



UNRISD

UNITED NATIONS
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Lebanese Shi'a and Political Violence

Elizabeth Picard

UNRISD Discussion Paper 42

April 1993

UNRISD Discussion Papers are preliminary documents circulated in a limited number of copies to stimulate discussion and critical comment.

The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency engaging in multidisciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

Current research themes include: Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change; Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of the International Trade in Illicit Drugs; Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change; Integrating Gender into Development Policy; Participation and Changes in Property Relations in Communist and Post-Communist Societies; and Political Violence and Social Movements. UNRISD research projects focused on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development included Rethinking Social Development in the 1990s; Economic Restructuring and Social Policy; Ethnic Diversity and Public Policies; Social Integration at the Grassroots: The Urban Dimension; and The Challenge of Rebuilding War-torn Societies.

A list of UNRISD's free and priced publications
may be obtained by contacting the Reference Centre:

UNRISD • Palais des Nations • 1211 Geneva 10 • Switzerland
Phone +41 (0)22 9173020 • Fax +41 (0)22 9170650
info@unrisd.org • www.unrisd.org

Copyright © UNRISD. Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorization on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to UNRISD, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. UNRISD welcomes such applications.

The designations employed in UNRISD publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNRISD concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The responsibility for opinions expressed rests solely with the author(s), and publication does not constitute endorsement by UNRISD.

ISSN 1012-6511

Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	6
Why the Lebanese Shi'a?	8
Violence as a Political Means	9
Economic transformation and relative deprivation	9
From deprivation to dispossession	12
Communalism against democracy	14
The role of imported violence	16
From Protest to Revolution	17
A search for radical change in a traditional way	18
The Lebanese state: From indifference to collapse	20
Revolutionary insurrection and communitarian warfare	23
War, political violence and terrorism	25
The Culture of Violence	27
Oppression and segmentation	27
Militia groups and civil society	31
Ritual as Meaning	35
The paradigm of Kerbala	37
The creation of a community discourse	40
Back to Politics: Competition between Elites within the State	42
New intellectuals and ambitious mollahs	42
The impact of regional normalization	46
The restoration of the state and the future of Shi'i violence	48
On the future of counter-society	51

Preface

This Discussion Paper attempts an analysis of political violence in Lebanon with a focus on the Shi'i community. The spectacular and widely publicized events most often associated with the recent history of the country - car bombings and the rash of abductions of Western citizens, for example - are revealed as only the most visible manifestations of frustrated attempts by the Lebanese Shi'a to obtain recognition and rights within the state structure.

The first part of the paper considers the historical context of political mobilization and violence within the Shi'i community since the creation of the Lebanese state in 1920. The birth and acceleration of this violence are explained by demographic, sociological, economic, legal and constitutional, as well as strategic and military variables. The combination of these variables, the staggered nature of their respective evolutions, and their impact on the Shi'a explain why members of the community, and organizations acting in its name, resorted to certain types of political violence. Three phenomena in particular are especially significant. First, the Lebanese Shi'a, as a group, was transformed in the space of forty years from an underdeveloped and submissive group to a community capable of rapid economic mobility and social mobilization. Second, the transformation from social mobilization to political mobilization was blocked, however, in part because the Lebanese communitarian system is governed by a set of rigid rules. Consequently, the Shi'a saw their identity reinforced, their borders established, and their mobilization as a "community" strengthened. Third, by using to their own advantage the failure of a new consensus within the Shi'i community and the impossibility of expanded political participation, outside forces intervened and propelled the discourse and practices of the Shi'a towards conflict and violence.

The paper offers a description and analysis of the various acts of political violence in which the Shi'a were implicated from 1974 to the early 1990s. By dividing the acts into three categories - extra-institutional protest in the form of mass demonstrations and protests, revolutionary insurrection (armed struggle) and terrorism - it shows how successive frustrations led to the transition from one form of violence to another: from a violence that was mainly symbolic and verbal in nature to a physical violence committed by armed militia groups, even against civilians. The analysis emphasizes the role of violence in structuring the cohesion and dynamics of the Lebanese Shi'a as a social group.

The paper then considers the phenomenon of violence itself as a means of reviving the past of the Shi'i community and of mobilizing its members. It examines the socio-economic, psychological, military and security aspects of the militia phenomenon which "structured" Lebanese society at the local level during the worst years of war when state order had totally collapsed. To illustrate how collective beliefs and values were used within the Shi'i community, it examines religious discourse as a way of structuring and giving meaning to anti-state and anti-Western political violence. In particular, it analyses the annual *Ashûra* ritual, which evolved from a religious celebration into a political performance as a means of galvanizing collective mobilization.

