Farid el-Khazen puts it - have existed and continue to shape the Lebanese socio-political sphere. These opposing visions of a Lebanese nation compete within the sectarian (or multi-confessional; the terms will be used interchangeably) socio-political system. Sectarianism is not only the result of opposing visions of national identity, but it also acts as an amplifier of polarization between groups with competing national identity visions. Furthermore, I argue that international politics significantly influence the process of Lebanese national identity-building: the Lebanese state inherited the sectarian politics of the French mandatory system. Furthermore, the National Pact of 1943 which founded the independent Lebanese Republic guaranteed French, Syrian and Egyptian interests as much as it did for the Lebanese. The regional dynamics of the Middle East in 1975 contributed to the protraction of the Civil War, which involved several foreign actors. Historically, international politics in Lebanon have entrenched sectarianism and thus hindered the consolidation of a non-sectarian Lebanese national identity. The contradiction of sectarian identities and Lebanese national identity is the cornerstone of the historical process of identity-building in Lebanon.

National Identity: A Socially Constructed Imaginary

Before defining ‘national identity,’ it’s important to define the term ‘nation.’ Benedict Anderson defines nations as political communities which are imagined as limited and sovereign.¹ But how do nations transcend human imagination and materialize? Since the state is the primary source of political power in a realist framework, nations often seek statehood to materialize their boundaries and sovereignty, meaning nations precede statehood. However, there are also cases where statehood is the precedent and wherein the nation is not consolidated. In these cases, the nation is either divided along ethnic, sectarian or other subnational lines, or the state must make substantive efforts to consolidate a singular national identity. This is applicable to Lebanon: the state of Greater Lebanon founded in 1920 ruled over a variety of sectarian communities which did not necessarily identify with a singular Lebanese national identity. In the context of a nation-state, the people governed by the state are assumed to identify with the nation, and thus have a *national identity*. However, this assumption is not a given.

National identities are socially constructed. Different groups within a nation interpret the meaning of national identity differently. Jorge Larraine argues that “the meaning of national identities is never static or given, but subjected to competing interests and are always, therefore, a terrain of conflict.”² Applying this definition to Lebanese national identity is analytically useful; the plurality and contradictions of Lebanese national identity can be explained by the fact that different religious communities of Lebanon have competing interests rather than a singular national interest. Many other states rule over different religious, tribal or ethnic communities, and many have succeeded in constructing a solid, singular national identity. The peculiarity of Lebanon lies in the deep-rooted institutionalization of sectarian identities and the unique sectarian design of the Lebanese political system.

Sectarianism and National Identity-Building in Lebanon

There is a wide range of literature on the Lebanese political system and its relation to national identity. Farid el-Khazen discusses national *identities* that entered a communal pact in 1943.³ He emphasizes the plurality and communal nature of Lebanese identities. Arend Lijphart defines Lebanon as a consociational democracy, a political situation where social stability is achieved through power sharing among elites.⁴ Therefore, she analyzes the Lebanese system through the lens of power relations. Rola el-Husseini builds on Lijphart’s definition to characterize the Lebanese political system as a power-sharing system between the elites of different religious communities.⁵ She incorporates the sectarian aspect of identity groups in

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

² Sergio Catignani and Clive Jones, *Israel and Hizbollah: An Asymmetric Conflict in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 138.

³ Farid el-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact*. London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991), 2.

⁴ Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, *World Politics*, 21, no. 2 (Jan 1969): 207-225.

⁵ Rola el-Husseini, *Pax Syriana: Elite Politics in Postwar Lebanon* (Syracuse University Press: 2012), 22.

Lebanon in Lijphart's power sharing definition. El-Khazen, Lijphart and El-Husseini have a similar interpretation of the Lebanese national identity as a pluralistic one.

