



The resilient state of Lebanon

# **WORLDVIEW, SECULARISATION AND IDENTITY**

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**Lars Erslev Andersen**

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## **ABSTRACT**

For at least the last seven years, Lebanon has been in a deep economic and political crisis that has sparked several mass demonstrations in the heart of Beirut. Every time demonstrations were joined by up to more than a hundred thousand demonstrators with vast participation from the Lebanese society. None of the demonstrations have succeeded in substantially changing the political system. Manipulations by power elites crushed the demonstrations, pandemic and other reasons kept demonstrations away, but many also lost faith in them and stayed home. Why is that? This article argues that it is necessary to use concepts of the state other than the post-Westphalian Weber concept to understand the structure of Lebanon. It investigates the discourse on secularisation and concludes that it is not the solution to the political crisis. It introduces the concept of worldview and argues that a new relation between state institutions and religious communities is needed to provide new perspectives for Lebanon.

## THE RHETORIC ABOUT THE POST-WESTPHALIAN PROTO-STATE

Even before the massive explosion in the Port of Beirut obliterated a third of the city in August 2020, Lebanon was often referred to as a failed state or on the verge of becoming one.<sup>1</sup> A major economic collapse and a political crisis, exacerbated by large demonstrations, pointed unambiguously towards a state in deep crisis. The demonstrations broke out in October 2019, forcing several government officials to resign, and ceased only due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though they had begun to lose some of their broad support prior to that.<sup>2</sup>

In the leading political science discourse on states and state systems, as well as in Western policy-making environments, including in Denmark, the diagnosis of Lebanon's crisis is clear: It is a fragile or failed state.<sup>3</sup> This is, however, a normative assessment. One could ask a political scientist what the norm for a non-failed state is and receive a simple answer: the post-Westphalian proto-state.<sup>4</sup> States deviating from this norm are accordingly either perceived as disadvantaged—previously referred to as developing countries, fragile or failed or as having successfully developed beyond the post-Westphalian proto-state to become a post-modern state.<sup>5</sup> There are states that have been capable of navigating within the global information society and profiting from large transnational capital funds and flows, moving beyond their physical state boundaries to compete in other arenas. The conceptual core, if one may put it that way without immediately being subjected to critique for essentialist naivety, of the norm for the successful state is the conceptualisation of the state that the sociologist Max Weber is routinely cited for, namely the bureaucratic territorial state that bases its sovereignty and success on an efficient governance system grounded in robust state institutions and an unchallenged monopoly on violence.<sup>6</sup> States of the world can be divided into those that have surpassed this norm and those that are hopelessly far from achieving it. Although the norm is exclusively based on European history and the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity and up to the establishment of the European nation states, it is applied to a great deal of research and Western policy, both as a universal norm and as a concept when analysing non-European states.<sup>7</sup> Even some of the most noteworthy Middle East scholars, such as Michael Hudson (USA) and Fred Halliday (Ireland), who enjoyed a long career at the London School of Economics, struggle to find

<sup>1</sup> Googling 'Lebanon as a failed state' returns 68,700,000 results.

<sup>2</sup> The Middle East Institute: Special Briefing: Lebanon one year on from the October Uprising, October 22, 2020, [<https://www.mei.edu/blog/special-briefing-lebanon-one-year-october-uprising>].

<sup>3</sup> See Louise Riis Andersen, for example: Voldelige konflikter, ustabilitet og skrøbelighed frem mod 2035. Analysepapir til arbejdsgruppen om dansk sikkerhedspolitik. *DIIS Working Paper* 2021:07. [[https://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/4383322/Voldelige\\_konflikter\\_ustabilitet\\_og\\_skr\\_belighed\\_frem\\_mod\\_2035\\_DIIS\\_W\\_P\\_2021\\_07.pdf](https://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/4383322/Voldelige_konflikter_ustabilitet_og_skr_belighed_frem_mod_2035_DIIS_W_P_2021_07.pdf)].

<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 2003): 45.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 21ff; Georg Sørensen: *Rethinking the New World Order* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016): 32ff.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber: Politik som levevej, *Udvalgte Skrifter Bind 1* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag 2003): 215ff; Sociologiske grundbegreber, *Udvalgte Skrifter Bind 2*, (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag 2003): 237f.

<sup>7</sup> This also applies to some of the chapters in the otherwise highly enlightening book: Raymond Hinnebusch and Jasmine K. Gani (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System* (London: Routledge 2010).

alternatives to the European-developed ideas in the history of political ideas. Halliday famously said that Middle East research must consist of a synthesis of methodical universalism and historical particularism. Although a noble and appropriate ambition, the problem is often that methodical universalism derives its concepts from the European history of political ideas<sup>8</sup> - concepts such as legitimacy and secularisation, for instance. Thus, methodological universalism often risks becoming particularistic in its conceptual inventory, as has been noted in post-colonial studies, and the question is whether it is conducive to understanding the problems and challenges faced by modern Middle Eastern states.<sup>9</sup> The intention behind the question is not - as is unfortunately often the case in the aforementioned post-colonial studies - to exempt non-European states and their regimes from criticism, but rather to ask whether the criticism directed at the norm of the post-Westphalian proto-state is conducive to a perspective-rich analysis of Middle Eastern states. Alternatively, can it even blind people to some power structures, forms of legitimacy and types of social organisations that, if given more attention, would direct the criticism in other directions than the almost obligatory one, i.e. that the problems of the Middle Eastern states are based on a lack of robust state institutions, the absence of secularisation and too much Islam?<sup>10</sup> This is, of course, a caricatured characterisation of the arguments of expert scholars like Hudson and Halliday, yet somewhat accurate when it comes policy and political discourse on the Middle East in general.<sup>11</sup>

### **Beyond the post-Weberian narrative**

Theoretically, this discussion has been taken up many times over the past few decades, with Edward Said's classic work, *Orientalism*, likely being the most famous attempt to deconstruct a Western conceptual inventory in the study of the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> As one of the later branches from the tree of this theoretical discourse, Renard Mansour and Lina Khatib published a research report in 2021 at the English Institute of International Studies, Chatham House, in which they point to the exact issue outlined above and also refer to the Weberian concept of the state as a methodical instrument that obscures insights more than it contributes to informative analyses.<sup>13</sup> Their case studies are Lebanon and Iraq, and instead of arguing that the two states and their regimes should be exempt from criticism, they instead construct other concepts and methodological perspectives than the post-Weberian narrative of state concepts and, thereby, perhaps contribute to more constructive criticism. The title of their research report is 'Where is the

<sup>8</sup> Michael C. Hudson: *Arab Politics. The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale U.P. 1977) and Fred Halliday: *Islam and The Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Post-Colonial Studies is a large field, but one of the figures who stands out both as an exponent of post-colonial studies and as critic of the field is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: *In Other Worlds; Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Methuen 1987),

<sup>10</sup> e.g., Fouad Ajami: *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Louise Riis Andersen op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Renard Mansour and Lina Khatib. *Where is the 'state' in Iraq and Lebanon. Power relations and social control.* Chatham House, Middle East and North Africa Programme, London. 2021.

state?', arguing that by post-Weberian standards, it is rather absent in both Lebanon and Iraq. But according to the two authors, that is by no means the case in practice; it is grounded in civil society and in other power structures than those that appear - or rather, *do not* appear - when focusing on the structure of state institutions or the absence of the same. In other words, it is necessary to rethink both concepts and methods if one wants to understand the relationship between state, power, and legitimacy in the two states.<sup>14</sup>

Metaphorically the Lebanese state could be 'like a bumblebee', i.e., capable of flight even though it is not biologically or physically supposed to be. In a similar sense, Lebanon exists as a state, although it may not appear so from our post-Weberian perspective.<sup>15</sup> In their approach, Mansour and Khatib develop an analysis of power structures that they argue makes it possible to locate the state. They propose analysing power relations as informal relations that are divided along two lines: a horizontal one - which in Lebanon connects the political elites across interests when it comes to security both from external threats and from political opposition internally - and a vertical one that connects the individual elite with a social base, i.e. what is described as clientelism in much of the literature.<sup>16</sup> Rather than regarding clientelism as a deviation from the post-Westphalian concept of the state, to be rectified by creating a system of effective and robust institutions based on a firm concept of secularisation, the vertical line can be analysed as a dynamic that distributes power, economy and security in a way that has proved extremely resilient in the face of crisis and conflict. According to Mansour and Khatib, the means of this dynamic are ideology, economy, and violence, where ideology is *a communicative act* that appeals to the mind, though one could add only when it concretises itself in a *sense of belonging* to a community does it establish a social bond, which in turn can prove to be strong. This implies that the state - when viewed through the proper lens - is not absent but present in the informal bonds that exist horizontally between the elites of the state, who are its stewards, and vertically between those elites and their social base. In their analysis, it is ideology that embodies itself as the social adhesive that creates coherent dynamics in groups based on a sense of belonging. This paper argues that 'worldview' is a better concept for describing this bonding agent than ideology.<sup>17</sup> While ideology is an intellectual construct that can be acquired or rejected through a reasoned choice, worldview, according to the German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, connects itself to the lived life - human

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen. 2018. Like a Bumblebee. Politics, Society and Security in Lebanon, *IEMed Yearbook 2018*, Barcelona: IEMed – European Institute of the Mediterranean.