The paper ends by looking at the recent evolution of the Shi'i movement during the period of reconstruction of the Lebanese state since the end of the war. It considers the choice faced by the Shi'i movement between compromise with the state including the accession to power, or refusal of the path of normalization through withdrawal into a society that at some future date could remobilize.

The study has been prepared within the framework of the UNRISD research programme on political violence and social movements, directed by David Apter. The author, Elizabeth Picard, is a researcher with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris. A specialist on the Arab world, she teaches at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques and at the Université de Paris IV. Her publications on the politics and societies of the Middle East include **Liban: Etat de discord** (1988), **La question Kurde** (1991) and **La nouvelle donne au Moyen-Orient** (1993).

Dharam Ghai, Director
April 1993

Introduction

In the Middle East, indeed throughout the entire Arab-Muslim region stretching eastward from Morocco to the Gulf and from Caucasia down to Sudan, no country offers a better example of political violence than Lebanon. The only exception, it could be argued, is Iran. But the political violence in Iran, under Islamic rule since 1979, is quite specifically state-sponsored violence; whereas in Lebanon the example of the Shi'i community lends itself better to a general theoretical model of political violence. The Lebanese case seems to correspond even more precisely to such a model than a country such as Libya, with its role not only in the internal conflicts of neighbouring countries but in international terrorism as well. It seems to correspond to a model of political violence more precisely than Egypt or Syria, too. In the former country, the violent acts of Islamic militants - such as the assassination of Anwar el-Sadat - had long been a marginal phenomenon in a complex social order that was basically democratic, and in the latter, Islamic opposition forces led a violent civil war against the secularist military regime of Hafiz el-Assad between 1979 and 1982.

Indeed, the example of the Lebanese Shi'a offers a rich variety of characteristics and variables that enable us to construct a paradigm of political violence. Attempts to address political violence in the geo-politically important region of the Middle East have tended to approach the question from either a political economy perspective (though not strictly class-based) or a cultural perspective (though not exactly culturalist).¹ In this paper, we shall go beyond these two perspectives in order to penetrate the internal logic of the actors involved in emancipatory movements: in order to understand a community's moral project and its confrontation with the state, we must interpret tumultuous events in their historic and metaphoric dimensions. First, however, it is indispensable, albeit oversimplified, to examine the variables and circumstances that can help us understand why "men rebel".²

With this aim in mind, the first part of this paper will consider the historical context of political mobilization and violence within the Lebanese Shi'i community since the creation of the Lebanese state in 1920. We will also discuss the Shi'i community in the context of the ultra-liberal, pro-market economy of Lebanon - and particularly Beirut. Furthermore, the specific nature of the country's political system, social structures, and especially its rapid transformation since the Second World War will also be addressed. Regional conflicts - both the Arab-Israeli conflict and that between Israel and the Palestinians - have had tremendous repercussions within the Shi'i community, and will therefore also be considered. Finally, we will discuss the profound impact on the Shi'i community of the Iranian revolution. By doing so, we hope to provide an answer to the question "why" - and "why" only - behind the phenomenon of political violence.

The second part of this paper offers a description and analysis of the various acts of political violence in which the Shi'a have been implicated between 1974 (the year before the "official" outbreak of the Lebanese civil war) and the beginning of the 1990s. It focuses on three particular types of violent acts: first, extra-institutional protest (mass demonstrations and insurrections); second, revolutionary insurrection (armed struggle); and third, terrorist acts. In discussing these three types, we will consider how they are coordinated, how they can be scaled according to various stages, how they change

¹ J. Leca, "L'économie contre la culture dans l'explication des dynamiques politiques", *Bulletin du CEDEJ*, N° 23, 1988.

² T. Gurr, *Why men rebel*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970.

according to time and place, and the nature of possible inversion³ as the actions evolve from one stage to another.

The third part of this paper focuses on violence as a means of actualizing the past of the community, and of mobilizing its members, on a new basis and within new boundaries. The interior dynamics of the Lebanese Shi'a as a community are examined. This approach, which can be called a "political culture" approach, serves to illustrate how political mobilization within the Shi'i community has in many ways been a mobilization of a collective repository of beliefs and values. Because this store of beliefs and values has been in a continual state of creation and recomposition, it must be examined in relation to the local culture.⁴ The ethnic basis of this political culture can be described as "Arab Mediterranean". In the Arab Mediterranean societies often divided into clans or tribes, where action within a code of honor is central, violence can provide a structure. Violence functions as a sort of internal logic, even to the exclusion of social interaction. Our focus on the "militia" phenomenon - examined not only in its socio-economic dimensions but also in relation to military and security questions and to some extent individual and collective psychology - we hope will offer a contribution to the understanding of the specific form of political violence adopted by Lebanese communities in strife. In the Lebanese civil war, the militia groups, in their discourse and actions, were the chief users of violence. Their violence was directed not only at the state, but also aimed at deepening the segmentation of society and thus reinforcing the identity of the community group under their control.

