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The rebirth of the Lebanese identity in the philosophy of the Lebanese intellectual Samir Kassir

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Abstract: During the last years of the Syrian control of Lebanon, Samir Kassir was undoubtedly one of the prominent Lebanese journalists who fought against it and tried to more distinctly define the fragile and broken Lebanese nationality. Kassir was mainly active in political comment and analysis and tried to introduce new and fresh ideas in order to awaken the Lebanese people from their ongoing lack of political consciousness, coma and social degeneration. He tried to bring about a shift in political views that originated in the people, Lebanon's grass roots, rather than try to change the elite and corrupt political framework. His political and intellectual activities offered the Lebanese a new and promising national agenda that, supported by other similarly concerned intellectuals, might have given the Lebanese new hope in their turmoil. The article examines Kassir's part in building the new hybrid Lebanese identity and argues that Kassir, as a modern Lebanese intellectual, first diagnosed the core problems involved in creating this Lebanese identity and later suggested his own understanding of what such a hybrid, reconstructed identity should be.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Samir Kassir, who dealt bravely with the most sensitive issues regarding the Lebanese identity and the role of Syria in Lebanon, was one of the most promising writers in modern Lebanon. Along with his journalist writing he also wrote several books and publicist columns which, all together, expressed his innovative agenda and beliefs. In this article, the writer wishes to shed some light on the fragile Lebanese identity, Kassir's understanding of this identity and his suggestions about how to see it, create it, preserve it and renew it. His unique, yet innovative and pioneering vision, paved the way for other Lebanese and Arab intellectuals to find the courage to express their own unique or controversial visions and to encourage the Lebanese to seek and embrace their own Arab, Lebanese, collective, ethnic or eclectic identities.

1. Introduction

One of the most intriguing and colorful intellectual figures in Lebanon in recent years was, undoubtedly, Samir Kassir. Kassir, who was of Syrian-Palestinian origin, lived most of his adult life in Lebanon but also studied at the Sorbonne University in Paris where he wrote his doctoral thesis in modern history. Kassir was also one of the founders of the democratic leftist movement and was a member of its executive council. After his studies in Paris he returned to live in Lebanon where he expressed clear, incisive nationalist ideas about the Lebanese identity, on the one hand, and sharp criticism against the Syrian regime and its proxies in Lebanon, on the other. Kassir expressed his ideas regularly in the local journals and newspapers such as the well-known *al-Nahar* and even published a number of books, among them "Being Arab" (in the original Arabic—*In Takun Arabia).*

After the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the exit of the Syrians from Lebanon at the beginning of 2005, Samir Kassir was himself assassinated in his car near his home in the Beirut he loved so much and about which he often wrote. This paper will examine the national motifs Kassir expressed in his writings and which apparently were a matter of concern to those who dispatched his assassins. The article will discuss Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" theory in order to categorize Kassir's ideas about Lebanese print-nationalism at the time. The purpose of this paper is to examine the question of whether the Lebanese Arab identity, on the one hand, and the Lebanese identity that Kassir wanted to sharpen and nurture, on the other, in fact produced a significant differentiation in the nationalistic and independent thinking of Lebanon's citizens and whether this ultimately led to their demand to separate themselves from Syria to achieve their independence.

2. The spiritual role played by modern intellectuals in changing society's agenda

It is important to understand Samir Kassir's role as an intellectual whose words and activities somehow initiated a political process that would finally create a more precise view of the political situation in Lebanon and sharpen the Lebanese national identity. There is a theoretical approach that might provide us with a better understanding of the role intellectuals play in shifting people's mindsets and in initiating social protests and revolutions. This theory argues that "One of the intellectuals' roles is the politicization of intellectual Ideas ... —the shifting of intellectual activity from the world of ideas into the political arena"; and [A]nother function of the intellectual is the sharpening of Civilian Awareness ... and he, in one way or another, acts as a bridge between the new political authority and society.

According to this theory there are three types of intellectuals that are active before, during and after social protests:

(1) The disconnected intellectuals who do not take part in the people's daily lives and, in fact, act like laboratory workers who have no contact with their research subjects but still try to reach better solutions to their problems in their work and ideas.

(2) The involved intellectual who lives a civilian life with his/her supporters and admirers and learns, and experiences what is needed and not needed for the new reality. His/her personal experiences may be prejudiced but they can be easily absorbed by the public since it feels that he/she feels and understands its difficulties and experiences.

(3) The "eternal intellectuals" who have set forth an agenda and philosophy that have been initiated and have brought about civilian changes that finally end in revolution and the establishment of a new order. We can also add here this kind of intellectual chooses independence and avoids political life. Our conclusion regarding this type is that "His reputation, position as a dignified intellectual is kept, and he has the advantage of being able to remain impartial and unprejudiced" (Cohen, 2014, pp. 36–38).

In order to achieve a better understanding of Kassir's outlook on nationalism, we will use Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" to see if they contain any similar effects and terminology that might help us reshape Kassir's intellectual vison of Lebanese nationalism. Anderson, however, actually uses the word "imagined" since there is no one clear definition of nationalism and it has "cultural artefacts of a particular kind". For him nationalism was something "modular, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains" (Anderson, 1991, p. 48). History, national-consciousness, cultural roots, geography, print-nationalism, print-capitalism, print languages etc. all together (among other things) are the components used to establish an imagined community, i.e. imagined nationalism (Anderson, 1991, pp. 49–58). These components will also be identified in Kassir's writing with the way they are used and understood locally by the Lebanese.