<sup>16</sup> Susan C. Stokes. 'Political Clientelism' in Robert E. Goodin (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (Oxford University Press 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Inspiration for a theory on worldview is derived from the German philosopher Karl Jaspers: *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer). Another discussion of the concept that puts it in relation to global studies is Mona Kanval Sheikh, Worldview Analysis, in Mark Juergensmeyer, Saskia Sassen, Manfred B. Steger (eds): *The Oxford Handbook of Global Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019).



existence as it consciously and unconsciously unfolds over time (history, tradition) in affiliation with communities.<sup>18</sup>

### **The secularisation thesis**

The paper will focus on the relationship between religion and secularisation where power has been organised along the two lines described by Mansour and Khatib, and discuss what the relationship between secularisation and worldview is? The discourse on secularisation is long and complicated.<sup>19</sup> The relationship of religion to power and politics, however, is an extremely pressing issue in Lebanon, which on the one hand has almost become a laboratory for the study of sectarian conflicts. On the other hand, the relationship between the state, power and legitimacy is increasingly manifesting itself as a rigid conflict between religion and secularisation because only the opposition to the elitist, sectarian system sees secularisation as an indispensable part of the alternative to the established consociationalist model.<sup>20</sup> Yet as professor Caroline R. Nagel at the University of South Carolina points out in an insightful article, it may very well be that it is actually the universal demand for secularisation that politicises religion and, thus, produces sectarianism, and not the other way around.<sup>21</sup> The paper follow up on this discussion by examining the concept of secularisation that has for decades been tied to - and seen as a precondition for - the establishment of the liberal democratic state, which in the Western debate is the greatest and most desirable example of the post-Westphalian proto-state. It is the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas who, if anyone, has formulated the universal demand for secularisation as a precondition for the democratic rule of law based on what he calls constitutional patriotism, and which in abstract form is the vision around which the critical Lebanese opposition can gather, but without being able to concretise it.<sup>22</sup> In later years, however, the philosopher Habermas has questioned the secularisation thesis. This doubt manifested itself in an intriguing debate with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict).<sup>23</sup>

This paper examines the liberal democratic thesis of secularisation, which is also the backdrop for the activists, protesters and intellectuals demanding the abolition

<sup>18</sup> Jaspers op.cit; Elena Alessiato. Human being, World, and Philosophy in Karl Jaspers, *Humana.Mente*, (18)

<sup>19</sup> Werner Conze; Hans-Wolfgang Strätz; Hermann Zabel. Säkularisation, Säkularisierung, in: Otto Brüner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Red.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag 1984), 5, 792-829.

<sup>20</sup> Both during the Arab Spring in Cairo and during demonstrations in Lebanon, alternatives to the status quo were formulated as a secular, democratic rule of law, but without further concretisation or an actual political vision, as was clear from statements made by activists to news media and in the numerous webinars organised after the explosion in the Port of Beirut in August 2020. During my field studies in Lebanon in 2016, 2017 and 2018, I had the opportunity to interview activists, including leaders from the 'You Stink' movement and from Beirut Madinati. These interviews confirmed that there were many visions when it came to the environment and infrastructure, while questions about their vision for a new political system received only rather abstract responses, for example.

<sup>21</sup> Caroline R. Nagel. The 'problem' of religion in the secular state: sectarianism and state formation in Lebanon, in Sami Moisió (ed.): *Handbook of Changing Geographies of the State. New Spaces of Geography* (London. Edward Elgar Publishing 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Nagel op.cit.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger. 2006. *Fornuft og religion. Sekulariseringens dialektik*. Introduction by Florian Schuller and afterword by Jan Lindhardt (Forlaget Hovedland: 2006); Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger: *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).

of the current Lebanese political system. To them, secularisation is the recipe for leading Lebanon out of the dead end it has arrived at, which from a Western perspective sounds sensible, but perhaps in itself is a source - among others, of course - of the sectarian conflicts and problems that have led the country into its worst crisis since the end of the civil war in 1990.<sup>24</sup> The argument here refers partly to Habermas' theory of communicative action, which is the basis of the secularisation thesis, and partly to the debate with Ratzinger to highlight the challenges to the thesis that Habermas himself identifies. Following this is a discussion of the results in relation to the current situation in Lebanon.

### **Structure of the paper**

The paper begins with an outline of the political situation in Lebanon as it has developed in the aftermath of the demonstrations that erupted in October 2019 and following the massive explosion in August 2020. This account culminates in a question: Why does the Lebanese state still exist - against all odds - and why is there not greater, more persistent and comprehensive popular support for the demonstrators' demands for a secularised, liberal democratic state to replace the sectarian, elitist political system that exists today? To answer this question, the paper analyses the secularisation thesis as it is expressed and challenged in the debate between Habermas and Ratzinger. This leads to scepticism that the idea of constitutional patriotism can serve as a substitute for the 'sense of belonging' that a worldview founded on a concrete community of values provides, whether these imagined communities are determined by nationalist or religious discourses.<sup>25</sup> Returning then to the situation in Lebanon, some of the consequences of the rigid conflict between secularism and religion are presented, thereby also returning the focus to the starting point of the article, namely the discussion raised by Mansour and Khatib. Primarily though described within a formal framework with a post-secular angle to concretise why the universalist demand for secularisation encounters rigid opposition in Lebanon, while the same Lebanese people are so critical of the consociationalist system that has, thus far, only led to unending sectarian conflict. Since the concept of worldview plays a central role in the argumentation, before outlining the situation in Lebanon, a brief explanation is given of how the concept is understood and applied.

### **Identity and worldview as limit situations**

In recent years, the concept of worldview has enjoyed growing interest within the social sciences, not least in relation to the analysis of conflicts that entail clashes between different symbolic - possibly religion-based - value hierarchies through which people spontaneously and unconsciously understand their existence. There are several interpretations of worldview, all of which, nonetheless, agree on taking

<sup>24</sup> The terms sectarian conflicts and sectarianism are used interchangeably. Associate Professor Morten Valbjørn contributes systematically to the debate here: Morten Valbjørn: What's so Sectarian about Sectarian Politics? Identity Politics and Authoritarianism in a New Middle East, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (19)1, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> The phrase 'imagined communities' naturally refers to Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso 2010 [1983]). See also for inclusion of Anderson, Nagel op.cit.

Immanuel Kant's philosophy as the starting point. The interpretations part ways from there, as some go down the road of the sociologist Max Weber and philosopher Michel Foucault, while others pursue a philosophically hermeneutic path based on Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, as well as existential philosophy heavily influenced by Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>26</sup> Of particular interest to the argument of this paper is Jaspers' interpretation that draws a distinction between *Weltbild* ('world image') and *Weltanschauung* ('worldview'), where *Weltbild* defines a specific *orientation* in the world that amounts to a shell (*Gehäuse*) that people spontaneously and partly unconsciously form to be able to inhabit their world while also shielding themselves from worries and sometimes even threats. To Jaspers, *Weltanschauung*, or worldview, is a more reflected process that entails self-reflection of one's *Weltbild* and potentially *transcendence* in the formation of a new *Weltbild*.

For Jaspers, this understanding of the process and transcendence of a *Weltbild* is the concept of the philosophical process that, with *openness* to 'the *Weltbilder* of others', dialogically expands an individual's understanding of the world. It is precisely in this interpretation of worldview that Jaspers' humanism and value pluralism - which should not be confused with relativism - comes to the fore. In his interpretation of worldview, there is, accordingly, a tendency for openness and dialogue, governed by reason, which generates new knowledge and insights. At the same time, however, Jaspers' ethical requirement is that worldview should be a safeguard against radicalisation and fundamentalism, as it always dynamically changing. It is this interpretation of *Weltbild* and world interpretation that drew criticism from his contemporaries in the interwar period, not least from the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who in a review of Jaspers' first philosophical work *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* from 1919 mocked the notion of pluralism of worldviews. Heidegger, at this time not yet an established professor of philosophy, was nonetheless regarded as an up-and-coming authority, and his own teacher, Heinrich Rickert, did not respect Jaspers because he was not educated in philosophy. Jaspers was not only a physician and psychiatrist, gaining an international recognition as such, he was also appointed a professor of philosophy in Heidelberg based on his work on worldview. Although Heidegger's critique was somewhat extreme - possibly because Jaspers touched on some fundamental philosophical interpretations that were close to Heidegger's - it was not entirely specious, as Jaspers can certainly be criticised for a degree of excessive faith in the power of reason or - put differently - a downplaying of desire and the emotional foundation for the shaping of worldviews. In relation to the above, Heidegger refers to Søren Kierkegaard's studies on the meaning of fear, anxiety,

<sup>26</sup> Mona Kanwal Sheikh op.cit.; *Weltbilder and Philosophy* edited by Renata Badii and Enrica Fabbri, *Humana Mente – Quarterly Journal of Philosophy*, Issue 18, September 2011; Elena Alessiati: Human Being, World, and Philosophy in Karl Jaspers, in *Weltbilder* op.cit.; Steven Goldman: The Psychology of Worldviews: Jaspers / Heidegger, published in *Presencing EPIS. A Scientific Journal of Applied Phenomenology & Psychoanalysis*, episjournal.com (2012), available at Research Gate; Chris Thornhill: Karl Jaspers, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2008, major revisions 2018.

despair and 'sickness unto death' in his interpretation of the existential circumstances into which people are thrown.<sup>27</sup>