The academic consensus is that the Lebanese identity is pluralistic, and since Lebanon's political system is a multi-confessional republic, it's important to discuss sectarianism in relation to national identity. Sectarianism is a conceptual problem in and of itself. This paper will build on Max Weiss' concept of "sectarianisms" in the plural form. Specifically, it will understand sectarianism as "the structured feeling that produces particular forms of cultural identity or social solidarity, [...] a political system in which sectarian criteria are institutionalized as the basis for administration of government, [and] an expression of violent, even murderous, tendencies."⁶ Similar to tribalism and ethnic identity, sectarianism is opposed to nationalism and internationalism, because it is a subnational mode of identification.⁷

Thus, sectarianism hampers the prospects of a singular, cohesive national identity. To support this argument, this paper will first explore the history of sectarian tensions in Ottoman Lebanon. Then it will argue that sectarianism was essentially institutionalized by the French and became a pillar of the Lebanese mandatory system.

The Early Days of Sectarianism in Mount Lebanon: An Imperial and Colonial Creation (1516–1918)

What is known as Lebanon today was once a mere part of *Bilad ash-Sham*, meaning Syria (or Greater Syria). The first founder of "Lebanon" was Fakhreddin I. In the early sixteenth century, he founded the Maanid dynasty which would rule over the Mount Lebanon Emirate, an autonomous subdivision of the Ottoman Empire, until the end of the seventeenth century. The Shehab dynasty then took over and ruled the Emirate from the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire began to decline. This Emirate is considered the historical precursor to the Mount Lebanon governorate. Under the Ottoman Empire's *Tanzimat* reforms, the *Mutasarrifyat Jabal Lubnan* (Arabic for governorate of Mount Lebanon) was created in 1861 following a brief but devastating civil war between the Druze and Maronite Christian communities in 1860. This conflict erupted after decades of tensions between the two groups as the Maronite peasantry was revolting against their Druze overlords.⁸ The sectarian tensions weren't rooted in prejudice or hatred against the other, but rather in material and economic interests that intersected with sectarian or communal modes of identification.

In 1842, Ottoman authorities, using a proposition by representatives of European powers, tried to address these tensions. They divided the Mount Lebanon Emirate into two districts: a northern Christian one and a southern Druze. This measure clearly didn't address the root of the problem, as the 1860 conflict lasted for several months. Following these events, the French,

⁶ Max Weiss, "The Matter of Sectarianism", in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle-Eastern and North African History*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Amal Ghazal (Oxford University Press: 2016), 1.

⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁸ Leila Fawaz, *Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, 1995), 47.

British, Austrian, Prussian, Russian and Ottoman Empires formed an international commission to establish a new judicial and administrative system that would prevent the recurrence of such conflict. Under diplomatic pressure from the European powers, Ottoman authorities decided to separate the Mount Lebanon governorate from the remainder of Syria, to reunite the northern and southern districts under a Christian *mutasarrif*, and to give the governorate further autonomy. This *Mutasarrifiyah* is the historical precursor to the Lebanese Republic. Following the defeat and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and under the framework of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the victorious French and British Empires gained control of Ottoman territories: Lebanon and Syria became French mandates, Palestine became a British mandate, and Transjordan and Iraq came under British rule. In 1920, French General Gouraud announced the formation of the state of Greater Lebanon, expanding the previously autonomous Mount Lebanon governorate. Mandates were essentially “the legal trusteeship of territories”, a concept that historian Micahel Provence likens to adult guardianship over minor children.⁹

In line with Anderson’s concept of nationhood, one deduces that Lebanon was first an Ottoman *invention* known as Mount Lebanon, and later became a European colony (under the guise of a ‘mandate’) curated to be Western-friendly via the deliberate ascension of the Maronites to power at the expense of the remaining communities. Furthermore, one can conclude that Lebanon has a history of sectarian tensions that predates Western encroachment. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs will explain how French mandatory rule played on these tensions and solidified sectarianism as a pillar of the Lebanese political system.