By offering two main approaches to the use of intellectual and nationalist terminology that can help us understand Kassir's philosophy, we will see that we can certainly claim that Kassir was an intellectual of the type who was both an "involved intellectual" and an "eternal" one. His being an involved intellectual can be easily proved while his being the eternal intellectual might only be proved over the distance of time. At present, after his death, Kassir's writings and deeds as an intellectual have been receiving more and more attention than they ever did during his lifetime.

3. Parallel lines never meet?—Nationalism and Lebanese identity vs. the establishment of an independent Lebanon

Lebanese Nationalism really depends on whom we ask to define it. Most would agree that those who created this nationality were the Marronites who wished to justify Lebanon's separate existence and placed weight upon the importance of the region of the Mountain of Lebanon and the Lebanese autonomy that existed between 1585 and 1840. Lebanese nationalism, as we understand it today, only began during the first half of the 19th century with the beginning of the national history of Lebanon. Since Lebanon was under Ottoman rule at this time its identity was not expressed and had to wait until a later period in order to manifest itself like the other identities in the region. The arrival of foreign forces, at first mostly missionaries and later western powers (Britain and France), spurred the appearance of national feelings that moved between the strengthening of an ethnic identity, on the one hand, and the expression of an Arabic common denominator, on the other. The end of the Ottoman Empire led to the beginning of the growth of new national identities in the Arab regions (today Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan) and, with the establishment of the mandates and protectorates, these identities began to strengthen and crystallize as separate national identities.

A concrete expression of the growth of the Lebanese identity began with the perceptions developed regarding the states of Lebanon and Syria by the French on 1 September 1920 (Zamir, 1993, p. 11) when they entered into the complex of identities and ethnic groups that made up these countries and wanted to administer the area within the framework of the system of "divide and rule". Since this system never proved itself (also because of the increased number of Shia and Druze rebellions in the Mount Lebanon and Mount Druze regions) the French had to use this system (divide and rule) for ethnic separation that would allow the different ethnic groups to express their relative power in the emerging politics. According to the only population census that existed in the state in 1932, the Christians (all denominations) were the majority in the state as they represented 51% of the population. After them came the Sunni Muslims with 23% followed by the Shias with 20% and, at the end of the list, were the Druze with 7% who now became the seventh largest in size despite the fact that, in the past, they had been third largest.

One might have expected that the results of the population census would have redirected the political thinking but, in fact, the census produced the opposite result. Now the different ethnic groups saw this as the opening shot in their battle to strengthen their power at the expense of other ethnic groups because they believed that their true strength was greater than what had supposedly been shown in the census. The establishment of a greater Lebanon created a split in the nation not

only from a demographic point of view but also politically and this was something that created difficulties for any communal or political unification (Zamir, 1993, pp. 106–110).

Other attempts at unification of the national identity took place during the Second World War with the British returning the control of Syria and Lebanon to the Free French government from the hands of the German Nazi proxy—the Vichy regime. This attempt was expressed in the "National Pact" of 1943 that, at least in its name, aimed at creating a unification of identity for all the ethnic groups. Against all expectations the treaty created differentiation between the two main forces fighting over the real identity—the Maronite-Christians and the Sunni-Muslims (Zamir, 1993, p. 222). In this context it is important to note that, in spite of the treaty's problems, it did pave the way to establishing the independence of Lebanon during that year and, in fact, led to the exodus of the foreign forces from the state which left the local politics in the hands of the Lebanese alone. Now, with the exodus of the foreign forces and the creation of a political model that had a Christian identity,[1] the other Islamic ethnic groups felt that their relative power was not being expressed (Zisser, 2009, pp. 39–40). This turmoil and the struggle over identity, or at least the image of it, the question of Palestine, the establishment of the "Arab League" and, ultimately, the establishment of a United Arab Community— all of these led to the First Civil War in 1958 (Zamir, 1993, p. 223).

As noted above, on the background of all these things, the First Civil War broke out in 1958. To the catalysts of the reasons mentioned above can be added the controversial activities of the ruling president Camille Chamoun in his campaign to be elected to another term in office. The Civil War mainly took place between the Leftist camp, mainly made up of Muslims who supported the idea of Pan-Arabism, and the president's camp, which was mostly pro-western and mostly supported by the Christian groups. In July 1958 American marine forces landed and this led to a truce and the finding of a solution to the political crisis in the country. Chamoun resigned from the presidency and his place was taken by General Fouad Shihab. In contrast to Chamoun, Shihab enjoyed prestige and the respect of both many of the Muslims and the Christians because of the way he functioned during the crisis (Romero, 2012).

It was Fouad Shihab who really tried hard to create a Lebanese identity which, for him, meant–loyalty to the flag. As a Christian, he wanted to come closer to the Muslims and weaken the factors of traditional power thus creating a kind of Lebanese unity.[2] This, however, was not enough since, at the end of the First Civil War, Lebanon entered into an interim period mainly characterized by growth and prosperity but, unfortunately, this positive development ended in 1975 when the situation deteriorated into the outbreak of the Second Civil War (1975–1990) (Zamir, 1993, p. 47) which caused people to lose belief in statehood and the political system. Loyalty, they felt, should be directed first to the family and to the sect, rather than to the state.[3] During this seventeen-year period Lebanon underwent many changes. On the one hand there was increased urbanization, the rise of the Sunni secular left, the growth of the Palestinian community (Fatahland) (Najem, 2012, p. 2) and, on the other hand, the political-social advancement of the Shia ethnic group following the arrival of the religious leader, Mussa al-Sadr (Ajami, 1986, p. 22, 91).