With his background in psychiatry and psychopathology, Jaspers was far from alien to the meaning of desire and the dysfunction of consciousness, but rather described an ideal process in which the philosophical openness to worldview contained a promise of greater insight and knowledge. He describes the process as being made up of three modes or stages in the lived experience (likely inspired by Kierkegaard, but undoubtedly by Kant), namely one's orientation in the world, reflection about one's orientation in the world, which forms a *Weltbild*, and the transcendence of the *Weltbild* in a reinterpreted worldview. In this modality analysis of existence, one recognises Immanuel Kant's description of cognition as a process of three syntheses, namely viewing the perception in time and space, recognising the perception as mine and self-reflection of the perception in the greater context. This process has been previously described as 'the desire for order', which follows a schema in four dimensions, namely time, space, boundary, and judgement, which can lead to transcendence, a new *Weltbild* and, thereby, worldview.<sup>28</sup> Although one's orientation in the world spontaneously and unconsciously always occurs and, thereby, stores unconscious 'ballast' in the existential formation, transcendence and configuration of worldview is, according to Jaspers, an event that occurs in limit situations<sup>29</sup>, one's own experience of finality, death or other confrontations of life limits. In those situations, one's personal understanding of affiliation becomes pressured by worry or even anxiety and re-establishing one's *Weltbild* helps protect the individual from being entirely consumed by that anxiety. The risk, however, is a dogmatisation of *Weltbild* to ward off threats to one's own boundaries and sense of affiliation. The threat and limit situations can be experienced at every level: from the individual or private, to the workplace or societal, and ultimately one's affiliation to the world as such. Of course, history, tradition and the specific context influence this limit experience, and the prejudices, preconceptions, thought patterns and *Weltbild* that an individual possesses affect their interpretation of limit situations. It is precisely in this regard that Jaspers' and Heidegger's interpretations diverge, as Jaspers advocates thinking through the tradition, while Heidegger, in his major work *Sein und Zeit*, introduces the concept of 'destruction', or as Nietzsche phrased it: 'How to do philosophy with a hammer'. This destruction must sweep away tradition and prejudice and pave the way for a realisation of being that is veiled and hidden in traditions and the many layers of prejudice.<sup>30</sup> For Heidegger, this necessitates the development of a new philosophical vocabulary, liable to the risk of authentic thinking, which can very quickly degenerate into jargon and ideology rather than

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger: Supplements, edited by John van Buren, comments on Karl Jaspers' Psychology of Worldviews (Albany, NY: SUNY 202): 71-103, here quoted from Steven Goldman op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen. The Desire for Order: a Theoretical Approach to (World) Order. DIIS Working Paper 2019:6.

<sup>29</sup> Grenzsituationen.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1979): § 6: Die Aufgabe einer Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie: 19ff, 23; Friedrich Nietzsche: *Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*, *Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe Band 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1967-1977).

philosophical insight.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, although it is possible that Jaspers' interpretation (and incidentally also Jürgen Habermas' interpretation, with his concept of 'communicative action') is based on an excessive faith in reason, it is more realistic and applicable in political and social science analysis. However, this presupposes that desire is given greater importance, which is obvious in Jaspers' interpretation of worldview in that it is shaped in limit situations and, ultimately, in the confrontation with one's finitude and death. It is precisely this that also demonstrates the distinct difference between ideology and worldview, where the latter is embedded in concrete life experiences, including the perception of existential threats and the necessity of affiliations that shield against existential 'fear and trembling', thereby contributing to a sense of security. In such situations, more than enlightenment and good arguments are needed, namely a belief in and strong emotional belonging to specific social communities.

With this understanding of worldview, it is possible to also approach a sociological interpretation of the concept of identity. Formally and philosophically, it is an extremely complicated concept, the formal logical definitions of which continually present challenges and complications to an extent that is completely foreign to the everyday use of identity. Systematically, identity can be analysed and described when it comes to the individual object or individual, which the Danish philosopher Hans Fink has convincingly documented.<sup>32</sup> However, the complexity becomes overwhelming to deal with when the focus of the analysis is multiplicities or quantities. One, therefore, must, as argued in Benedict Anderson's pioneering book on *Imagined Communities*, construct identity from diversity as an image, that is, as a narrative of community based on images of this community.<sup>33</sup> Once again, it is the tradition from Kant over Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to philosophical hermeneutics that inspires me to a concept of identity as relation, relational identity.<sup>34</sup> Identity is not a thing, something one has, but a series of relationships that are continuously at work and changing spontaneously and unconsciously in the specific life contexts and communities the individual is embedded in. One can, therefore, intellectually consider and deconstruct the common identity narrative. However, because it is also based on emotional and unconscious relationships, it is extremely difficult to change the notion of one's identity as a proven existential choice; such a change will often be accompanied emotionally by worry, and perhaps even anxiety, in terms of the dynamic change of worldview. This relationship makes notions of common identity a highly conflictual field sociologically as it is tackled in the popular debates on identity politics and sectarianism.

<sup>31</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Edition suhrkamp 1964).

<sup>32</sup> Hans Fink. Om identiteters identitet [About the identity of identities], in Hans Fink: *Filosofiske udspil* [Philosophical perspectives] (Aarhus. Forlaget Philosophia 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London / New York: Verso 1983).

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman 2006 [1957]).

## After the explosion

The blast, which occurred on 4 August 2020 at the Port of Beirut, destroyed a third of the city. It killed more than 217 people, injured about 7,000, destroyed 77,000 homes, and according to authorities, left over 300,000 people homeless from one moment to the next.<sup>35</sup> The disaster occurred at a time when Lebanon was already in a deep economic and political crisis. One could argue that Lebanon has been in that state since the civil war, which started in 1975 and ended in 1990. Lebanese society has benefited very little from the political elites, who have spent far more time securing power and income than implementing political reforms and providing stable public services. The Lebanese people have had to deal with most of their problems themselves.<sup>36</sup>

To foreigners visiting the country, this has often resulted in a romanticised view of a people who are wonderfully anarchistic and self-organising, such as when a man rides his scooter with his wife and three daughters through heavy traffic without the police and authorities raising an eyebrow. Or when a little eatery sets up tables on the sidewalk and draws electricity from the labyrinthine public grid without registering or paying for it, other than with the free service provided to passing authorities (formal or otherwise). For visiting Scandinavians, who are world-famous for observing the red light at the pedestrian crossing on an empty street in the middle of the night, the absence of public regulation appears to be almost a picture of indescribable freedom. While Scandinavia has internalised the regulations of the strong state, the state seems strangely absent in Lebanese society.

Lebanese homes rely on generators that can step in and provide backup power during the many times throughout the day when the public supply of electricity is cut off, and households must maintain large containers of water at home that can be used when the water supply fails.<sup>37</sup> It is up to the local neighbourhood to repair potholes, if they want to be sure they get fixed at all. The locals themselves make a show of it and, thereby, contribute to the romanticised depiction of the status quo, such as when one cannot find the seat belt in a beat-up taxi and the driver asks why on earth one is needed. 'This is Lebanon, after all', he laughs. Even though it's not actually funny. Rather, it is an expression of a state incapable of providing public services, labour market reforms, health care services or, quite simply, welfare services in general. Socially and politically, the Lebanese have become accustomed to their state being something distant, while in Scandinavia, the state has become inextricable from the citizen.

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International. Lebanon: Authorities must lift immunity for officials summoned by Beirut Blast Investigator, 14 July 2021, [<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/lebanon-authorities-must-lift-immunity-for-officials-summoned-by-beirut-blast-investigator/>].

<sup>36</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen: Arrested Development: Migration, Security and Dilemmas of Consociational Democracy, *International Relations and Diplomacy*, October 2017, Vol. 5, No. 10: 594-606. [<http://www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/5a1bbcb216c45.pdf>]; M. Felsch & M. Wählich (red.): *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings. In the eye of the hurricane* (London: Routledge 2016); Seidman, S.: The politics of cosmopolitan Beirut: From stranger to the other. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29(2), 3-36.

<sup>37</sup> Kareem Chehayeb: Lebanon electricity crisis: 'Disaster in the making', *Al-Jazeera*, 11 June 2021 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/11/lebanon-electricity-crisis-disaster-in-the-making>].

Lebanon has also been unable to reform itself economically. Deficits and indebtedness have grown, and it is only through economic life support in the form of contributions from the Arab Gulf states that the state has been able to continue running, while the Shia Muslim party, Hezbollah, has been supplied by Iran.<sup>38</sup> The United States and other countries have channelled money to Sunni Muslims in particular in the hope that they can use those funds to weaken Hezbollah's power, and EU countries increased development aid tenfold as Syrian refugees flocked to Lebanon after their own civil war broke out in 2011.<sup>39</sup> Upon sight of the big luxury yachts in the Beirut marina and the expensive cars lined up in the parking lot next door, one feels compelled to ask why Lebanon needs development aid. The answer, of course, is that wealth in Lebanon remains in the pockets of rich families, while the poor and Lebanese society in general must fend for themselves. It was, therefore, the EU, the UN and international donors who funded – and continue to fund – aid programmes for the Syrian refugees. It is common knowledge that if one wants to get something done in Lebanon, personal connections (*wasta*) and corruption are part of the game. The authorities are keen to explain the major problems and challenges that Syrian and Palestinian refugees impose upon the Lebanese state, but the state is not spending any funds on them. Instead, a decent cut of the international development aid ends up in the back pockets of the state's public servants and administrators.<sup>40</sup> In other words, it is Lebanese society that is left to deal with the problems and challenges, it is the foreign and international donors who are paying, and it is the political elites who are shovelling significant percentages of funding into their own private accounts.<sup>41</sup> It was the cash flow from Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states in particular that supported the state budget and kept creditors at bay.<sup>42</sup>

This has been the case since the civil war came to an end. But in the mid-2010s, the gravy train stopped. Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states were increasingly dissatisfied with and concerned about Hezbollah increasing its power and influence and, along with Iran, engaging in the war in Syria on Bashar al-Assad's side. This caused them to cut off funding, and at the same time, the Gulf Arabs found somewhere else to vacation, a hard blow to the Lebanese tourism industry.<sup>43</sup> Without the Gulf states' money to close the gaps in the state budget, the economic crisis intensified. The banking sector had presented itself as an alternative to Switzerland, where foreign customers could expect absolute confidentiality about their financial transactions. At the same time, they offered

<sup>38</sup> Maha Yahya: Lebanon. Not Expecting Gulf Aid to Come Back, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre, 2020 [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/11/lebanon-electricity-crisis-disaster-in-the-making].