Colonial Legacy (1918–1943): Institutionalizing Sectarianism and Asserting French Supremacy

The French established the state of Greater Lebanon under its mandate, the historical precursor to the Lebanese Republic. Colonizing the Middle East wasn’t merely an interest-driven venture, it was “a matter of national destiny” for French politicians.¹⁰ It was a matter of national destiny and of religious ‘civilizing’ objectives interlaced with material interests: “A potent popular historical narrative combining mythic Frankish Crusaders, Catholic missionaries, the right-wing cadres of the colonial army, and provincial business interests had evolved to advocate a French Mediterranean empire.”¹¹ By establishing a French empire in Ottoman lands, the French’s civilizing mission “would bring Francophone enlightenment and civilization” all the while “[asserting] the supremacy of French power, prestige and culture.”¹² The national identity of the Lebanese would be heavily influenced by French identity through language and legislation. French influence is still present today. For example, many streets in Beirut are named after French public officials and generals such as Gouraud and Clemenceau. Loyal colonial subjects accepted French supremacy, often embracing francophonia and choosing Latin names as opposed to Arabic names for their children. Their ‘special relation’ with the West, based on

⁹ Provence, “The Levant Mandates”, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹¹ Ibid, 2

¹² Ibid, 2

shared Christianity, was part of their identity. As such, French identity became interlaced with Lebanese identity. Lebanon thus became a French colony (or ‘mandate’), and this naturally birthed political resistance from Arab Ottomans: “The earliest petitions to the League of Nations were in opposition to Zionism, the Balfour Declaration, and the assignment of French and British mandates in Syria and Palestine.”¹³ The contradiction lies in the fact that two equally significant parts of the Lebanese population were at odds: one was a colonial subject and the other was anti-colonial. As a response, the French designed the ‘multi-confessional’ system of Lebanon in a way that would privilege the ‘better’ colonial subjects.

The Maronite Christians of Lebanon were assumed to be more ‘civilized’ colonial subjects than the Muslim communities.¹⁴ General Gouraud and his chief strategist Robert de Caix considered the educated Ottoman Arabs as their main enemies, therefore the separation of Lebanon from the rest of Muslim-majority Syria was necessary in safeguarding the colonial interests of the French.¹⁵ However, the French did not install a Maronite-majority population in Lebanon- at least not demographically. The state of Greater Lebanon expanded the Mount Lebanon governorate’s geographical borders quite significantly, thus “[diluting] a Maronite majority in a larger territory.”¹⁶ The cities of Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Akkar, and the regions of the Bekaa Valley and *Jabal Amel* had either significant Muslim populations or a Muslim majority. In other words, Maronite Christians did not constitute the majority of the population within the Lebanese borders. Nonetheless, Gouraud and De Caix overrepresented Maronites in high power positions. For instance, the administrative council was two-thirds Christian. In 1926, the French High Commissioner appointed a constitutional committee for Lebanon, which had three pro-French Christians and one pro-French Muslim. After 1922, the Chamber of Deputies was also dominated by Christians, who accounted for 58% of its seats.¹⁷

Sunni Muslims initially rejected this *fait accompli* and sought unification with Syria, whom they viewed as “the bastion of Arab nationalism.”¹⁸ In 1923 and then in 1926, Sunni leaders expressed their grievances to General Weygand, Gouraud’s successor, and held conferences on the matter. Their political activism continued well into the 1930s, but aspirations for Syrian unification faded. The idea of uniting different communities of Lebanon as a first step to achieve greater Arab unity prevailed over the idea of directly unifying with Syria.¹⁹ Although the Shi’as of Lebanon had little power compared to the Sunnis and the Christians, they also engaged in anti-colonial political activism. They took the same stance as Sunnis, meaning they rejected the separation of Lebanon from Greater Syria.²⁰

We can thus deduce another contradiction in Lebanese national identity: the proximity to French and Christian identities versus the proximity to Arab and Muslim identities. Lebanese

¹³ Ibid, 5

¹⁴ Ibid, 7

¹⁵ Ibid, 13

¹⁶ Ibid, 14

¹⁷ Ibid, 15

¹⁸ El-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities*, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 13-14.

²⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 77-78.

national identity does not exist in a vacuum; it is linked to other national, subnational and supranational identities. The meaning of Lebanese national identity is relative to broader identities: French and Christian identities, and Arab and Muslim identities. The powerful Maronite community imagined Lebanon as close and friendly to Western Christian states whereas the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims imagined Lebanon as a part of the greater Syrian (or even Arab) nation. Moreover, the political system was built on the notion of power-sharing along sectarian lines and blatantly placed Christians atop of the system; the French institutionalized sectarianism under the guise of 'multi-confessionalism'. This institutionalized sectarianism would entrench sectarian identities, with the groups having contradictory Lebanese national imaginaries.

Lebanese 'Independence' (1943–1975): National Identity or Identities?

On November 22nd, 1943, the Lebanese Republic gained its 'independence' from France but remained subjugated by the sectarian system installed during their rule. Lebanon's first President was Bechara el-Khoury, and his Prime Minister was Riad el-Solh. Their government was formed under the framework of the 'National' Pact of 1943. However, this Pact could not be further from 'national': Political scientist Farid el-Khazen describes it as a "Communal Pact" consisting of "identities" rather than a singular national identity.

There was a need to bridge the gap between Christians and Muslims--more specifically, between Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims--and to end mandatory rule and seek independence. Farid el-Khazen posits that the 'National' Pact was the only possible political formula for Lebanon given all the historical contradictions of its national identity.²¹ However, like in earlier periods, international politics influenced the National Pact even more than intra-national politics did. In fact, the Pact did not concern merely Lebanese political actors. As el-Khazen puts it: "Rather, it was an arrangement involving Lebanese politicians (mostly Maronite and Sunni), Arab leaders (mainly Syrians and Egyptians), and western powers (the French and the British in particular)."²² The unwritten 'National Pact' thus had the function of a power sharing agreement between the sectarian communities of Lebanon. Furthermore, it was an indirect agreement between Arab leaders (who supported the Sunnis of Lebanon) and western powers (who supported the Maronites). However, it also served to define --or at least attempted to-- the meaning of the Lebanese nation and the Lebanese national identity. The contest over imagining and creating a Lebanese nation is tied to broader questions about Lebanon's position in the world, notably vis-a-vis the imagined Arab nation and Western powers.

Essentially, the Maronite community -- and Christians in general-- had to accept the Arab aspect of Lebanon's identity, and the Muslims had to accept that Lebanon was an independent state with a 'special relation' with the West. They also had to abandon any aspirations for unification with Syria. It was essentially a compromise between the 'colonial identity' of Lebanon--a country carved out of Greater Syria that is friendly to European powers-- and its

²¹ El-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities*, 5.

²² *Ibid*, 5.

'anti-colonial' identity that identified with an imagined Arab nation. It's important to note that Lebanon is home to eighteen officially recognized religious sects. Yet, for a long time, power sharing mainly involved the Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim and Druze communities. Relatively little power was given to the Shi'a Muslims. The formula posited by the National Pact is as follows: the Presidency was given to the Maronite Christians (a historical continuation of the privilege they enjoyed when the *Mutasarrif* of Mount Lebanon was of their kin), the Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and the Parliament Speaker position is reserved for a Shi'a Muslim. The Speaker position was mostly symbolic as the President had much more power, but later came to play a more significant role.

Political representation was also sectarian and parliament seat proportions were based on the findings of a 1932 population census. The interpretation and analysis of these findings back in 1932 embody "issues of contest regarding the identity of the Lebanese state and who its members should be."²³ Indeed, the domination of Maronite Christians was systematically sustained. As political scientist Rania Maktabi notes, "The restrictive citizenship policy practiced by the Maronite-dominated regime until the outbreak of the civil war in 1975 is understood as a means to sustain political domination in an ethnically divided society."²⁴ Even after 'independence' from France, Lebanon inherited the power dynamic which favored the Maronite community, reflecting the legacy of French colonial practices in Lebanon. This dynamic was sustained through citizenship policy. Since it determines who belongs to Lebanon and who does not, citizenship policy is an effective tool in the contest over the meaning of Lebanese identity. The restrictive policy would inaccurately represent the Lebanese nation, just as the French empire did. Unsurprisingly, restrictive citizenship policy and more generally the disproportionate power held by the Maronites would brew tensions along sectarian lines.