On the one hand there were the internal changes in Lebanon, that is the growth of the Shia community, the oppressive Palestinian presence and the political battles and, on the other hand, the regional changes and interference of foreign patrons in the internal politics, as well as the Palestinian struggle against Israel, Egypt's reduced power—accompanied by the dying out of the Pan-Arab vision, the struggle between Egypt and Syria, Libya and Saudi-Arabia and all of them together against Jordan. All of these things together and singly affected Lebanon and caused turmoil that would find its expression in the outbreak of the Second Civil War in 1975 (Ajami, 1986, pp. 23, 189–190; Vatikiotis, 1984).

This war which re-ignited different rivalries again led Lebanon into chaos that would continue at least until 1990. In this arena every ethnic group that was fighting had at least one veteran patron and those who didn't, like the Shias, were brought into the imposed, but necessary, embrace of Syria.

Before Syria entered Lebanon, however, it had to declare that it was not the ally of anyone in the war but quite the opposite since its interest was to separate the hawks. The Syrians knew that their entry into Lebanon could not be imposed because of their justified concern that such an entry would arouse the Arab world and the west against it.[4] Syria understood that it had to enter Lebanon surreptitiously in order to pacify the powers that were hostile to it both in the Arab League and in Lebanon. To achieve this, the Syrians asked the Marronites to request assistance and, after the Christians agreed to the Syrian plan, Syria changed its position and supported the Palestinians, their proxies the Shias and even the Sunnis. Despite all this the role of Syria was viewed as a stabilizing and steadying factor that was improving the situation and, according to Yosef Olmert: "It was, paradoxically, the Syrians who represented legitimacy, the attempt at conciliation and the inter-Arab agreement to stabilize the situation in Lebanon" (Avi-Ran, 1986, pp. 26–27; Olmert, 1987).

This section concludes with the understanding that Lebanon has found itself in an imbroglio of identities, without the ability to reach agreement on one clear identity. The Lebanese deserve credit for trying but they have failed because each separate ethnic identity has been fighting the others and the Syrians have been supporting all the fighting camps and their identities according to what benefits them. While it is true that the Syrian control over Lebanon, together with the support of the Arab world, has strengthened the Lebanese identity this has only been the case for a short time. While, in this context, Kassir did not deal thoroughly with the causes of the civil wars and their results he did, however, touch upon their long-term consequences which were the fragility of Lebanese nationalism, and Syria's deeper involvement in the state (among other issues of course).

4. A brief biography of Samir Kassir

In order to understand what the enigmatic and complicated character of the journalist Samir Kassir was one has to understand issues and events in the brief story of his life. A biographical description of Kassir will make it possible for us to understand the period and atmosphere in which he grew up and developed into becoming one of the most influential journalists and publicists during this period in Lebanon. Apart from being a talented journalist with a wide audience of readers, from "common people" to intellectuals, what Kassir wrote also aroused anger and disputes among other readers who did not always agree with his caustic articles.

Kassir was born on 4 May 1960 to a Lebanese father and a Palestinian- Lebanese mother and spent most of his childhood and adulthood in the *Asrafia* neighborhood of Beirut. He went to school at the François Lycee and, in 1981 at the age of twenty-one, six years after the Civil War in Lebanon and one year after Israel's invasion of Lebanon, he moved to Paris to continue his studies towards a second degree. After three years of intensive study Kassir was awarded an MA in Political Philosophy in 1984 from the Sorbonne (*Université* Paris) but his passion for learning was not satisfied and he continued on at this university towards a doctorate in contemporary history which he completed in 1990. Despite the fact that he was up to his neck in his studies in the French capital Kassir succeeded in publishing his political ideas in the journals *al-Hayat* and *L'Orient Le Jour* and this was because Lebanese political matters interested him even though, and perhaps despite, his being in the Parisian diaspora. He also wrote in *Le Monde Diplomatique* and even published a number of articles in the newspaper *The Seventh Day* and the French edition of *The Journal of Palestinian Studies.* In 1992, Kassir, together with the Syrian historian and publisher Farouk Mardam Bey, published a two volume book in French on the subject of French policy in the Arab Levant especially in regard to the *naqba* (catastrophe) and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

A year later, in 1993, Kassir returned to Beirut in order to teach in the Political Science Department at St. Joseph University and, in addition to his activity as a lecturer, he began to write an opinion column in *al-Nahar* and even became the manager of the paper's publications. In 1994 Kassir published his second book in French *The War in Lebanon,* which was based upon his doctoral thesis, in which he analyzed the dynamics of the conflict as well as the complex relations that existed between the internal and foreign factors during 1975–1982. Ironically, this book was only translated into Arabic in 2008 (after his death). Two years later, in 1995, Kassir set up a monthly called

L'Orient-Express which quickly became an important and respected cultural journal in Lebanon but the publication of the journal ceased in 1998 because of economic problems. Parallel to his setting up the above journal he also established a publishing company called "al-Layali" which published a number of books and articles.

Kassir published three books between 2003 and 2004 one of which dealt with the history of Beirut and was translated into Arabic and English. This book described the history of Beirut, its cultural life, economy, the families, its urban development and the role it plays in Lebanon. The second book *Democracy in Syria and the Independence of Lebanon* was also published in Arabic and focused on the connection between the transition to democracy in Syria and the independence of Lebanon. The third book *'Askar 'ala min,* which was also published in Arabic, was actually a collection of articles that had already been published in *al-Nahar* which describe the contrast between the principles of freedom and republican values and the political role of the security mechanisms.