<sup>39</sup> The following is based on field studies and data in connection with the writings of Lars Erslev Andersen: *The Neglected. Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and the Syrian Refugee Crisis*. DIIS Report 2016:12.

<sup>40</sup> Based on interviews with Beirut diplomats seeking anonymity; Karim Merhej: *Breaking the curse of corruption in Lebanon*. Research Paper, Chatham House, London, 29 June 2021 [https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/breaking-curse-corruption-lebanon].

<sup>41</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen. No Future for the Palestinians in Lebanon: Power Sharing, Political Stagnancy and Securitization of (Palestinian) Migration, in Mogens Chrom Jacobsen, Emnet Berhanu Gebre, Drago Zuparic-Iljic (eds.): *Cosmopolitanism, Migration, and Universal Human Rights* (Cham: Springer Nature 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Mohammad Bazzi. The Corrupt Political Class That Broke Lebanon. A Decaying Sectarian System Kindled Beirut's Port Blast, *Foreign Affairs*, August 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Maha Yahya: Lebanon op.cit.

high interest rates on deposits from foreign capital. The debt grew, and in order to pay it off, banks borrowed even more money at even higher interest rates.<sup>44</sup> Researcher Jad Chaaban from the American University of Beirut has documented that the leaders of various political parties have large shareholdings in their respective favoured banks.<sup>45</sup> As the crisis began to rage in earnest in 2019, and Lebanon and its banks became unable to obtain more foreign loans at the same time that negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had stalled, Lebanese banking customers began withdrawing their deposits. The banks reacted by imposing major restrictions on ordinary Lebanese accounts - if customers were able to withdraw money from their own accounts at all, they could only take out Lebanese pounds, even if they had been deposited in US dollar accounts. The problem was that the banks' dollar holdings were depleted. For years, the Lebanese pound and US dollar had been used as equal means of payment in Lebanon. The exchange rate was roughly fixed at 1500 pounds to one US dollar, yet in the spring of 2021, the exchange rate jumped to 15,000 pounds per dollar. During the same period, food prices rose by 400%. A nurse who had received a monthly salary that could be exchanged to 2000 USD before inflation ran amok had to make do in the spring of 2021 with a salary corresponding to 200 USD. The shortage of food, medicine and fuel was pervasive, and the already unstable electricity supply was at risk of leaving a quarter of the country completely in the dark.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the country was headed by an administrative department since the various political leaders, as so many times before, could not agree to appoint a government. US sanctions to punish and weaken Hezbollah's involvement in the war in Syria further exacerbated the crisis.<sup>47</sup>

### **The resilience of Lebanese society and the dysfunctionality of the Lebanese state**

In the days following the explosion, the clean-up efforts were not headed by the state, but rather by self-appointed groups and civil society volunteers who cleared away the glass and rubble while also helping the wounded and ailing.<sup>48</sup> The volunteers, activists and social critics angrily dismissed foreign commentators' praise of 'the resilient Lebanese society', as the resilience was due not to something inherent in the Lebanese people, but to a necessity borne out of years of experience with a dysfunctional state that they had been forced to live with and act within: Yes, Lebanese society is resilient, but it is resilient out of need and in order to survive, rather than as a result of something particular to the DNA of Lebanese people. This depiction of Lebanon's resilient civil society fits neatly into

<sup>44</sup> Edmund Blair: Explainer: Lebanon's financial meltdown and how it happened, *Reuters*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Jad Chaaban: I've got the power: Mapping connections between Lebanon's banking sector and the ruling class, Economic Research Forum, Working Paper 1059, October 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Rania Abouzeid: After the Blast, *The Atlantic*, April 2021 [<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/beirut-lebanon-explosion/618074/>].

<sup>47</sup> Timour Azhari: US Caesar Act could bleed Lebanon for years to come, *Al-Jazeera*, 19 June 2020 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/19/us-caesar-act-could-bleed-lebanon-for-years-to-come>].

<sup>48</sup> Abby Sewell and Kareem Chehayeb: Beirut blast survivors struggle to rebuild, *The New Humanitarian*, 9 December 2020 [<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/12/9/beirut-explosion-insufficient-aid-rebuild>].



the romanticised narrative of the anarchistic and self-organising Lebanese people but is just as inaccurate.<sup>49</sup>

What is both remarkable and strange is that the state of Lebanon still exists and has maintained its territorial cohesion with a president and a political system based in Beirut, complete with police, military, intelligence, a central bank, provincial governments, city governments, courts, ministries, schools, an education system, etc. The fact that the political system is virtually paralysed and that the public service is catastrophically poor is not in itself an indication that the state is not functioning in a wide range of other areas. When the airport shut down and aircraft were sent into hangars, it was not due to a state collapse, but rather a pandemic that paralysed the global aviation sector. Despite the misery and the violence that accompanies demonstrations, when some of the protesters actually resort to violence while parties such as Amal (allegedly, at least) allow thugs to disrupt them, and authorities arbitrarily intervene with tear gas, etc.,<sup>50</sup> the state manages to maintain a high level of security, which is quite remarkable considering the dire straits it is in: Hezbollah's active involvement in the war in Syria, Islamic State activities in the Arab Middle East, al-Qaeda's attempts to meddle in conflicts in the country and the involvement of powerful rivaling states in Lebanon's internal affairs expose the state to threats of terrorism, proxy wars and internal violence which could lead to civil war.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the Lebanese state has spent decades discriminating against, humiliating and degrading Palestinian refugees, and in recent years, made the Syrian refugees - who are largely undocumented and living under extremely difficult conditions - scapegoats for Lebanon's ills.<sup>52</sup> In light of the strong reactions that far less severe security threats have provoked in Scandinavian states, it is noteworthy that the large number of diverse and extremely serious security threats to the state in Lebanon have been handled remarkably effectively without major political conflicts and debate.<sup>53</sup> The political conflicts occur in other areas such as the economy, including criticism of corruption, criticism of the sectarian political system, social policy, inadequate public service and even environmental policy as well as, of course, the refugee problem.<sup>54</sup> Although there are relatively few terrorist attacks and some fighting with transnational jihadist networks, it is nevertheless remarkable how high the security level is in Lebanon and how little the political discussion about security figures in the everyday lives of Lebanese people. Ineffective as the state is when it comes to social security and welfare, it appears to be remarkably effective when it comes to state security. In fact, the 2008

<sup>49</sup> Information based on webinars organised by the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut and the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC shortly after the explosion.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Jazeera: Lebanon protests: Five things you need to know, 19 October 2019 [https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/19/lebanon-protests-five-things-you-need-to-know].

<sup>51</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen: Is Lebanon the next battlefield? in Mona Kanwal Sheikh: *Expanding Jihad* (Copenhagen: DIIS 2017) [https://www.diis.dk/node/20969].

<sup>52</sup> Kareem Chehayeb: Lebanese above all: The politics of scapegoating Syrian refugees, *The New Arab*, 17 June 2019 [https://english.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/scapagoating-syrian-refugees-lebanon].

<sup>53</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen: Fighting Islamic State. Learning from History. Security beyond the state, R.A. Boserup, W. Hazbun, K. Makdisi, H. Malmvig: *New Conflict Dynamics. Between Regional Autonomy and Intervention in the Middle East and North Africa* (Copenhagen / Beirut: DIIS / AUB 2017).

<sup>54</sup> Lars Erslev Andersen: Is Lebanon the next battlefield, op.cit.

conflict between Sunni Muslim leaders and Hezbollah, which led to Hezbollah simply besieging Beirut and arresting the Sunni Muslim leader Saad al-Hariri, ended with the development of what can be described as a strikingly stable security state.<sup>55</sup>

This raises the question of what kind of a state Lebanon is. It is obvious that it in no way lives up to the norm of the post-Westphalian proto-state. It is, nevertheless, undeniable that the modernisation of the Arab states was thoroughly influenced by the presence of the European colonial powers in the 19th century, and that the state system was the result of great power diplomacy in connection with the post-World War I peace negotiations.<sup>56</sup> Yet it is equally indisputable that the historical development of the Arab states with a background in the Ottoman Empire has shaped them at the same time as European modernisation. In the case of Lebanon, this is best documented by Ussama Makdisi in the book *The Culture of Sectarianism*, which documents the influence of both the modernisation initiatives of the French as well as the *tanzimat* reforms that the Ottoman Empire initiated from the middle of the 19th century, partly in an attempt to strengthen the empire in relation to the European colonial powers.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the development of the modern Lebanese state cannot fairly be described as merely a singular result of European colonisation and modernisation; it is far more complicated than that, with strong historical roots in traditional paths and the Ottoman modernisation reforms. Accordingly, it would be problematic, if not outright wrong, to solely conduct analyses of power in the Arabic states - including Lebanon - from a Eurocentric perspective based solely on a concept of modernity developed in Europe by Europeans.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, it is the rule, at least in policy studies, that Lebanon is analysed from a historical-philosophical development perspective with the modern post-Westphalian state and its further development into a post-modern competitive state as the norm for successful states (and for failed states to aspire to). The 'successful state' is based on a robust system of institutions that can mediate in conflicts both between the individual and the state and between different societal interests and groups. This modern state is, according to the theories, based on a social contract embodied in a sensible constitution which must guarantee that the state is both sovereign and value-neutral: It is the enlightened discourse, the communicative action, within the framework of the constitution and the institutional system that determines policy and defines the interests of the state, which are implemented without the interference of special interests in the state administration. The theoretical premise for this state is that the citizens have

<sup>55</sup> Lebanon's Politics: *The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current*, Middle East Report No. 96, 26 May 2010, International Crisis Group (ICG) [<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/96-lebanon-s-politics-the-sunni-community-and-hariri-s-future-current.pdf>].

