The Impact of Sectarianism and Intolerance on the Workplace in Lebanon

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Abstract. This qualitative study will describe and analyze the perspectives of Lebanese employees, managers, and trade union representatives regarding the influence of sectarian favoritism in their workplace. The research design will involve "in-depth phenomenological interviews" (Seidman, 1991), conducted across a range of private sector companies in Lebanon, focus groups, and observations. The research will have implications for employers who want to make a positive difference in their diverse workforce's achievement and productivity.

1 INTRODUCTION

My research will investigate how intolerance and sectarian harassment affects the Lebanese in their workplace. Does sectarianism affect their career choices? Are they recruited according to sectarian criteria? Do they experience the effects of sectarian banter and intolerance in their workplace? Does intolerance hinder their personal development? Does intolerance and sectarianism hamper work progress or decision-making? Are they promoted according to sectarian standards? In Lebanon, productivity and team work are definitely affected by sectarian pestering and intolerant behavior.

Sectarianism is a constellation of negative beliefs, attitudes, and feelings toward other sects. The reason for that is that most religions teach people not to ask questions but rather to consider those questions settled, thanks to their often pat answers. The problem with this approach is that it makes faith into a destination, rather than a journey, a place to be reached instead of a road to be traveled. Consequently, the Lebanese became the know-it-all with a shallow sense of moral purpose, and so far they have used one strategy to deal with their "enemies", or actually with the "other Lebanese": fight him or her. This method has not been successful, and Lebanon is still populated with "enemies". The problem with trying to destroy "the other" over the years has been that it has become increasingly difficult to do so. Today, the malice of the neighbors, the resentments of squabbling families, the envy of colleagues and mainly the battle of the sects can no longer be eliminated, for it has become rooted in the heart, brain and soul of the majority of the Lebanese. That means that there are ever more potential threats, general and personal, that are building up in every house, every neighbourhood and especially every workplace in Lebanon. Private disputes are settled through force and the law cannot put an end to that practice. One would have thought that after so many years of fighting, the Lebanese would have purged their country of "enemies", but that did not happen because fanaticism and intolerance have become a way of life. The most dangerous fact about fighting the "other" is that the thrill of the fight is often the sole purpose behind it.

During the years of civil war, conflict resolution was mostly through military means. Thus was established a tradition that encouraged the Lebanese to blind themselves to each other's points of view. Based on that, enmity among the sects can continue forever, and what helps it to thrive is the fact that individuals are prisoners of mind-sets which make them seek out

enemies everywhere in their daily life, but especially in the workplace. When one believes that there are people who despise them or wish them harm... when one is constantly simmering with anger and filled with loathing and disgust for the "other"... when one is convinced that the "other" is totally incompatible... it goes without saying that those individuals cannot work together in the same environment.

Either the Lebanese have continued to develop hatred through a visceral reaction, or they have taken it for granted that enmity is the inevitable consequence of the way the world is made. Fabricating enemies is one of the oldest and busiest of human industries, where the raw material may be nothing more than hurt, pride, anger, or rivalry gradually hardening until the manufacturers become prisoners of their hatred. More often than not, creating enemies is a way to perhaps justify or reinforce one's raison d'être, and seeing that the Lebanese are the product of their environment and experiences over the years, it is no wonder that their behavior has taken root and continues to flourish unchecked, affecting even the workplace.

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2 LITERATURE REVIEW:

History of the sects:

Lebanon is a place of richness and diversity where religious communities rub along together in a way unimaginable in a secular society and where vulnerable minorities live out their unique identities. Sometimes these communities clash and it is easy to see how they can give rise to the tensions that characterize Lebanese politics and which can, if cleverly exploited, lead to conflict. Therefore, I find it necessary to shed some light on the Lebanese history to fully understand the nature of this complex country as well as its citizens.

From 1516 until the end of the First World War Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, the Ottoman rulers allowed the leaders of the Maronite Christian, Muslim and Druze communities to rule their fiefdoms without much interference. In 1860, mounting tensions between the Druze and the Maronites in the Chouf mountains lead to the death of over 10,000 Christians. French troops arrive to protect the Maronite community. Although still part of the Ottoman Empire in 1861, Mount Lebanon is declared an autonomous province.

In 1920, the State of Greater Lebanon is formed, taking in Mount Lebanon, the provinces of north Lebanon, south Lebanon and the Bekka Valley. France is given the mandate for both Lebanon and Syria. In 1926, Lebanon is declared a republic with a constitution enshrining the principles of democracy and human rights. In 1943, the foundations of Lebanon's status as an independent republic are set out in an unwritten National Pact. The Christians are expected to recognize Lebanon's 'Arab Face' and not look to the French for protection, while the Muslims are to seek independence from Syria. The agreement formalizes a power-sharing arrangement between the country's Christians and Muslims: the president is to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shia Muslim.