At the beginning of 2003, between writing a book and articles in the above newspapers, Kassir participated in the establishment of the Democratic Left Movement (DLM) and already in 2004 Kassir was part of the movement's leadership. His articles and other writings had a great influence on the movement's discussions about the independence of Lebanon and, in parallel, about the control of the *Ba'ath* party in Syria. His writings also made a contribution to discussions about other things such as secularity, the rule of law and social justice for the Lebanese people.

On 14 February 2005, after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, the ex-prime minister, Kassir began to take an active part in the wide protest against and great opposition to the hold that the Syrian security apparatus had over Lebanon (as will be discussed later in the article). Kassir called these uprisings "intifadhas of independence" in order to emphasize the patriotic nature of the struggle. His provocative and reproving articles in *al-Nahar* became the strongest voice of the "intifadhas of independence" and, together with this, Kassir started to make speeches to the press, the politicians and students in the *Shuhadaa'* (martyrs) Square where he tried to initiate and advance ideas and proposals that would lead to the rehabilitation of the state and its freedom.

The articles and ideas of Kassir that were published in *al-Nahar* at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium are even today viewed as being the most courageous and provocative writings published against the Syrian regime in Lebanon, the rule of the ex-president Émile Lahoud, and against the functioning of the security apparatus. These articles enraged the head of General Security General Jamil Sid and led to threats against his life, harassment and the confiscation of his passport at the Beirut international airport in April 2001 (*China Daily*, 2005; Samir Kassir Foundation, n.d.; Young, 2010, pp. 17–23).

5. Kassir's Lebanese vs. Syrian-Palestinian identities—the case of hybrid identities

It is difficult to exactly point out when Kassir began to discuss the question of national identity, both with himself and with his readers, especially in light of the fact noted above that he was a person of Syrian- Palestinian origin who was living in Lebanon. He was not the only one that had such an identity but, despite this, he was among the few in his time that dared to discuss the issue of identity in direct public confrontations with the objects of his criticism—the Syrians and the Lebanese. It is important to point out that Kassir viewed the subject of nationality from a wide theoretical perspective in his attempts to answer the questions about Arab identity as a whole and not specifically Lebanese, Syrian or Palestinian. In any case he had to declare his national intentions in light of the fact that he was living in a multi- ethnic country that was being controlled by another foreign Arab country for a long period of time.

As aforementioned Kassir often talked about the Arab identity as he understood it, especially in light of the fact that he was a person with a Syrian-Palestinian identity who was living in Lebanon and had lived for more than a few years in France while he was studying. As he wrote: "Even when he goes to Europe or the Arabian Gulf (Persian) a Lebanese person is full of a mixture of pride,

passion, curiosity, doubt and fear". Kassir goes on and says that the consciousness of that same person with a Lebanese identity becomes sharper especially in light of the Arab social transparency that the Lebanese exile apparently can see only when he is in the diaspora. He writes: "That same person (the Lebanese) will quickly notice that the feeling of fear that the exile has will not only cause him to outwardly express what he has heard about a series of bombings but will also cast doubt upon the concept 'Lebanese politician' whoever that politician is".

In this context when the Lebanese exile experiences the feeling of independence that is imaginary in an independent Arab state then, according to Kassir: "This same person (the Lebanese who is in another independent Arab state) might find himself forced to renew his understanding of the subject of independence in the way that follows his direct political dimension especially when at some time he returns to his everyday activities that take place after those events. It is only then that he begins to feel the disappointment that confirms to him the everyday politics that does not grasp the achievement that they (the same politicians) hoped to achieve" (Kassir, 2005e). In other words Kassir is trying to say that the Lebanese does not feel the need for Lebanese independence when he is in Lebanon but that, when he is outside his country, he understands how much this independence is lacking for him.

Kassir began to give expression to these insights in his weekly publications in the local newspapers in Lebanon and, beginning in the middle of the 1990s, he became especially famous because of his weekly Friday column in *al-Nahar*. It was in his articles in this newspaper and in his public appearances that Kassir attacked the hegemonic rule of Syria in Lebanon and, in contrast with other Lebanese nationalists, he supported the wider point of view about democracy and freedom not only in Lebanon but in Syria and the rest of the Arab world as well. Kassir's support of Arab democracy and freedom was not to demonstrate that he was merely a Pan-Arab nationalist but one who came from the international leftist school of thought—and this was expressed in his determined opposition to both nationalistic chauvinism and dictatorship and repression (McCormack, 2006; Who is Samir Kassir, n.d.).

From Kassir's perspective it was actually the end of the civil war in 1990 that also brought about the loss of any chance that the Lebanese people would arise in protest. The perpetuation of Syria's presence in the country created deep despair in the Lebanese nationalists and the loss of faith in Lebanon ever being an independent state with no foreign control. In his words: "In 2003, thirteen years after the almost total destruction of the chances of renewing the face of the country, sometimes planned and sometimes random, (the almost total destruction), of replenishing the souls of the citizens, whoever they are (following the above) in a start and stop fashion, they want to surrender their right to take part in the political processes of the country. [This surrender] has been an act of despair and this was an opportunity that not only wasted the beautiful dream but also denied the citizens the right to dream and that was because of those in powerful positions (the pro-Syrian politicians) who, up until now, have tried to distance themselves from reality" (Kassir, 2004).