<sup>56</sup> An extensive discussion of the concepts of the Middle Eastern state and state system can be found in Ray Hinnebusch and Jasmine K. Gani (eds.): *The Routledge Handbook to the North African State and State System* (Abingdon, Oxon 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Ussama Makdisi: *The Culture of Sectarianism. Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000).

<sup>58</sup> Caroline R. Nagel op.cit.

replaced their traditional affiliations to communities based on symbolic narratives that promote social cohesion with, as Habermas terms it, 'constitutional patriotism'. The premise for constitutional patriotism is, thus, radical secularisation. In other words, from such a perspective, Lebanon is assessed based on whether secularisation - modelled on the liberal democratic European state - is truly achievable. This premise is what is referred to as the secularisation thesis in this article.

Although secularisation today is linked to the European Enlightenment and modern Western states, it makes sense here to note that secularisation - understood as separate spheres for political execution of power, religious guidance, and legal regulation of decency - has a long tradition in Muslim societies. Many studies have shown this, such as Sami Zubaida's well-documented work on law and power in the Islamic world.<sup>59</sup> In fact, it is only in late modern times, presumably as a reaction to European colonisation and modernisation, that a programme of state and mosque coordination (*din wa dawla*) was politically developed, with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as the best-known example. This western understanding of secularisation is applied here because it is the one that most explicitly makes secularisation a precondition for establishing a liberal democratic state. It is through this thesis that the 'Arab Spring' in Egypt and the numerous demonstrations that erupted in the Arab states in the late 2010s, including in Lebanon, have been interpreted. This also applies to the protests following the explosion in the Port of Beirut in August 2020, where activists practically made a virtue of not having a vision or programme: replace the system, but with what?<sup>60</sup> Therefore, what follows is a brief discussion of the European debate on the secularisation thesis, as illustrated in the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger.

### **European modernity and the inner paradox of the state**

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas sees the liberal democratic state based on a free constitution as the ideal prototype in what he has called 'the modern project'. It is a project because the modern is still on the way and is characterised by the fact that modern states are far from the goal and are often at risk of veering off course from the project. Nevertheless, Habermas has most succinctly summarised the modern project, which is anchored in a concept of reason derived from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. It is especially in the substantive work *The Theory of Communicative Action* that Habermas formulates the philosophical basis for his understanding of the modern and, thus, of the modern state.<sup>61</sup> Although his thoughts on this have been dismissed as naive and utopian,

<sup>59</sup> Sami Zubaida. *Law and Power in the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris 2003); Saba Mahmood: *Religious Difference in a Secular Age. A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton U.P. 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Cutting the Gordian Knot of Lebanon's Power-Sharing System, webinar 8 September 2020, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre, Beirut [<https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/09/08/cutting-gordian-knot-of-lebanon-s-power-sharing-system-event-7408>].

<sup>61</sup> Jürgen Habermas: *Die Moderne – Ein unvollendetes Projekt*, in J. Habermas: *Kleine Politische Schriften I-IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1981); Jürgen Habermas: *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns I-II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1981).

specifically by theorists inspired by postmodernism, even they must concede that Habermas knows his way around the nooks and crannies of the history of European philosophy and that he - in a rather sophisticated fashion - actually summarises the concept of the modern constitutional state coined by Max Weber.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear, however, that the concept of modernity that Habermas believes makes up the foundation of the constitutional state contains several problems which he himself has increasingly become cognisant of in his later career. These are not simply the risks of deviations and failures empirically evident in several modern constitutional states in the form they have been established in what is inaccurately termed the Western world. Looking beyond the European nation states in the EU alliance, it is not difficult to point to several aberrations and derailments from the lofty norms of the modern project.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, Habermas increasingly asks himself the question of whether there are any contradictions or shortcomings inherently built into - i.e. constitutionally enshrined - in the liberal constitutional state that in and of themselves entail risks for the realisation of the modern project. Thus, he begins his speech in the famous debate with (at that time) Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger by pointing to a question that had been posed by Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, a legal philosopher and constitutional lawyer who served many years as a judge on the German Federal Constitutional Court. The question is: 'Whether the free, secularised state erodes normative preconditions that this state itself cannot guarantee'. Habermas clarifies:

'It expresses the doubt as to whether the democratic constitutional state, with the help of its own resources, can renew the preconditions for its existence, just as the presumption is expressed that the state is dependent on autochthonous worldviews, religious or at least collectively binding ethical traditions. Admittedly, this would present the state, which is committed to worldview neutrality, with difficulties about the "fact of pluralism" (Rawls), but this conclusion does not speak in advance against the presumption itself'.<sup>64</sup>

This is not exactly a soft start to a discussion with the future Pope. Habermas is famous for formulating himself somewhat abstrusely, but his question is about whether the secularised state can completely free itself of '*collectively binding ethical traditions*', which can of course be of a religious nature, while at the same time maintaining a popular emotional obligation to the state and its constitution. In other words, what should bind citizens together in a community that is both loyal towards and committed to the state and constitution, i.e. what Habermas calls 'constitutional patriotism' in the thoroughly secularised state? If the state cannot achieve that, i.e. provide its own normative and ethically binding value contexts and must instead resort to other (potentially religious) worldviews as the unifying and binding basis for the maintenance of the state, 'difficulties' arise with the 'fact

<sup>62</sup> Martin Jay. 2019. Habermas and Postmodernism. *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, (42) 2.

<sup>63</sup> Anne Applebaum. 2020. *Twilight of Democracy. The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Doubleday).

<sup>64</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger op.cit.

of pluralism' (Rawls). For which worldview should be privileged and asserted, while the others become subject to the rigid demand for secularisation?

This issue has to a great extent been brought to light in the discourse in both Hungary and Denmark, where one side demands radical secularisation of religions other than Christianity, while the other side - represented by both the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and neo-Christian Danish politicians - argues that the Danish democratic state ought to be based on 'Christian values'.<sup>65</sup> This is the challenge that Habermas addresses in his introduction to the debate, and it is hardly surprising that he rejects the problem in principle, arguing that the secular state can create its own normative foundation and, thereby, itself create that constitutional patriotism that is necessary for the maintenance of the state as a free and democratic state that does not come into conflict with the 'fact of pluralism'. Habermas believes that the problem can be solved empirically. In this context, it is important to underscore that the secular liberal democratic state envisaged by the proponents of the possibility of constitutional patriotism is referred to as a '*Willensnation*' (nation of will): that the citizens, regardless of their faith, gender, ethnicity, etc. *choose the nation of their own will*. This describes, in other words, a social contract.

In contrast to what the theologian Bishop Jan Lindhardt notes in his afterword to the debate (in the Danish translation of the debate), one finds detectable doubt in the aging philosopher. This doubt is interesting when one considers that Habermas has spent his whole life defending and advocating for the possibility of the full realisation of the constitutional state based on reason and without the crutches of religion or metaphysics. Habermas has, thus, consistently argued for secularisation as a precondition for the constitutional state, which in his conceptualisation must be 'neutral in terms of worldview'.<sup>66</sup> The same is true of Western politicians, political science theorists, development researchers and development practitioners when they have criticised non-Western states as 'failed or fragile' and offered recipes from their scholarly books with instructions for how these misled states can be repaired and brought back on the right universal development track towards the post-Westphalian state.

The examples are legion, but one possibly worth highlighting is that of one of the most knowledgeable historians on the Ottoman Empire, Princeton professor Bernard Lewis's global bestseller *What Went Wrong*, which quickly offered an explanation for what had led to the al-Qaeda terrorist attack on New York and Washington D.C. on 11 September 2001: It was quite simply because there had never been an Enlightenment in the Islamic world, which, therefore, never became

<sup>65</sup> See speech by Viktor Orbán in Romania, July 2018 at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/> [accessed 2022-02-09].

<sup>66</sup> Jürgen Habermas: Staatsbürgerschaft und nationale Identität in Habermas: *Faktizität und Geltung*. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1992). See also Jan-Werner Müller: Verfassungspatriotismus. Eine systemische Verteidigung, *Vorgänge*, Heft 3, 2010, 111 ff.

secularised.<sup>67</sup> The view immediately gained popularity as an explanation for the calamities of the Middle East, and in Denmark, the once influential commentator, university lecturer and international secretary of the Social Democrats, Ralf Pittelkow, was quick to echo Lewis' arguments in his own book, *Efter 11. September. Vesten og Islam* ('After September 11: The West and Islam').<sup>68</sup> The fact that scholarly dissertations, historical studies, and well-documented books have documented that secularisation - as a separation between political power and religious guidance - has traditionally been the rule rather than the exception, also in the Ottoman Empire, has been largely ignored in studies and policy outside the field of Middle East studies.<sup>69</sup>

### **The language of religion is private**

In addition to rejection of the conclusion on the lack of secularisation in Muslim countries by some areas of Middle East research, the concepts of secularisation and modernity can also be problematised in their Western - or rather, European - form. At least that is exactly what Habermas, by raising Böckenförde's question, discusses in the debate with Ratzinger.<sup>70</sup> The Kantian model of the modern project, as Habermas interprets it, can be understood as three rationalisations of three conditions in the human position in the world, namely the cognitive, the ethical-moral and the sensory-aesthetic. The crucial problem in this model is that rational cognition and human emotion are completely separated and delegated to two different realms, namely the mind, which pertains to the cognition, and the aesthetic, which pertains to the beautiful and the sublime.<sup>71</sup>

The intellectual historian Hans-Jørgen Schanz has pedagogically translated Habermas' Kantian model of the modern into the triad of: (1) man's relationship to nature and technology based on the objective cognition of nature cleansed of emotional distractions; (2) man's relationship to other people, i.e. how people sensibly create communities, which involves the suppression and repression of individual desires and emotions for the benefit of the community's well-being; and (3) man's relationship to himself, where the emotional life unfolds aesthetically, existentially and religiously.<sup>72</sup> It is obvious that this translation of the modern project does not do either Kant or Habermas justice, but, nevertheless, one can point to a problem that deconstructs the idea of modernity and secularisation, namely that emotion, beliefs and religion are limited to the individual's relationship to themselves, i.e. that religion in modernity can be cast aside as an

<sup>67</sup> Bernard Lewis. *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002).