Given its sectarian divisions, one can apply the notion of 'consociational' democracy to Lebanon. It is defined as "a political situation in which a variety of groups, none of which are large enough to constitute a majority, are able to achieve social stability by means of a [power sharing] pact among the elites of the various groups."²⁵ However, social stability in Lebanon before 1975 is not a given, as tensions between Christian and Muslim groups continued. In 1958, American troops invaded Beirut because the country was on the brink of civil war. The Muslims of Lebanon were outraged by Western attacks on Nasser's Egypt following the Suez Crisis and by Pro-West President Camille Chamoun's decision to join the Baghdad Pact. They viewed these events as a threat to Arab nationalism, whereas the majority of Christians sought to keep the pro-West status quo. Three months later, Chamoun's presidency ended, and Prime Minister Rachid Karami formed a national reconciliation government. However, efforts to maintain 'peace', social and political stability would only last until the late 1960's.

In other words, the National Pact of 1943 -the foundation of the Lebanese system- was a power sharing arrangement aimed at bridging the gap between Christian and Muslim identities. It

²³ Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who are the Lebanese?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26, no.2 (Nov 1999), 219.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 220.

²⁵ El-Husseini, *Pax Syriana*, 1.

constituted “a political system in which sectarian criteria are institutionalized as the basis for administration of government.”²⁶ Furthermore, it was a pact that suited Syrian, Egyptian and French powers, once again emphasizing the role of international politics. International politics, particularly Arab nationalism, played a big role in mobilizing Lebanese Muslims who knew that Maronite Christians were disproportionately powerful. Later down the line, when Maronite power was threatened by the influx of Palestinians - who are mainly Sunni Muslims - national identity would be completely fragmented.

The ‘Civil’ War (1975–1990): Sectarianism, (Anti-)Zionism and Syrian Hegemony

Before going into the details of the ‘Civil’ War itself, the national memory of this conflict is very telling of Lebanon’s inability to consolidate different historical narratives. To this day, educational curriculums in Lebanon don’t provide any in-depth history of the ‘Civil’ War since different communities disagree on the details of how events developed. If Lebanese people can’t come to a consensus as to how and why the ‘Civil’ War occurred, is it surprising that they can’t come to a consensus as to what Lebanese national identity is?

Many authors are reluctant to label the 1975-1990 conflict in Lebanon as ‘civil’ since regional and international politics played a very significant part in its protraction. As the previous section details, the period from 1943 until 1975 was somewhat stable due to compromise rather than real social cohesion. Tensions gradually built up, as evidenced by the 1958 American invasion. Once the balance formulated by the National Pact was jeopardized, so was social and political stability.

Following the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Jordan during Black September, its leadership and guerrillas settled in South Lebanon in 1971. Christian political parties, from the Kataeb (Phalanges) to the Lebanese Forces, were vehemently opposed to Palestinian presence. Their view of Lebanese national identity was separate from an Arab identity, and thus anti-Zionism was not of great importance to them. In fact, they went on to collaborate with Israel and called for Israeli invasion to crush the PLO in 1978 and later in 1982. As for the Muslims of Lebanon, their identities were closer to the larger Arab identity. Anti-Zionism was a crucial component of this identity. Arab nationalists, Syrian nationalists, Communists, Lebanese Muslims and Druze alike were dedicated to anti-Zionism. Once again, international politics played a huge role in the protraction of the conflict and in the fragmentation of the Lebanese identity. One part of the population was anti-Zionist, and the other was willing to collaborate with Israel. Nonetheless, not all Christians in Lebanon were collaborators: many joined the ranks of the Lebanese Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and other political parties which opposed the pro-Western and collaborationist politics of right-wing Christian parties. Furthermore, many Lebanese Muslims had joined the ranks of the South Lebanon Army, an Israeli proxy militia. Therefore, when discussing the opposition between Muslim and Christian identities, it’s important to keep in mind that it stems from competing interests and differing national imaginaries, not from religion itself. Islam and Christianity, like

²⁶ Max Weiss, “The Matter of Sectarianism,” 1.

the concepts of East and West, are not fundamentally contradictory. Rather, the contradictions lie in the expression of national imaginaries by political actors from each community.