In contrast to the feeling of despair described in Kassir's words above he came out with a call for encouragement or, in his words, "the declaration of a dream (of independence for Lebanon)" in which he spoke in the name of the Lebanese people, that same people, he said, who want to quickly realize the vision of independence. In his declaration of his dream he issued a heartfelt call for independence in these words: "We the Lebanese citizens signed below, since we have clearly understood that the ideological, political and ethnic differences sometimes justify our negative world view, have also perfectly understood that our dream for a renewed country has remained very strong in order to solve (the problems of) these differences. Our whole dream is only the hope and belief in a better tomorrow. Our whole dream is a state that can use these differences as a source of strength for inclusion, for a country without selfishness and ethnicity and tribal constraints" (Kassir, 2004).

According to Kassir independence was involved giving freedom to the secular and non-sectarian voices in the country, those voices that were not limited or obligated to some ethnic group or

another. Together with this these voices were, at the same time, to be obliged to lead a process to- wards pro-independence which, of course, would be "not in the obsessive meaning of a passion for independence but more like not being connected to the Syrian opposition". He thought that the Lebanese had to look at and adopt new foundations upon which the country could build its inde- pendence or, at least, adopt a model that showed what political control was in the country. In a situ- ation like this, after establishing internal security, "Lebanon will not see any problem with having a special relationship with Syria," but quite the opposite. Kassir thought that perhaps one should con- sider a confederate unification with Syria but should definitely "not (accept) a situation in which Lebanon remains an admirer of Syria and under its control" (Badran, 2004).

One can conclude from this that, because of his intellectual and ideological complexity, Kassir thought it correct to express his political view which actually redefined the subject of Lebanese in- dependence. His call was a call that crossed boundaries since Lebanese independence would not be anything that could fill the Arab lack of a measure of independence since this independence would have to be introduced throughout the whole Arab region. In this Kassir, in fact, on the one hand ar- gues against the Syrians and the Lebanese government and, no less important, against the Lebanese people since the subject of independence was something that had to be worked for and thus one had to motivate the nation towards an ideological awakening that would quickly become an unam- biguous demand for independence from all those dealing with the matter.

6. The hatred and hostility towards Syria as a basis for nurturing Kassir's identity

As is well-known and already mentioned in earlier chapters Kassir was known to be one of the most prominent opponents of the Syrian army's control of Lebanon and the nature of Bashir Assad's re- gime in particular (*Memri*, 2005). Kassir was undoubtedly the first to warn that the "intifadhas of independence" would not last for long after the Syrian army left Lebanon. He suggested this be- cause, in his view, the intifadha was characterized by a lack of any political basis that could lead to a political and economic reform, to internal changes of the system and to a real attempt to achieve a political reconciliation. Kassir called this intifadha an "intifadha within an intifadha", meaning that the popular struggle would continue to grow while preserving the political intentions and the decla- rations that initiated the intifadha.

Despite his unambiguous views against the Syrian regime in Lebanon and against the top down rule, Kassir also opposed all the forms of racism in Lebanon against the Syrian population. In his articles and speeches in the "*Shuhadaa'* Square" (Martyrs Square) he clearly and continuously called upon the Lebanese people "not to mix up the Syrian regime and the intelligence forces of those controlling both Lebanon and Syria with the Syrian people, workers, intellectuals and others" (Samir Kassir Foundation, n.d.).

As earlier noted Kassir often expressed criticism of the Syrian regime and this can be found in his many articles in *al-Nahar*. In one such article he expressed criticism of the Syrian control of Lebanon and called for the application of the UN resolution 1559.[5] As a journalist who held very firm ideas Kassir claimed: "I have to add that my criticism is not necessarily ethical and I also do not intend to make the Syrian opponents feel that they owe something to the Lebanese because our press acts as a basis for presenting their ideas." Kassir comments: "It is impossible to understand Syrian politics without taking into consideration what Syria has done to Lebanon over a quarter of a century" (Young, 2004).

In order to understand the above Syrian politics Kassir tried to characterize the complex relation- ship between Syria and Lebanon and argued that the Syrian presence in Lebanon was not necessar- ily viewed as being taken over or conquered and, on the other hand, that this conquest was also not a voluntary union between two sovereign states. He further argued that Lebanon was not, and never had been a protectorate of Syria but was more a state like those in Europe under the control of the Soviet Union. In fact, according to Kassir, it was possible to see this presence also as "a form of pro- tection similar to the Mafia" and this was because Lebanon was important to Syria and acted as an

important strategic zone. In addition to the strategic advantage there was also the control of the Syrian elites in cooperation with their Lebanese associates both of whom together sometimes plundered and illegally exploited the economy of Lebanon that was anyway very shaky.

In regard to this Kassir was quite clear that the present situation could not continue for long and that in his opinion the situation only harmed the strength of the Lebanese civil society. According to him what made the present situation possible were two variables that helped maintain the status quo of the relations between the states. The first variable was the internal inclusion by the Syrian regime—in other words the Syrian regime's understanding that Lebanon was an inseparable part of Syria. This was mainly expressed during the period of rule by Hafez al-Assad. The second variable was that Syria stopped maintaining the "silent conspiracy that enveloped the Syrian's taking control over Lebanon at the beginning of 1976". This conspiracy, he said, ceased to exist and established itself as an accomplished fact in the period after the war (after 1990) when it also received American acquiescence.

This American acknowledgement also, however, finally came to an end when the American president George Bush (the father) decided to impose sanctions on Syria because of its presence in Lebanon (1991). Despite Kassir's determined opposition to Syria he also opposed the principle of one-sided sanctions that the government of the American president Bush imposed on the Syrian regime. On the other hand, Kassir thought that the steps taken by Syria in the framework of its soul searching and the agreement about the renewal of Lebanese sovereignty in fact opened a "new page" despite the fact that it was against the private desire of the Syrian Baath party.