<sup>68</sup> Ralf Pittelkow. *Efter 11. September: Vesten og Islam* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof 2002).

<sup>69</sup> Sami Zubaida op.cit.

<sup>70</sup> Jan-Werner Müller summarises the debate in the article *Verfassungspatriotismus*, op.cit.

<sup>71</sup> The interpretation of Kant's three critiques, which deal with three different areas of human life, is controversial. I would say that the separation of reason and emotion constituted a great challenge for Kant and that the whole later part of the authorship, including the third critique, Critique of Judgment, is an attempt to tie together what had been separated in the first two critiques, namely, reason and emotion.

<sup>72</sup> Hans-Jørgen Schanz: *Europæisk Idehistorie. Historie. Samfund. Eksistens* [European History of Ideas. History. Society. Existence], (Copenhagen: Høst and Søn 2006): 148ff.

individual matter that should not interfere with the cognitive and the social. In the modern constitutional state, the attempt to - on an enlightenment-philosophical basis - limit religious practice to the individual's relationship to themselves, where they can, of course, seek together with fellow believers in a congregation, but still without interfering in society's common affairs, i.e. politics amounts to genuine Protestant theology, as far as I can see.<sup>73</sup> The liberal democratic constitutional state can assert its worldview value neutrality insofar as it makes religion a *private matter*. With its foundation in a specific Protestant interpretation of the social position of religion, might the effort to make the liberal world order universal have a touch of Protestant missionising, which is perhaps one of several reasons why it encounters opposition in non-Christian communities?

### **Patriotism, enlightenment and the inner contradiction**

Before returning to the question of the Lebanese state, there are two problems with the concept of secularisation as it specifically manifests itself in European modernity that will be briefly addressed. The first is conceptually immanent and the second more empirical. If one insists that the liberal constitutional state must be worldview-neutral, and that religion must be relegated to the private sphere, the question raised by Habermas and Böckenförde can be concretised into a question of what it is that binds the citizens of a state together and makes them collectively recognise the state, the constitution, and the modern project. As mentioned, Habermas' answer is 'constitutional patriotism', which means that 'citizens not only acquire the constitutional principles in their abstract content, but concretely from the historical context of their own national history'.<sup>74</sup> What causes citizens to internalise the principles of the constitution or the regulations and rules of the state and develop a positive *emotion-based* commitment to them? Montesquieu was already aware of this problem and defined in the introduction to his great work *The Spirit of the Laws* a concept of 'civic virtue', which he emphasises should not be understood as a moral or a Christian virtue, but as a *political* virtue. Montesquieu's civic virtue explicitly refers to a feeling of 'love for the laws of the state', that is, patriotism.<sup>75</sup> Where does this patriotism come from?

The obvious answer is that it comes from the specific contexts in which citizens are socialised, and it is in these contexts that cultural habits, traditions, rites and often also religion are important for the development of a commitment to the community. It is precisely this which is expressed in the concept of worldview, which as noted is never simply a result of an abstract cognitive intellectual process, but just as much specifically formed by feelings of *belonging to a community*. In his introduction to the debate with Ratzinger, Habermas points to the problem: 'Moral insights and a worldwide agreement to feel moral indignation over massive human rights violations would, in isolation, only barely be adequate

<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther was a child of the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance about making the human individual the centre of the world and, by extension, making the relationship of God and faith a matter for the individual in a relationship that relates to himself, as Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus formulates it in *Sickness unto Death*.

<sup>74</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger op.cit.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989): pp. XLIIIf.

to integrate citizens into a politically constituted global society (if such a society would ever become a reality one day). Among citizens, a form of solidarity, albeit abstract and legally mediated, arises only when the principles of justice find their way into the close network of cultural value orientations'.<sup>76</sup> In other words, there must be a solidary social bond, a sense of belonging to the community, which can be a group or a congregation. This social bond is a worldview that, therefore, has a discursive and cognitive element that can take the form of a political ideology or creed, and an emotional element of belonging to a community where this worldview is shared. In the modern secular post-Westphalian state based on a worldview-neutral constitution (in principle), the fundamental question must, therefore, still be: What causes citizens to feel a binding and solidary sense of belonging to the worldview-neutral state? Habermas will reply *that it is the rational argument, i.e., ultimately communicative action in the form of rational discourse, that results in a sense of affiliation with the state*. We are accordingly back in Immanuel Kant's motto for enlightenment: 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage . . . Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding! Is, therefore, the motto of the enlightenment'.<sup>77</sup> Kant, however, became increasingly aware that it takes more than common sense and rational arguments to create binding and solidary communities, and so, apparently, has Habermas in his later years. Nevertheless, it is reason and the uncompromising secularisation, where religion as a worldview is relegated to private life, which gets the last word, according to Habermas: 'A liberal political culture can even expect secularised citizens to participate in the efforts to translate relevant contributions from a religious to a publicly accessible language'.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the enlightened, secularised citizen with the rational argument must convince the religious citizen that insofar as the religion of the person concerned can offer relevant contributions to the bourgeois public, *the religious language must be translated into the language of reason*: The apostles of the Enlightenment must convince the religious that in the constitutional state, religious language has no relevance in itself, but must dress itself in the language of the public. It is easy to see that a dispute can quickly arise here about what the relevant contribution is, just as within the framework of the liberal political culture there can be a dispute about which body, institution or sovereign should decide the question of the relevance of the worldview contribution. The secular state, thereby, suffers from an inner paradox - despite Habermas' denial - where its worldview neutrality has delimited the ontological premise of its own existence, namely the social ties that are founded precisely in worldview, which in turn is often based on religion in Europe, the USA, and the Middle East. Thus, it ought to be clear that the modern post-Westphalian secular state has by no means found a solution to the precarious relationship between politics, state and religion. One could also say that it awards a higher status to the idea of the secular, liberal constitutional state as a worldview that dismisses all other worldviews as irrational personal opinions. On the one

<sup>76</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger op.cit.

<sup>77</sup> Immanuel Kant. Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? in Ehrhard Bahr (ed.): *Was ist Aufklärung?* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1980).

<sup>78</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger op.cit.



hand, constitutional patriotism is the result of a conscious choice, a social contract. On the other hand, no worldview is ever solely the product of conscious choices, but also includes socialisation rooted in human emotion.

### **The lack of balance between reason and religion**

This conflict between the nation of will's contract of reason and the emotional influence of socialisation manifests itself empirically in today's Europe, where religion has gained political importance in relation to immigration policy. National conservative parties have been hugely successful both at mobilising voters by pointing to Islam and Muslims as threats to the states as well as at underscoring Christian values as the foundation of European culture in political discourse. Most radically, the view has been formulated by Hungarian politician and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán with his definition of democracy as illiberal and Christian.<sup>79</sup> It is, therefore, possible that the post-Westphalian state may have been a historical success in economic and military terms, and that it has resulted in the development and formulation of human rights and liberal order, but at the same time, it is clear that it has not found a sustainable balance between reason and religion and, thus, between politics and religion, which today is expressed by an ever-intensifying conflict in the balance between security policy and compliance with international law, international conventions and human rights. This lack of balance is expressed perhaps even more clearly in the conflict between the universal demand for secularisation and the awarding of Christianity privileged status as the foundation of European national identities.

The Arab states and Lebanon have a completely different history than European countries, and that history has naturally shaped their development, including the balance between politics, state and religion, in a different direction. Measuring them on the basis of and attempting to 'repair' them according to the norm of the post-Westphalian secular state and imperfect European modernity is, therefore, problematic, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. As the West sees it, the challenge is to push those states onto a development track that will lead to achieving this norm. However, the chances of that are slim, not least because - as Habermas himself establishes - even in Europe, the project is incomplete and appears to be veering increasingly off course due to the internal inconsistency inherent in the norm for the liberal and secular state.

It has hereby been demonstrated that the secularisation thesis contains a fundamental problem that has remained unresolved even in established liberal democratic states, and that is revealed in the opposition of those demanding increasingly radical secularisation of religions other than Christianity and those who see Christianity as the foundation for the European nation state. One could perhaps argue that the Protestant ethics of individualisation of faith was already secularised from the start, but as indicated, the establishment of the nation states has entailed a constant balancing act between politics and religion - a balance which has not yet been struck. The criticism is severe and the demand for

<sup>79</sup> Viktor Orbán op.cit.

secularisation strong when the private language of religions moves into the public domain, but Protestant Christianity is, of course, a different matter altogether, at least according to nationalist conservative Christian politicians like Orbán in Budapest.