The most important aspect of this political culture is the religious dimension - the topic of the fourth part of this paper - for it is essentially in this dimension that groups find the "mytho-logics" that structure their emancipatory discourse. After the decline of Marxist and nationalist ideologies - which had long been leading popular mobilization against external foreign domination - religious discourse appeared as a new means of popular mobilization and a new way of structuring and giving meaning to anti-state and anti-Western political violence. Despite its contradictions and weaknesses, religious discourse has become the foundation of a new Islamic political order, opposed to the international nation-state order. To analyse the process of popular mobilization, we shall specifically examine the annual *Ashûra* celebration, which for the Lebanese Shi'i community is a privileged moment of retrieval and projection. The *Ashûra* ritual, which serves as a *topos* for group fusion based on faith and an eschatological vision, has been turned into a political performance in which the community's founding traumas⁵ are reversed in order to galvanize collective mobilization.

The fifth and final part of this paper concentrates on the recent evolution of the Shi'i emancipatory movement during reconstruction of the Lebanese state. Since 1991, the Lebanese state has been attempting to regain control over its territory and populations. Confronted with a new national and international environment, the Shi'i movement faces a choice between compromise with the state, which favors accession of part of the Shi'i community to the benefits of power exercised through clientelism, or refusing totally the path of normalization through withdrawal back into a society that, at some future date, could remobilize. The choice between marginalization and future remobilization will ultimately depend to a large extent on the ability of the state to propose solutions for many serious problems such as war, unemployment, underdevelopment, crime and emigration - the very problems that led to the creation of the Shi'i movement.

³ M. Wiewiorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, Fayard, Paris, 1988, Ch. VI "L'inversion".

⁴ C. Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.

⁵ R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, Grasset, Paris, 1972.

Why the Lebanese Shi'a?

It is necessary to express a certain degree of caution at the outset, not so much because of doubts about the validity of our analyses or because we acknowledge the arrogance of pretending to draw conclusions about a social movement whose nature, organization, and objectives impose a certain degree of secrecy. Neither does the theme under discussion pose a semantic problem, even though some theoretical approaches insist that a very wide range of social acts, indeed virtually all social acts, are metaphorically⁶ or literally violent⁷ which would render the term “political violence” redundant. Nor is the problem the fact that violence is *always* a dialectical process to the point where it would be wrong-headed to oppose the idea of “state order” with “disorder” and revolutionary violence. The real question is the pertinence of our choice of object - the Lebanese Shi'a - with respect to the theme of political violence.

There could be some confusion, at once concrete and ideal, between the violence of the war in Lebanon, involving exterior forces, and the “civil” war, in which both sub- and trans-state actors fought against Lebanese state forces and against each other.⁸ How, and to what extent, can we distinguish the events of the war from those which can be described as political violence? What logic and causality link these two phenomena? These questions are particularly crucial when one is examining the Lebanese Shi'i community, as it has been directly involved, for obvious geo-strategic reasons, in the violent confrontation with Israel. Contrary to the events in Italy in the 1970s or in Northern Ireland today, Lebanon - and especially southern Lebanon inhabited by the Shi'a - was drawn into an international conflict (since 1968, 1973, or 1975 depending on the source) that gave birth to an armed resistance which was “Lebanese” if not “national”. Should violent actions, such as hostage-taking or bomb attacks, be considered “acts of war” (said to be committed in the name of a “struggle for liberation”) or “acts of terrorism”, the ultimate expression of political violence? In this paper, we will highlight various ambiguities and perversions, not only in acts undertaken, but also in the discourse that gives these acts meaning. One encounters, as we shall see, some difficulty when attempting to treat together the two adjoining questions of war and political violence, as each inevitably spills over into the other.

We must strongly reaffirm - contrary to the prejudices spread by Orientalists and supported by Islamists - that there is nothing intrinsic to the Lebanese Shi'i community (or to Muslims generally) that leads to the conclusion that this social group is inclined towards political violence. Historical, spatial and economic contexts, as well as the constant cultural changes within the Shi'i community itself, have created a great variety of experiences which preclude any fixed or immutable definition of the Shi'a. Moreover, studies of other ethnic and religious groups in the region,⁹ as well as our own study of the mobilization of the Maronites by the Lebanese Forces militia within the context of the

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_21695