Kassir was, however, not one of those who were afraid to direct criticism at the Syrian presidential palace. According to Kassir: "Qasionology (the nickname for Mount Qasion the hill in Damascus where the presidential palace is) was no longer any safer than Kremlinology (named after the Kremlin in Russia). This uncertainty was the result of a lack of transparency in Syrian politics together with the internal confusion in the country about the inheritance of Bashar (al-Assad) which resulted in nobody knowing exactly who was to be responsible. "It was quite clear to Kassir that Bashar's pride would not allow him to admit this, or anything else that would threaten his rule, except, perhaps 'the shadow of his father- Hafez el-Assad. He wrote that the Syrian rulers were so lazy, unconfident and tainted that' nobody has the power to change anything"(Young, 2004). In fact, Kassir claimed, Bashar, in contrast to his father who carried out a revolution against the neo-Baath regime, inherited the regime and did not bring about any far-reaching changes to it (Kassir, 2005f).

7. Samir Kassir vs. the Lebanese president Lahoud

The stinging language of the journalist Samir Kassir was not only aimed at Syria and its president but also at the high centers of power in the state, powers which he argued led the Syrian policy in Lebanon. The existence of these political powers, in spite of their Lebanese identity, caused Kassir to come out against them and, perhaps because of this, to pay for it with his life. According to Kassir, during the period when President *Émile* Lahoud was in power (1998–2007) Lebanon in fact became a nation with obsessive security. He even claimed that "It was during his rule (Lahoud's) that Lebanon began to March towards being a regime like the Syrian Baath regime … (a situation in which) security people saw the citizens as enemies or, in the best case, as children who needed to be controlled".

During this period, from 1998 onwards (actually until after Kassir's death), Kassir argued that individual liberties that were sacred to Lebanese citizens, and which had been achieved with much bloodshed, had reached the point under Lahoud's rule where "... liberty and the freedom of expression became limited in a very serious way". Kassir admitted and confessed that, perhaps, he was being politically incorrect but he could not find anything positive in Lahoud's period in office. He wrote: "The liberation of the south (South Lebanon in 2000) was also the result of the resistance (by Hizbullah) and not the result of Lahoud's actions. Even then (at the time of the liberation) Lahoud and those close to him succeeded in wasting (politically and internationally) this achievement."

Kassir continued to be amazed at why Lahoud was trying to hold on to power in such an obsessive and uncompromising way and said that perhaps this was: "because opposition to renewing Lahoud's mandate would, in fact, arouse the Lebanese people against him." This, in fact, was a prophecy that finally came true (Young, 2004).

Kassir did not give up. In his articles in the newspapers and in his speeches he continued to come out directly against Lahoud and his frustration led him to write an article in *al-Nahar* in which he argued that "the world remains the same since the extension of Lahoud's period in office" (which he opposed as seen above) and that this term was in fact a "tragedy", although a minor one when compared to the tragedy Syria was leading Lebanon towards. This was the way Kassir, in fact, expressed his measure of criticism against the powerful factors in the country (*Memri,* 2005). The expression of his belief that all of Syrian politics and its relations with Lebanese politics was, in fact, mafia style politics was not a one time, unimportant thing; and this same Syrian and Lebanese "mafia" that he came out against could not permit him to continue and dictate the public mood in Lebanon. To prevent this, they had to do something.

8. The pro-Syrian Lebanese vs. Kassir's memory and heritage

The preceding chapters discussed the hostile and stinging criticism expressed in Kassir's articles against the Syrian regime and its close and ideological partners in Lebanon. None of them went unheard and gained the attention of his political and ideological enemies. It is difficult to say that Kassir was naive in thinking that these things, as extreme as they were, would be so seriously related to in one way or another by the subjects of his criticism. The idea that he was a journalist living in a pluralistic and relatively liberal Arab country, when compared to others, apparently led him to believe that he was immune to harm and malice. It turns out that this was not the case.

The beginning of the campaign against Kassir began with the confiscation of his passport and, in fact, his freedom of movement from one place to another (Kassir, 2006/2013, pp. viii–ix). In his words: "My passport was taken from me on the basis of baseless accusations made by foreign agents (the Syrians) for forty days, literally around the clock." Before even being taken in for questioning or arrest, however, Kassir sometimes felt that "two or three cars were following me and I don't even know why." Kassir goes on and says: "I have reason to think that they (Syrian intelligence) at first wanted to do me harm. Anyway I identified these 'followers' fairly early and this was before they confiscated my passport, and I contacted official people that were not directly connected with the army (which, in fact, controlled the security services) so they could intervene." Kassir concluded from these actions by the Syrians that, apparently, "the aim of the agents was to isolate me". From his point of view, the situation in which he was subject to constant harassing surveillance "was very vexing when people were watching and following you in cafes, restaurants or in your or your friends' homes."

Kassir claimed that the strength that caused him to continue expressing his criticism against the Syrians and their "house of puppets" in Lebanon came from "the solidarity people expressed towards me ... (it) allowed (me) to initiate things and come out against (the Syrians)" and added "(because) I have to say that I had the privilege to receive civil support from opposition factors in Syria who even signed a manifest supporting me." According to him this was "the first time that support like this came from Damascus to Beirut, more than the opposite."

