The political economy and ideological hegemony of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon

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ABSTRACT:

Contrary to common opinion, sectarianism in Lebanon is not a derivative of primordial and ancient hatreds. Rather, and following the constructivist approach, sectarian identities are modern historical constructs whose institutionalization as main markers of political identity and mobilization dates back to overlapping local, regional, and international dynamics in middle 19th century Mount Lebanon. But what explains the resilience and reproduction of these identities in postwar Lebanon? I deploy a theoretical toolbox rooted in the analysis of power provided by Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and James Tully to explain this puzzle. On this view, and far from being a relic of a traditional pristine past, sectarianism is a modern constitutive Foucauldian socioeconomic and political power that produces and reproduces sectarian subjects and modes of political subjectification and mobilization through a dispersed but complex ensemble of institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices undergirding the political economy and ideological hegemony of the sectarian system. The objective of these sectarian/political elite and non-elite practices is to 1) reproduce sectarian identities and modes of political mobilization and, 2) sabotage challenges to the political economy and ideological hegemony of the sectarian system.

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