In 1976, Syria intervened in Lebanon with the purpose of limiting the PLO's power, a decision welcomed by the Maronites of Lebanon. By the end of the year, Syria completely reversed its policy and established an Arab Deterrent Force. As a result, two rival factions were formed: a military administration headed by Michel Aoun in East Beirut, the other a civilian force headed by Salim el-Hoss and supported by Syrians in West Beirut. The complete fragmentation of the Lebanese state was a result of the complete fragmentation of the already contested Lebanese national identity. This further fragmented Lebanese national identity. Under Tilly's war-making and state-making theory, each religious community fought 'the others', established its own authority, and solidified "the structured feeling that produces particular forms of cultural identity or social solidarity"²⁷ along sectarian lines. Syrian presence in Lebanon would last until 2005; the Syrians played a crucial role in ending the war through the Ta'if Agreement in 1989. Furthermore, Syria and Lebanon signed the "Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" treaty in 1991, legitimizing Syrian military presence and consolidating Syrian power in Lebanon. Syrian presence in Lebanon would also further divide the country and entrench sectarian divisions. These divisions would culminate into the Cedar Revolution of 2005 and create the two main blocs that dominate Lebanese politics today: March 8 and March 14, the former being a coalition of parties united by their pro-Syria stance and the latter being a coalition of anti-Syrian parties.

Sectarianism of the street was at its highest during the war. Identity-based killings were conducted by all militias at their checkpoints, as Lebanese identity cards have the citizen's religious sect printed on them. Under the tutelage of the Israeli Defense Forces (who invaded Lebanon in 1978 and would continue to occupy South Lebanon until 2000), right-wing Christian militias massacred Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps. The Damour massacre which targeted Christians was conducted by Lebanese Muslims and left-wing militias in coordination with the PLO. In this instance, sectarianism was "an expression of violent, even murderous, tendencies"²⁸ interlinked with regional political interests.

We can thus conclude that the 'Civil' War was a result of sectarian tensions. However, the war did not occur simply because of competing interests; it was also a conflict over the meaning of the Lebanese nation - who belongs to it, who leads it, who are its friends, who are its foes? This was amplified by the contradiction in Lebanese national identity regarding the question of Zionism and Palestinian presence, and the proximity to Arab identity and the question of Syrian presence. In other words, international politics informed the war more than national politics did.

²⁷ Ibid, 1.

²⁸ Ibid, 1.

Conclusion: A History of Contradictions

Lebanese national identity, like all national identities, is a field of contestation and contradiction. However, the peculiarity of Lebanon's case lies in the systematic institutionalization of sectarian identities. Like Farid el-Khazen, many argue that Lebanese national identity isn't singular; competing views of Lebanese national identity exist. Contradictory imaginaries and interests eventually culminated into bloody conflict. However, opposing views of Lebanese national identity don't exist in a vacuum. They are inextricably linked to broader visions of regional and global order, notably the vision imposed by Western imperialism and the vision of anti-imperialism taken on by Arab nationalists. Anti-Zionism, because of its centrality in Arab nationalism and because Lebanon shares its southern border with Israel, was and continues to be a divisive issue in Lebanese society. Thus, national identity in Lebanon is shaped by international politics just as much, if not even more so, than by national politics.

Sectarianism, in its various forms and manifestations, has been a feature of Lebanese society and politics since the early nineteenth century. These "sectarianisms" have hampered the construction of a singular, cohesive, united national identity. The opposing visions of Lebanese national identity, which are linked to broader visions of world order, compete along sectarian lines. Therefore, sectarianism in Lebanon must be understood not as a mere historical or inherent feature of Lebanon, but also as a system inextricably tied to regional and global developments.

In summary, Lebanese national identity was shaped by a history of contradictions. These contradictions concern Lebanon's position and relations with the West and with the Muslim/Arab world and that international politics were more important in the national identity-building process of Lebanon than national politics.