In 1948, the state of Israel is created and around 100 000 Palestinians refugees flee north into Lebanon. In 1964, The Palestine Liberation Organization is formed and, in the years that follow, its guerrillas use south Lebanon as a base for raids into Israel. In 1975, following clashes between Phalangist and Palestinian militia, the civil war begins. For the next fifteen years, Christians (based in Beirut and parts of Mount Lebanon) fight Muslim and PLO militia across the Green Line (west Beirut and south Lebanon). The conflict is characterized by shifting alliances between the country's different sects and factions and brings both Israeli and Syrian troops onto Lebanese soil.

In 1976, in response to a request from the Lebanese president to the Arab League for a peacekeeping force, Syrian troops enter Lebanon to protect the Christians. In 1978, Israel launches a major invasion of Lebanon and succeeds in pushing the PLO guerillas north to the Litani River. It forms a proxy Lebanese militia, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), to protect the security zone it has carved out on Lebanese territory along the border and following UN resolution 425, withdraws from Lebanon. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is created to keep the peace. In 1982, Israel launches a full-scale invasion of Lebanon, 'Operation Peace for Galilee', with the aim of curbing PLO activities. Israeli forces invade west Beirut and in revenge for the assassination of their leader, the president-elect Bashir Gemayel, the Phalangist Maronite militia enters the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. With the co-operation of the Israeli forces guarding the camps, they kill hundreds of Palestinian civilians.

In 1982, Shia militants begin to form Hezbolla, the 'Party of God', with Iranian backing, as a political and military organization whose goal is the destruction of Israel. In 1986, Western hostages, including John McCarthy and Brian Keenan, are kidnapped by Islamic militants in Beirut, remaining in captivity for up to five years. The following year, the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy Terry Waite is also kidnapped while attempting to negotiate their release.

In 1989, The National Assembly, meeting in Taif, Saudi Arabia, endorses a National Reconciliation Charter which marks the beginning of the end of the fighting. Te Taif accord transfers some power away from Maronites to the Sunnis, reflecting Lebanon's changing demographics and assuaging Muslim resentment. In 1991, all the militias taking part in the fighting except Hezbollah are dissolved, bringing the civil war to an end; it has claimed the lives of more than 100 000 civilians, injured another 100 000 and left much of Beirut in ruins.

In 1996, Israeli forces launch 'Operation Grapes of Wrath', bombing Hezbollah bases in south Beirut, southern Lebanon and the Bekka. An Israeli attack on a UN base in Qana results in the death of over a hundred Lebanese civilians sheltering there. In 2000, after the collapse of the SLA and the rapid advance of Hezbollah forces, Israel withdraws its troops from southern Lebanon. The end of the Israeli occupation is widely seen as a victory for Hezbollah.

In 2005, on February 14, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is killed by a car bomb in Beirut, along with twenty-two other people. The culprits are widely believed to be the Syrians, and the following month the UN sets up a special inquiry to investigate the killing. Following the assassination, calls for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon intensify. Hezbollah organizes a pro-Syria demonstration in Beirut on 8 March, and on March 14 a million people gather in Martyrs' Square calling for an independent, democratic Lebanon free from Syrian control. In April 2005, following increasing pressure from the UN and the West, Syrian forces leave Lebanon.

June 2005 sees the killing of two prominent anti-Syrians in car bombs: the journalist Sami Qasir and George Hawi, former leader of the Lebanese Communist Party. The next month Deputy Prime Minister Elias Murr survives a car bomb. In an explosion in September, the well-known Lebanese journalist May Chidiac loses her left arm and leg; in December, anti-Syrian MP and journalist Gibran Tueni lose his life in a car bomb. In October 2005, the UN inquiry into the Hariri assassination publishes its first report as part of an ongoing investigation. It points to Syrian involvement, with co-operation from the Lebanese security forces, but does not name any of the individuals responsible.

2006 on the 12th of July, following a raid into Israeli territory in which Hezbollah captures two Israeli soldiers, Israel launches air and sea attacks on targets in Lebanon. Ground troops enter the south of the country in August. During the course of the month-long war, much of Lebanon's infrastructure is destroyed and over a million people are displaced. Almost 1,200 mostly civilian Lebanese and over a hundred and fifty Israelis die. A cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah comes into effect on the 14th of August, and Hezbollah claim a 'divine victory'. A UN peacekeeping force of 15,000 foreign troops begins to deploy along the Lebanese-Israeli border. In November of the same year, the assassination of Maronite government minister Pierre Gemayel plunges the country into a new political crisis.

Researchers have conducted many investigations in an attempt to define and measure the development of human consciousness and self-awareness in the shadow of various religious sects. Nevertheless, no consensus has emerged concerning any sect and its behavior, due to the wide range of human passions and motivations. In this study, I will attempt to identify Lebanese people's conduct (from different sects) present in the workplace when interacting with each other.