Ultimately this surveillance and the arrest, together with the suspension of his passport by the Lebanese security forces, all were intended to prevent Kassir from appearing on television and thus prevent his audience from hearing his criticism of both the Syrian and Lebanese authorities. Finally, however, the security forces left him alone (Al-Bawaba, 2005; Young, 2004), and apparently abandoned him to be easy prey for the Syrian security forces which led to the silencing of his voice—this time forever.

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9. The murder of the Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri

On February 14th 2005 an explosion shook the streets of Beirut. Rafiq al-Hariri, the prime minister of Lebanon, a figure who was admired but was also controversial, the leader of the Sunni community and a figure of great influence in Lebanon, was murdered together with his bodyguards while they were passing by the St. George Hotel in Beirut (Harris, 2013; Najem, 2012, p. 71). Lebanese politics immediately attributed the murder to people high up in the Syrian intelligence (Kassir, 2005b) and even the talk in the streets of Lebanon could not find any other way than to blame Syria for the murder (Kassir, 2005a). In reality this murder was the final act in the tense battle over the control of Lebanon in which, already from the year 2000, Hariri had been involved battling the past president of Lebanon and sworn enemy *Émile* Lahoud, past commander of the army, and Bashar Assad's Syrian regime (Blanford, 2006, p. 7).

Hariri's murder had significant and immediate consequences, the first being that this murder caused profound rifts in Lebanese society, split the political system into two and fanned the flames of communal passions in the state. It seemed, at least at that stage, that the tense struggle between the Syrian government and the Lebanese would cool down and even cease for some time but, in fact, the opposite was the case. The second was that the murder led to Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon after thirty years of occupation and, perhaps because of this, turned Lebanon into an additional arena for the Sunni-Shia; Muslim-Christian-Druze conflict in the Middle East. This conflict, however, had already been ignited just after the end of the first civil war, but here, it was becoming sharper although it still lacked Syrian incitement.

10. The Cedar Revolution—*Thawrat al-Arz*—a questionable beginning

It was quite clear to all involved that the main accusation for the murder of the Sunni Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri should, first and foremost, be directed at the Syrians and their collaborators the President Émile Lahoud and the Syrian security commanders under his authority. In contrast to other political murders in the region this murder of Hariri reverberated greatly in Lebanon, in all the countries throughout the Middle East and even throughout the world. In Lebanon itself the streets were filled with demonstrators who were not only Sunnis but Lebanese from all ethnic groups. They called for the immediate resignation of the Christian president Émile Lahoud and even dared to call for the expulsion of the Syrian forces from Lebanon. In contrast to such protests in the past this demonstration and the pressure actually led to something and, on 28 February 2005, the Lebanese government resigned after it was accused of being the puppet of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Following the resignation of the Lebanese government and strong international pressure on the Syrian president he announced the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon (Kassir, 2005h; Zisser, 2009, p. 246). The civil unrest among all the ethnic groups in Lebanon caused the Arab tourists in the country to immediately leave out of the fear that Lebanon was on the brink of another civil war (Kassir, 2005c). This was how, in the spring of 2005, after thirty years of Syrian control of Lebanon the Lebanese citizens regained the independence that they had so longed for (Zisser, 2009, p. 241).

It is important to note that Kassir in his articles remained faithful to his journalistic tradition and even published Syria's claim that it was not involved in the murder of al-Hariri (Kassir, 2005d) even though, of course, he was one of the central accusers of Syria.

11. Syria's withdrawal and Kassir's prophecy

Samir Kassir also responded quickly to the hasty withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon since this was one of the things he had been waiting for most of his adult life. "There has not been enough said about Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon." Kassir innocently wrote and asked: "Does this (the withdrawal) come from the fact that the event was too good to be true—or because of the (Syrian) security network remaining in the country?" Kassir wanted to enjoy the Syrian withdrawal since, as he wrote it "was almost totally missed and the appropriate attention was hardly paid." According to him "the citizens (Lebanese) and those trying to lead them almost failed to pay attention (to the event of the withdrawal since) a new page had, in fact, been opened in Lebanon's history" (Kassir, 2005e). In other words, according to Kassir, this was, in fact, a festive day for Lebanon and more

should have been said in the public discussion about it and it should not have been treated modestly as though something bad had taken place in the country.

On 20 May Kassir wrote in his column that this rapid Syrian withdrawal created confusion and bewilderment in Lebanese politics about the plans to form a new government. He wrote that "the having gotten used to a Lebanese political system 'under Syrian patronage' has caused Lebanese politics to be fixed upon the political model which has to receive Syrian authorization. Now, with the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanon is confused and bewildered about how to conduct itself" (Kassir, 2005g).

12. Kassir's death—the end or the beginning of new hope?
Up until he reached the age of 45 Kassir had achieved much personally, socially and nationally since he was also a highly regarded writer and editor, philosopher, academic, author and intellectual. In addition to having played so many roles one can say that he was also a field reporter who succeeded in rebuffing all the Syrian attempts to get their hands on him when he savagely condemned the nature of Bashar Assad's regime. The story of his full but brief life ended on the morning of June 2nd 2005 when he opened the door to his car, sat in the driver's seat and started the motor (Kassir, 2003, p. xv). This ended Kassir's life and he left behind him a wife (from a second marriage), Giselle Khoury, who worked for the Lebanese satellite television station *El-Arabia,* two daughters from his first marriage, Maissa and Leanna, and an admiring public that was shocked by the sudden, untimely death of their ideological and national leader—Samir Kassir (Kassir, 2003, p. xix).