This opposition is not limited to Europe but applies to all places where formal and abstract principles for power and politics collide with socialised communities, regardless of how well-intentioned those abstract principles are. In 2011 in Egypt, 100,000 people stood in Tahrir Square in Cairo and agreed that they wanted to bring down Mubarak's dictatorship, yet what they wanted to replace it with was subject to far more disagreement the more specifically the question was asked. For the 100 million other Egyptians who were not in Cairo, there was certainly considerable support for the criticism of the incumbent regime, but also considerable uncertainty about the alternatives. One could assume - although this would naturally need to be confirmed through studies - that was why 69% voted for Islamic parties that represented bonds they were socialised within and, therefore, offered a form of affiliation and security.<sup>80</sup>

Caroline R. Nagel's article, which was referred to in the introduction, analyses sectarianism in Lebanon as a political struggle between secularisation demands and religion. Among others, she cites Ussama Makdisi's meticulous studies on the politicisation of religious sects in Mount Lebanon in the 19th century and up to Lebanon's independence, concluding that, 'In this sense, secularism creates and re-creates the problem of religion that it then seeks to solve through various accommodations and strictures. Far from being ensconced in a separate private realm, religion becomes inescapably politicised'. Caroline Nagel adds: 'It is the idealisation of a secular, universalistic, liberal public sphere that has framed discussions of sectarianism in Lebanon, as well as anxieties in Western societies about Islamic fundamentalism and Muslim minority groups.'<sup>81</sup> As evident, Nagel's conclusions are entirely consistent with this present discussion of the secularisation thesis. The discussion now returns to Lebanon and the issue of the relationship between worldview and secularisation in extension of the current paper's arguments and Nagel's conclusions on the secularisation thesis by looking at the demonstrations that started with the so-called waste crisis in 2015 and which have, thus far, culminated in the demonstrations against the economic austerity measures in the autumn of 2019 and into 2020.

### **Lebanon as a construction**

While European states evolved in the early modern period (i.e. following the Renaissance, the Thirty Years' War and the development of the state system after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648), without interference from external, non-European powers and international organisations, the story of the establishment of the modern Arab states is a diametrically different one: They did not exist until

<sup>80</sup> Election results according to the African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project [<https://www.eisa.org/wep/egy2012results1.htm>].

<sup>81</sup> Caroline R. Nagel op.cit: both quotations p.142.

the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of the modern Middle East in connection with the peace accords after World War I. At the same time, the League of Nations was created, which made it possible for the new states to be mandated territories administrated by France and Britain.<sup>82</sup> In the aftermath of World War II, the League of Nations was replaced by the United Nations, which has had a major impact on developments in the Middle East, including in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict (resolutions, UNRWA, etc.), mandates for wars in Iraq (1991) and Libya (2011), sanctions against Iraq and Iran and negotiations with both, to name only a few examples. In addition, as noted by L.C. Brown in 1984 and repeated by R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami in 1999, there is no other region in the world penetrated as deeply by the major powers.<sup>83</sup> All of the above helps explain why the borders in the Middle East have remained so strikingly fixed since the construction of the region in San Remo in 1920 and Lausanne in 1923, the 1948 establishment of Israel being the only significant exception.<sup>84</sup> Yet even before the construction of the Middle Eastern states, the European great powers of the 19th century had exerted considerable influence in the region, which affected the modernisation that unfolded there. As previously mentioned, the Ottoman Empire reacted with its own reforms and modernisation efforts, *tanzimat*, as a counter to European influence. This meant that the provinces, in their transition from the traditional to the modern, were influenced from different sides. This was the case in Lebanon as well, where as early as the second half of the 19th century, France sought to create a political balance of power between the Druze and Christians in the Lebanese mountains. Modernisation, thus, followed several different paths, but the idea of creating a political system based on balance between different faiths was introduced by France long before Lebanon was established as a state.<sup>85</sup>

After World War I, Lebanon came under the control of the French mandate for Lebanon and Syria, and soon after, the French created what is today the Lebanese state. In 1943, a newly elected government abolished the French mandate, but Allied forces continued the occupation of the new republic until it gained its real independence in 1946.

In the 1943 attempt to secede, Lebanon established itself as a multi-denominational republic based on an unwritten agreement called the National Pact of Lebanon. The idea behind various groups and constituencies being given a fixed representation in government and parliament, so-called consociationalism, was to ensure that all groups in the highly divided Lebanese society share power and influence in government to avoid internal conflicts that could escalate into civil war. The philosophy was that ensuring all 18 publicly recognised

<sup>82</sup> D.K. Fieldhouse. *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914 – 1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).

<sup>83</sup> A. Ehteshami and R. Hinnebusch. 1999. *Syria and Iran. Middle Powers in a penetrated regional system* (London: Routledge).

<sup>84</sup> Hinnebusch and Gani op.cit.

<sup>85</sup> Michael C. Hudson. *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House 1968); Ussama Makdisi op.cit.

denominations received political power would ease tensions between the groups.<sup>86</sup>

The model never worked as intended, as the conflicts in 1958 and again in 1975, leading to the 15-year civil war, clearly demonstrated. Foreign interventions from Syria, Israel, Iran, the United States and France, as well as the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, including the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLO), which was in Beirut from 1971 until 1982, also helped intensify the conflicts. Negotiations in the Saudi Arabian city of Taif in 1989 paved the way for an agreement that ended the civil war in 1990. With some significant changes, the consociational model continued to form the basis of the political system following the civil war.

Israel, which had maintained an occupation of southern Lebanon, withdrew in 2000, and following a UN Security Council resolution in 2004 and large demonstrations in the streets of Beirut in the wake of the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, Syria also withdrew its troops from Lebanon. The Taif agreement demanded that all militias be disarmed, but Hezbollah was exempted on the grounds that their militia was defending Lebanon against Israel.<sup>87</sup>

The consequence of the crisis that followed the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 was the formation of two blocs in Lebanese politics named after the dates of two major demonstrations. The first is the 'March 8 Alliance' consisting of Hezbollah, Amal and the Free Patriotic Movement, a Maronite Christian group led by Michel Aoun, Lebanon's president from 2016. The other is the 'March 14 Alliance', led by the Sunni Muslim Saad al-Hariri, son of the assassinated prime minister, head of the Future Movement and supported by the (Christian) Lebanese forces (LF) and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party. Both blocs also include a number of smaller parties.<sup>88</sup>

Tensions between especially Sunni Muslims, led by Saad al-Hariri, and Hezbollah culminated in a direct confrontation in 2008, which was resolved by an agreement in Doha, Qatar.<sup>89</sup> Thereafter, it became clear that neither of the blocs had the strength to totally dominate the other, and a form of a national consensus on security began to develop. The priority of the power-sharing elite, including many former warlords from the civil war, was to preserve their own power and access to state funds, which has led to the gap between the state, ruled by the elite, and the rest of Lebanese society. As the economic crisis began to show its teeth in earnest,

<sup>86</sup> A. Lijphart, A.: Consociational democracy. *World Politics*, 21(2): 207-225, 1969; Tamirace Fakhoury: Lebanon's consociational politics in the post-2011 Middle East, in M. Felsch and M. Wählisch (Eds.), *Lebanon and the Arab uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane* (London: Routledge 2016): 21-31; Erslev Andersen: Arrested Development, op.cit.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Bahout: Armed groups and sovereignty. Domestic and regional agendas for war and peace in Lebanon, *Accord*, Issue 24, July 2012 [[https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Accord24\\_ArmedGroupsSovereignty.pdf](https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Accord24_ArmedGroupsSovereignty.pdf)].

<sup>88</sup> Erslev Andersen: Arrested Development, op.cit.

<sup>89</sup> ICG, Middle East Report op.cit.

after Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states stopped the flow of money and tourism to Lebanon, mistrust of the regime grew markedly among its population.

### **Demonstrations against the regime**

This mistrust became very apparent during Lebanon's waste crisis in the summer of 2015. When the authorities were unable to reach an agreement on a new landfill contract to replace one that had expired, waste piled up in the streets of Beirut.<sup>90</sup> The smell was unbearable, but the politicians were unable to come up with new and lasting solutions. Under the slogan 'You Stink', young people began to organise demonstrations that gathered tens of thousands of people from all over Lebanon in central Beirut. Their agenda was a non-sectarian protest inefficiency and corruption at the government level. The political elite reacted by coming together to implement largely symbolic solutions to the waste problem while combating the demonstrations and intimidating the youth movement by accusing them of sectarianism and even of being infiltrated by jihadists. The crisis ended without a lasting solution to the waste problem and left a shattered youth movement and a largely deserted city centre in its wake, the result of access restrictions introduced to prevent new demonstrations. The elite survived, but the problems continued. The system, described by Mansour and Khatib as the horizontal line in which the sectarian-based elites come together to ward off a security threat to their power, demonstrated its effectiveness.

However, the success of the You Stink movement in mobilising broad support inspired other civil society activists to form a party under the name Beirut Madinati (Beirut, My City), which ran in the Beirut local elections in May 2016.<sup>91</sup> Once again they gathered around a non-sectarian agenda against corruption and an insistence on sustainable, green solutions to the city's infrastructure problems, including the waste problem. Yet history only repeated itself: The party garnered strong support among the Lebanese people, but Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri, whose party controlled the city council of Beirut, intervened, backed by the rest of the political elite, and secured victory for his party through legal and - according to civil society sources, illegal - methods.<sup>92</sup> Once again, the established parties and their leaders among the elite survived the challenge of a civil society-based opposition, while basically nothing was done to solve the many problems in the capital.

### **The October Revolution that ran out of steam**

In May 2018, parliamentary elections were held after a four-year postponement. Lebanon had been without a president for two years, and when he finally took office, political leaders had to negotiate and implement a new election law. Hezbollah gained more seats and was able to completely control the parliament

<sup>90</sup> Maha Yahya: *The summer of our discontent: Sects and citizens in Lebanon and Iraq*. 2017, Carnegie Middle East Centre [<http://carnegie-mec.org/2017/06/30/summer-of-our-discontent-sects-and-citizens-in-lebanon-and-iraq-pub-71396>].