In his book *Sectarianism and Inter-Communal Nation Building in Lebanon*, Hanna Ziadeh discusses the sectarian conflict that has been historically dominant in Lebanon by drawing on an entire corpus of national pacts and constitutional texts; Ziadeh sheds light on different issues which have led the Lebanese in general to their sectarian fanaticism. While Max Weiss focuses on and explores the roots of Shi'i sectarianism by going back to the French Mandate rule when the Shi'i community was deprived from the freedom of participating in political, religious and ideological currents. Drawing the line between the outset of Shi'i collective identity and the rise of political Shi'ism, Weiss changes our understanding of the nature of sectarianism in his book *In the Shadow of Sectarianism.*

In his book *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, Bruce Masters investigates the history of the Christians and Jews in the Ottoman empire and how their identities evolved over four hundred years. As a reaction to Western influences, conflict erupted between Muslims and Christians across the empire. That triggered hostility between Muslims and Christians in the empire and conveyed religious fundamentalism to twentieth and twenty-first century Lebanon. While Ussama Makdisi argues that sectarianism was exploited for political and social purposes by shedding light on how European colonialism and Orientalism contributed to the rise of religious fundamentalism in Lebanon in his book, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire.*

3 METHODOLOGY:

Sects and Careers

This study addresses the effect of sectarianism and intolerance on the productivity of the individual employee as well as on the team work performance in the workplace in Lebanon. In addition, the underlying currents of sectarian harassment among the employees that triggers hostilities will also be investigated. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the perspectives of the Lebanese work force regarding sectarian law and aggravation. The central questions are: Does sectarianism affect the Lebanese citizen's career choice? Does it hinder their personal development? Does it force them to leave their country in pursuit of better opportunities? How do employees perceive the influence of sectarianism and intolerance on their motivations, professional achievement, persistence in the workplace, and aspirations?

These questions were investigated through a qualitative research design that consisted initially of interviews and observations of 100 employees from different social backgrounds and sects. In order to provide context for understanding the participant's perspective, the interview focused on the person's life history. Using an interview consisting of open-ended questions, I focused on the participant's religious background. In this interview, I also asked the persons involved to describe their present experience, their lives and the impact of sectarianism on their career choice.

Because this is an exploratory study, I coded data from interview transcripts and field notes. I returned first to an analysis of interviews from individual participants, as separate cases, and only then considered the wider matter of cross-case analysis. Such a sequence of analytic steps conformed broadly to the suggestions of Glaser and Strauss (1976), who have argued that an understanding of individual cases is the best guarantor for theoretical assertions that are grounded in specific contexts and real-world patterns. Next, I read across interviews, noting similarities and differences in order to identify common themes. Finally, I prepared the data analysis by briefly describing each of the employees, and by using quotes from their interviews, I was able to illustrate common themes as well as atypical responses.

4 ANALYSIS

Citizenship vs. Sectarianism

Each sect in Lebanon controls a council or a ministry that has a significant budget and accords contracts for large projects. Continuous power struggle and rivalry between sects lead to a complete failure in the governance process. Moreover, political institutions fail to play their vital role for the country. By employing their supporters each sect leader ensures the loyalty of his followers who serve as points to pass what he wants in the public administration. Each sect leader with his council or ministry serves particular interests and distributes public funds among his followers through awarded contracts or different other means. In addition, the economic factor helps the sect leader to further consolidate his sectarian chief on the expense of the well being of the country. Intense public and highly medialized political rivalry leads people of different sects to consider themselves as enemies, thus resulting in extreme social fragmentation and creating fertile ground for a civil war.

The country is almost in a complete halt on many important economical sectors, thus ensuing in a high unemployment rate. To compensate sectarian chiefs inject money into their sects through the ministries they control, consequently further enslaving their followers and consolidating their sectarian chief status. Each sect has a portion of the positions and employees are not appointed based on competence.

How much of the excessive public employment is due to equal confessional representation? Studies show that the figure is close to 6 per 1,000 civil servants. Applying this to Lebanon, Dr. Chaaban finds that almost 16% of public employees are an added burden due to sectarianism. The total cost of excessive public sector employment reaches $396 million per year. Revenue collection losses for public utilities are imposed by politicians using confessional pressures to allow their followers not to pay service charges. For this, the water sector loses $67.5 million every year, while the electricity sector loses $150 million yearly due to sectarianism.

5 CONCLUSION

My study not only showed that the Lebanese people's career choice is affected by sectarian banter, but also their future, their hopes and ambitions are obliterated due to sectarianism. Competence is not enough for a Lebanese to secure a job, for he/she needs the support of his/her sect leader to make sure he/she ensures a position whether in the public or the private sector.

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