13. Conclusions
This article has examined the character of the famous journalist Samir Kassir. In the first section we examined what defines an intellectual and what kind of definition best describes Kassir. The definition of him as an eternal intellectual, gave Kassir credit for being unique and different from those Lebanese public intellectuals who tried to imitate his path. The sacrifice he made of his own life actually sharpened the significance of his writings and thus helped to present his brand of nationalism and Lebanese identity better than anyone else in the region. The second part of the first section deals with the complexity of the Lebanese identity with reference to Anderson's "imagined communities" (and print-nationalism), its beginnings, development and problems during the twentieth century, at least up until the era of Samir Kassir at the beginning of the 21st century. In this section we showed that the Lebanese identity could be, first and foremost, examined according to the reactions of the different ethnic groups in the country. In this we are, in fact, not talking about a constructed, unambiguous identity but it is this that actually makes it unique. In the second section the story of Kassir's life was presented and one can see that, despite the brevity of his life, he succeeded in achieving quite a lot with his intellectual and ideological activities revolving around the axis of the question of both the Arab and Lebanese identities. It should also be noted that his writing in the al-Nahar newspaper, one of the oldest and most famous newspapers in modern Lebanon, opened the way for Kassir to influence both the Lebanese elite and common people as well, and somehow, gave his writings importance and prestige. Kassir invested all his effort into this publication in order to advance the de-Syrianization and de-Arabization of the Lebanese identity. Kassir could not have found better publication to introduce his agenda.

The third section is actually an amplification of the ideological worldview of Kassir and the central component in this chapter is the examination of the Lebanese identity compared to other identities in the region. Kassir came to the conclusion that the Lebanese identity was a feeble identity that has always existed in the shadow of the other more dominant identities in the region, such as the Syrian, and that this has prevented it from developing and demanding independence. Further on we have presented Kassir's thoughts about that same violent and threatening shadow of the Syrian regime that acted as if Lebanon belonged to it. Kassir often wrote articles against the Syrian rule and against its supporters in Lebanon, those same forces which, in his opinion, were supposed to be demanding the separation from Syria. It is important to note that Kassir did not want to do any harm to the Syrian people—only to the regime.

In the last section we have the story of the harassment and the attempts to silence Kassir and, finally, after his voice could not be silenced, the story of his murder. The thing that is amazing is that this murder was carried out after Syria had left Lebanon following the assassination of the Prime Minister al-Hariri and so it is unclear whether this was an attempt to silence Kassir's voice or an act of revenge.

Our following conclusions were drawn because of our efforts to answer the research question posed in the introduction: Did the question of Arab identity, on the one hand, and Lebanese identity, on the other, that Kassir wanted to sharpen and foster, actually lead to a significant difference in the national view and independence of the Lebanese people which was something that ultimately led to their demand to sever themselves from Syria and gain independence? There are five possible responses to this question.

One is that it is not possible to absolutely determine that Kassir's writings did, in fact, lead to making a significant difference to the national view of the Lebanese people. It is, however, possible to claim that his voice was of great importance because it led to a discussion in society that mainly expressed itself in the Lebanese people going out into the streets to demonstrate against the Syrians and this, in fact, became significant because, after Kassir's murder, it led to the exodus of Syria from the country. Secondly it is therefore possible to hypothesize, but of course not to determine, that the attempts to silence Kassir's voice at the beginning and to later kill him were motivated by senior elements in the Syrian regime and its proxies in Lebanon. The Lebanese and Syrian political harassment of Kassir only strengthens the assessment written in our first answer above. Thirdly, in his brief life, Kassir managed to see his dream about Syria's departure from Lebanon realized (although only partly) but he did not see the consolidation of the country's independence as a self-confident country that had a respected status in the world in the way he had hoped Fourthly, the figure of Kassir became part of the pantheon of intellectuals and philosophers who were harassed because of their ideas. If his voice had not been uniquely important it is doubtful that his enemies would have wanted to silence him and take his life. And finally, it was, in fact, the murder that turned Kassir into a kind of martyr and this only augmented his intellectual status and turned his ideological ideas into a contemporary ideological reality in both the Arab and Lebanese discourse about nationality.

Samir Kassir's multi-layered social roles of being a journalist, a public intellectual and a political activist, and his Syrian-Palestinian origins might serve as a symbol of the transcendence of the political identity of the Lebanon's grass-roots people. Kassir's strategy in his attempts to construct a Lebanese identity was not to create something that would be an affiliate or protectorate of the Syrians nor something that was just "Being Arab". What Kassir had in mind was that Lebanon should develop an identity that was consistent with the principle of ethnic and religious equality because of "the fact that he was living in a multi-ethnic country that was being controlled by another foreign Arab country". Our meagre efforts to frame and successfully discuss the Lebanese identity as proposed by Kassir shows that further research dealing with the hybrid nature of Lebanese nationalism and identity needs to be carried out.

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Notes
1. This definition is very vague as the "National Pact" says that there is no Arab, Western or "Arabian Face", yet in this regard, it comes to sharpen the "Christian" identity as opposed to the Islamic one, whether Sunni or Shi'i.
2. PRO, FCO 17/1103: "Ex-President Chehab", 16 September 1970. For more details about Shihab's period, see Nassif (2008) and on the Civil War, see Matar (1976).

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3. PRO, FCO 17/1103: telegram from Cecil Edward King, the British Embassy Beirut, to Michael Stewart, 15 June 1970.
4. Naor (2014). For more details on the Syrian involvement in Lebanon see: Deeb (2003), Osoegawa (2013), Ahmad Isa (2007), and Daghar (2001).
5. For more details on: UN's Security Council Resolution 1559 (9/04)'s (n.d.).

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