

were neither motivated nor felt represented by a confessional identity. While providing for the political representation of each religious community, the system does not provide representation for those Lebanese whose primary identification is not confessional." This issue of "security" versus "political participation" is the subject of heated debate. Whereas some analysts see Lebanon's confessional system as a wonder of democratic representation, others consider it the root of all Lebanon's suffering -- responsible for encouraging a weak government, perpetuating sectarian identification, politics, and agendas rather than encouraging national allegiance,<sup>12</sup> and rendering Lebanon ripe for external interference.

These different interpretations of Lebanon's political system are related to the larger sociological question of the "true" social reality of Lebanon's population. As el-Solh explained, some see Lebanon as a "confederation of sects rather than a nation," and, as such, the confessional system is the most democratic form for political participation. Others consider Lebanon's political obsession with its sects a historical fabrication and a function of traditional sectarian leaders' manipulation of identity in order to hold onto their respective power bases.<sup>13</sup> This latter perspective is supported by the magnitude of intrasectarian fighting throughout the war: more Lebanese were killed as a result of intrasectarian rivalry than of intersectarian violence. In addition, as Corm argued, the consociational view of Lebanon ignores the tremendous differences within each community: "What do we mean when we use the term Maronite establishment, which speaks of a monolith of unified opinion within a sect, and tells nothing of intrasectarian dissent?"

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<sup>12</sup> As Faris stressed, because of Lebanon's internal political divisions many Lebanese factions made foreign alliances in order to further their domestic agendas. And because of regional and international polarization, these factions found willing foreign sponsors.

<sup>13</sup> Participants agreed that manipulation of identity by sectarian leaders became particularly acute during the war: "Is it not true that the confessional and religious establishment backed the militias early in the 1970s as a means to increase their own power base?" Most participants concurred that many of the militias enjoyed a certain amount of popular support at the beginning of the war because they were seen either as agents of change (for those unhappy with the system) or defenders of the status quo. But, as the militias established violent hegemonic control over the political and social life of Lebanon, their popular support dissipated. As'ad Abukhalil pointed out, however, that in the south, almost every Shi'ite identifies with either the Amal or Hizballah militias. He stressed that the domestic reasons for the appeal of these group identifications should not be ignored.