<sup>91</sup> Beirut Madinati see Civil Society Knowledge Centre [<https://civilsociety-centre.org/party/beirut-madinati>].

<sup>92</sup> Personal interviews with representatives of Beirut Madinati in Beirut in May 2016.

together with the Amal party. Fundamentally, nothing changed in the political situation as it had developed since 2008: In all areas except security policy, the parties were unable to agree on the reforms that were needed, and the country headed directly towards economic collapse.

When the government of Saad al-Hariri and the Lebanese parliament decided, in October 2019, to introduce a tax on several goods, including chat messages on WhatsApp, protesters took to the streets again. The media talked about the WhatsApp uprising, but the activists themselves eventually called the course of events the October Revolution.<sup>93</sup> The demonstrations developed quickly and received broad support. Political leaders called for a halt to the protests as authorities began using tear gas and clashes broke out between protesters and police. Although counterdemonstrators, i.e. sympathisers of Amal and Hezbollah, intervened and incited violence and fighting, the demonstrations continued and spread.<sup>94</sup> After Saad al-Hariri resigned in November 2019 and was replaced by Hassan Diab, who continued the government, the demonstrations continued, centred at Martyrs' Square in central Beirut, where the parliament is also located. The square was cleared at the end of March 2020, - the official reason being to limit infections due to the Covid-19 pandemic - but although the demonstrations gradually decreased in size, they continued. And all the while, discontent among the Lebanese people simmered.

Anger at politicians grew when the circumstances surrounding the big explosion in the Port of Beirut were revealed. Admittedly, it was only a small part of the circumstances, as no one was held accountable and exactly how that huge stockpile of fertiliser that caused the giant explosion had ended up in a warehouse building with sloppy security precautions - and had remained there for years - remained unclear. It was beyond any doubt, however, that the sloppy management and lack of security was a result of the elitist system, and this, of course, intensified the anger and criticism directed towards the political system. Protesters gathered in Martyrs' Square and demanded the resignation of the government, as well as a halt to the sectarian political system in general. When French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Beirut two days later, on 6 August, and inspected the destruction in the city's streets, he was greeted by protesters shouting that he should not send emergency aid funds to politicians and the government, as they would only end up in their back pockets instead of going to the victims. There was even a petition that received more than 50,000 signatures calling for France to reintroduce the mandate, which Macron of course rejected.<sup>95</sup> On the contrary, he insisted on the need for a new transitional government that could pave the way for political and economic reforms. Lebanon's ambassador to Berlin was recalled and was to head the project, but he threw in the towel after just

<sup>93</sup> Middle East Institute: Special Briefing op.cit.

<sup>94</sup> Breaking the Barriers: One year after the demonstrations in Lebanon, ACLED [<https://acleddata.com/2020/10/27/breaking-the-barriers-one-year-of-demonstrations-in-lebanon/>].

<sup>95</sup> The Petition for A 'French Mandate' In Lebanon: 60,000 Signatures and More Questions [<https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-petition-for-a-french-mandate-in-lebanon-60000-signatures-and-more-questions>].

one month. Macron was angry but came to accept that Lebanese policy could not be issued from the French embassy in Beirut. In December 2020, Saad al-Hariri was appointed prime minister for the third time, but gave up after just three weeks, and Hassan Diab returned as the head of an administrative department. This sequence of events repeated itself over the course of 2020 and 2021, when Saad al-Hariri was appointed prime minister only to resign again.<sup>96</sup>

Most Lebanese were tired of the sectarian system, but also worried about what might replace it, and that insecurity was exacerbated by the fact that Lebanon was heading directly for total economic collapse: Over half of Lebanese already lived in poverty, fuel supplies were depleted, and the electricity supply was at risk of being cut off entirely. The situation was clearly exacerbated by the Caesar sanctions imposed by the United States in June 2020 to punish those who made money supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime.<sup>97</sup> This well-intentioned measure completely halted official trade between Syria and Lebanon and fuelled the development of illegal hoarding and smuggling. The Caesar sanctions were aimed at weakening Hezbollah, which was already under pressure due to the banking scandals and the circumstances surrounding the explosion. But Hezbollah, the system and the security state remained in place while the demonstrations lost support, and those who could left the country.<sup>98</sup> In fact, Hezbollah even managed to recover some legitimacy by handing out ration cards to the poor during the severe economic crisis, who could then shop at a 40% discount in Hezbollah-run supermarkets, which were also able to source some of the goods that were otherwise in very short supply in the country.<sup>99</sup> This shows, if anything, how the dynamics of Mansour and Khatib's vertical line work: First, anger and rebellion over powerlessness and corruption, followed by security from being in the Shia community and being supported socially.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that the social ties in the vertical link between the state's elites and their social bases can be strong appears to explain why the October Revolution lost its momentum. Even though the demonstrations are referred to as a revolution, there was no revolution in practice; people began to stay home or – increasingly - emigrate. Lebanon is currently essentially an economically bankrupt country with a political leadership that is effectively paralysed in relation to fixing the miserable situation and taking political responsibility for the running of the country, yet the

<sup>96</sup> After Saad al-Hariri once again gave up being able to form a government and resigned on July 15, 2021, there remains only an administrative department in Lebanon, which has been the case since Saad al-Hariri resigned in reaction to the 2019 demonstrations. See e.g., Al-Jazeera [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/15/lebanon-pm-designate-saad-hariri-resigns-as-crisis-escalates>].

<sup>97</sup> Timour Azhari op.cit.

<sup>98</sup> Lebanon Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS): Why did the October 17 Revolution Witness a Regression in Numbers? October 31, 2020 [<https://lcps-lebanon.org/agendaArticle.php?id=199>].

<sup>99</sup> Hanan Hamdan. Lebanese parties distribute food baskets as economy continues to sink, *al-Monitor*, 10 May 2021 [<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/Lebanese-parties-distribute-food-baskets-economy-continues-sink>].

situation resembles that which followed the large popular demonstrations in 2015, 2016, 2019-2020: great dissatisfaction, but no collective public agreement on the change - much less revolution - that is needed. In the autumn of 2020, the independent Lebanese think tank Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies launched an investigation into why the October Revolution quickly lost support.<sup>100</sup> This investigation was part of a series of studies that examined the course of the demonstrations by posing the same questions to several researchers and activists. The second study asked why so many people abandoned the demonstrations after a single month and prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Lebanon. There were many different factors at play, such as the authorities' use of violence and intimidation, violence initiated by the regime's thugs and the fact that many disillusioned opposition members were already leaving Lebanon. The answers, most explicitly the answer from the lecturer at the American University of Beirut, Rania Masri, also point out, however, that although the anger against the regime was great among a broad segment of the population, people were insecure about abandoning the social communities that, in spite of everything, lent them a certain degree of social security.<sup>101</sup> In the absence of a clear political alternative that could offer a specific and different social community, many chose to abandon the demonstrations. People could agree with the criticism of sectarianism, corruption, abuse of power and political impotence in relation to implementing necessary reforms, but without a specific and socially grounded alternative, people's *fear* of losing the social bonds they can rely on in Lebanon and which are anchored in religious communities was greater than their faith in the revolution being able to bring about something better.

The discussion of the secularisation thesis concludes, both in relation to the contestations manifested in the debate between Habermas and Ratzinger as well as the points raised by Caroline R. Nagel, that the secular state comes into conflict with itself about establishing an ethical basis for a worldview. Although it is a beautiful idea, this can hardly be remedied by constitutional patriotism emerging from sensible communicative action in a nation of will. In other words, rigid secularisation leads to a politicisation of religion, which presents difficulties for the 'fact of pluralism', with the risk of sectarian conflicts unfolding. The article's inclusion of a study of the course of events of the major demonstrations in Lebanon from 2015 onwards partly validates Caroline R. Nagel's point that secularisation as an exclusive strategy for implementing a more transparent and just political system creates conflict, in part because it produces the fear of losing social affiliations without a guarantee of alternative (worldview-based) social affiliations that existing religious communities can feel at home in. Finally, the article confirms Mansour and Khatib's thesis that the post-Weberian concept of the state, when used exclusively in the analysis of Middle Eastern states (in this case Lebanon), carries a great risk that other and more important dynamics of power will be overlooked. Attaching greater importance to these other dynamics of power explains why Lebanon remains a state against all odds, i.e. the surprising

<sup>100</sup> LCPS op.cit.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



resilience of the Lebanese state. The article complements Mansour and Khatib's points through an analysis of the secularisation thesis, which can concretise how the 'social adhesive' in vertical structures connecting worldview and socialisation works by creating strong social connections in denominational societies. Lebanon, and presumably many other Middle Eastern states, therefore, faces an enormous challenge in developing a balance between reason and religion, that is, developing liberal democratic formal principles of power inclusive of the different worldviews manifested in the different denominational communities that make up the Middle East today. Neither rigid secularisation nor simply willing constitutional patriotism into existence seems to be the right answer to this challenge. Not in Lebanon, not in the Middle East and not, for that matter, in the West either.

## **PERSPECTIVES FOR NEW RESEARCH**

This conclusion raises a new question: when the French and later the Lebanese themselves created the political system based in the constitution, they chose a consociational model giving constitutionally-regulated political representation to the religious communities. This has, by many political scientists, been seen as the dynamic for the dysfunctional political system leading to sectarianism and conflict. This paper concludes that secularisation is the dynamic for sectarian conflicts in Lebanon because it suppresses religious worldviews embedded in communities and that the liberal secular state seems to erode its own preconditions for social coherence. The solution to the balance between religion and politics is neither a secular divide nor a consociational constitution. Then the question arises: How can a balance between a plurality of religious worldviews and political democratic parliamentarism be obtained to give space for efficient political reforms without suppressing religious worldviews?